PAST MASTERS 216

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PAST MASTERS 216

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

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1: The Dook

J. D. Fitzgerald

1862-1922

The Lone Hand, 1 Sept 1920

IT WAS UNDERSTOOD among the Australian Press boys that Bill Larrabee, in the days of his success, was always good for a yarn in the whisky tent round the back of the circus, near the dressing-rooms, after the National Anthem and lights-out in the big-top and menagerie tents, if once you could press the apt reminiscence button. Clare, of the *Daily Courier* knew this, and touched the right button one night in Melbourne in asking innocently who was the original of the lady in the jewel-mounted photo-frame which invariably stood on Larrabee's table in his dressing-tent.

"That's Lady Ainley," replied Larrabee, tilting up his head a bit with obvious pride, and putting his ring on their racks.

"Some titled amateur, crazy on circus life?" queried Clare.

"No. Born and bred in th' circus. Three generations in th' business. She was the best principal rider I ever knew."

Leaning back in his chair, his hair, slightly streaked with grey, brushing the canvas of the tent, dangling his bridle bit-chain, and puffing smoke from his cigar, Larrabee soliloquised aloud:

"Ah, she *was* a rider! She had the courage and the spring of a man. She was a great loss to th' profession. Of course she's better off. Rich, and a handle to 'er name. But Minnie never forgits th' life. Every year she sends me something. Last year it was that." He picked up the photo-frame, and gazed at the portrait of a lady in an elegant decollete evening dress, her abundant hair aflame with gorgeous jewels, her shapely neck adorned with diamonds and priceless pearls. The smiling face showed a row of dazzling teeth. The writing on the photo was:

"To dear Uncle Bill, with love from Minnie."

The Pressmen knew that Larrabee had been adopted as an amateur uncle by many brilliant circus girls, who owed their success to his kindness and care in the rough life of a struggling bush show.

"Would y' like t' hear about Minnie?" said Larrabee.

The company having expressed their acquiescence, and a small black boy in tights and gauze wings having replenished the glasses, the story set down here in its sub-edited form was narrated.

THE PARTNERSHIP entered into between Bill Larrabee and his smart young agent, Jim Dantry after the episode described in "Bill Us Big!" brought the

experienced showman his first sustained success, and left him for the rest of his show life a substantial margin on the credit side.

After the Melbourne season which followed this success, the new show, with Dantry's business brain augmenting the circus mastership which Larrabee had acquired in his 30 years of show life, toured for six months through prosperous country towns, enjoying bounteous seasons. The new organisation was still a wagon show. There were twenty-four wagons for hauling tents, poles, circus gear, properties and apparatus (as the performers call their fixings). Four new animal cages, shutters bright with new paint, contained a lioness and litter of four cubs, a fine panther, two leopards which blinked their eyes, and a popular "happy family" of assorted monkeys, which filled one cage, and gave infinite satisfaction to the rural juvenile population.

Larrabee still drove the band wagon— a boat on wheels— a perfect wonder in riverless and lakeless districts in Australia, where a boat is the most novel of novelties; and in addition to the Farleigh Family, which Jim Dantry had been fortunate enough to secure, and the old company, there were several new acts, including a pretty "principal act."

Minnie Merrivale was the "boskerest principal rider," so Larrabee declared, that he had met in his adventurous career. The partners noted with satisfaction that Minnie's hurricane feats and fearless mastery of her horses were an attraction in the back-blocks. Larrabee began to a personal interest in the girl, and, with his knowledge, soon built up a naturally clever turn into an act that would have commanded a big salary in Europe or America. Minnie's ambition and desire for work were insatiable. So, as the show camped and rested on Sundays, Larrabee had the practice tent put up, and she had the advantage of advice from a past-master. She herself was inspired by love of her work, and, under his praise, tempered with criticism, she developed a fierce desire for success.

"Well done. Minnie," said Bill, one Sunday afternoon, after a heavy practice. "You'll make a world rider all right. I can see you in Paris and London afore you've done. But, look here, don't kill the horses and the grooms try'n' t' make 'em keep up with you."

She laughed, blushed, and shook back her dishevelled tresses.

As Larrabee went towards his partner, Minnie caressed the horse, and turning to the groom who stood meekly by, said :

"You give him a good feed and rub down, Duke," and walked perspiring, hard breathing, and happy to her dressing-tent, while the groom led the horses off to the temporary stables by the roadside.

The circus was in camp by the roadside, the wagons drawn up in a convenient half-circle among the gum trees. Near by a clear stream, dancing over smooth pebbles and sand, and wandering through she-oak and river gum.

Afforded a bathing place for horses and men, and water for the snug camp. Smoke arose comfortably from the cooking fires, round which men stood watching the cooking with healthy interest. Feed stalls, of rude bagging, stretched between waggon poles; and the horses, still shining from their bath, revelled in a generous meal. The women sat on property chairs or tubs, sewing or conversing, as the sun declined behind the trees and glorified the bush.

Larrabee found his partner, Dantry, sorting great crates of colour-printing. He turned over a property tub, striped with blue and white, sat down and joined in checking the stuff.

"You check, and I'll call." said Dantry, consulting a list headed "Erie, Penn'a, U.S.A."

"Here's No. 45 6 —l sheet, Exalted Rulers of the Air ; 1 sheet Trick Donkeys and Clown ; 9 sheet Bird and Monkey Bill; 9 sheet Japs, Foot Juggling, Ladders, Pyramids."

"Hullo! What's this?" said Larrabee, picking up a white sheet with black letterpress, headed by the Royal coat of arms."

"Let's see: Oh, that!" replied Dantry, "that's a police proclamation that got mixed up with the printing somewhere down below Mudgee. Next, 2 sheet. Fun for the Children— Giant Policeman chasing Dude, etc.; 6 Hippopot "

"Hold on. Jim,'' exclaimed Larrabee. "Read this!"

He held out the proclamation. Dantry read:

A reward of £200 will be paid to any person giving information which will lead to the discovery of James Loughborough Ainley, who left his home in London on September 16, 189-, and is supposed to have gone to Australia. Description: Height 5ft. 10in., eyes dark, with heavy dark eyebrows, nose large, inclined a little to the left; ears large; good teeth; limps a little on the left leg; ship in full sail tattooed on left arm.

"I say," said Dantry, "why that's a description like the groom the boys call 'Dook,' isn't it?"

They looked towards the horse tents. The groom who had taken Minnie's horses was rubbing them down. Clearly enough, his bare arm showed the tatoo mark of a ship. He limped as he led the horses back to the feed stall.

The crude police description libelled him. His nose did not slant materially, nor did his ears appear out of proportion. He was a well set-up, handsome and gentlemanly lad, with bright eyes, eager face, and a taking smile; age about 23.

"It's the chap that's gone looney on Minnie Merrivale," said Larrabee laughing. "He came on as a groom. I've sacked 'im a dozen times; but he only smiles, and dogs th' show round till he catches up. Then I take 'im back again. 'E's useless for any groomin' work except where Minnie's horses is concerned, and there 'e's a perfect terror for work. Hey! Dook! Come 'ere !"

The groom stopped, looked up in surprise, and approached.

"Well," said Larrabee, "wot 'ave you bin up to, Dook? D' y' see this?"

And he held up the proclamation.

"Oh, I knew that long ago," replied the young man in a superior manner of speech. "It's the police."

"Oh, the police!" retorted Larrabee. "What do they want you for? Murder, eh? Why don't you go'n give yurself up and get hanged!"

"I'm going to see the lawyers to-morrow. I let them know my whereabouts a week ago. I had a letter from some solicitors in Sydney. There's no crime about it. They want me over some money. My uncle in England has just died, and I have inherited his money and title."

"His title, eh!" exclaimed Larrabee. "What, are you a real Dook?"

"No!" replied the Dook smiling. "It's only a baronetcy. Nothing at all to speak about. But there's a good bit of money."

"Wot d' y' call a good bit?" inquired Larrabee. He remembered with satisfaction that the partners had £500 in bank notes in the treasury, which represented their profits and savings since the new partnership was formed. Larrabee called it a "good bit" at that time. Of course, later, when after their great season in the East— but of that in its place.

"I get a hundred thousand pounds now, and when Uncle Charles dies I get the rest of grand-father's estate— altogether about £250,000," said the Dook, with a calmness which the circus men thought simply uncanny. They were speechless for a moment.

"Gosh!" said Larrabee, his eyes opening wide, as he recovered his breath. "You're quite a millionaire. Why didn't y' rush the solicitors when y' heard?"

"Oh!" stammered the Dook, "I just— l just wanted to remain— until Minnie— until Miss Merrivale has her new trick complete. You see, I understand her horses. They'll do things for me. If I left— if I left, why— things mightn't go on as well with her act."

His embarrassment was quite evident, though ihe seemed a cool, cheeky person ordinarily. The partners laughed.

"Oh, well, you had better go and get your money affairs settled, and come back to see after— after the horses," said Dantry.

"I was going to do that," he said. "I will go from the next railway town."

THE DOOK disappeared for a week. He returned clad in garments of the most fashionable and up-to-the-minute type. His diamond rings and pins aroused the envy of Sam Kyngdon, the old juggler, and recalled to that gentleman's nemory his gorgeous youth in India, reminiscent of Rajahs, Syces, Wallahs and Mafoos. His perfect hats and boots were the envy of the comparatively spick-and-span performers, and he despair of grooms, tent men

and property men. His art pyjamas were the admiration of all. He was permitted by Larrabee to come long as a passenger on the pole waggon, the least comfortable mode of transport in the whole show. However, Minnie lent him some saddle cloths and horse rugs, and he managed to straddle the centre pole more comfortably a the jolty road. Thereafter his diurnal emerence in his gorgeous garments of the night grom the living tent became a function which rew all eyes. As Cora Chinizelli (suckling an entirely fresh baby) said, through cigarette smoke wreaths, "He was a circus in himself."

THOUGH the Dook no longer performed the action of groom to Minnie's horses, he hung ound her, brought her expensive chocolates ngles and draperies, and sat as a paying visitor in the best seats at night, leading the applause at her act. His attention relaxed when she was absent from the ring, and he became didly oblivious of the tumblers, horse and pony acts, unconscious of the "Exalted Monarchy the Air," and indifferent to the fascination of the clowns or other wonders depicted on the expensive colour-printing.

Indeed. after her act, he generally slipped aroud the back and watched with envious eyes his successor grooming Minnie's horses.

THERE was no shaking him off— till Minnie self took a hand. He took to hanging round ring entrance door when her act was going She usually allowed him to place his hands a step from which she vaulted, light as gossamer, on to the back of Curio, her special horse. They would earnestly converse there heedless of the blare of the band, the applause or augnter, the shouts of the ringmen, the cracking of whips. The sounds of the circus not appear to concern them. There were long periods of silence, and short bursts of conversation between them.

One night, as Bill Larrabee came out of the ring from his own act, his four Arab stallions glistening with the exercise, their harness ringing musically, he saw Minnie at the entrance door suddenly draw her whip and lash the Dook across the face twice, making a weal on those lineaments so graphically described in the police notice. Then without looking, she flashed into the ring as the band struck up her music, leaving the Dook rubbing his wounds with one of superfine handkerchiefs.

Larrabee, wondering; went to the ring entrance and watched Minnie's performance.

"I never saw her do anythin' like it," he declared afterwards. "She rode as if the devil was after her; she leaped higher, and somersaulted better, and pirouetted with more spring I ever saw a woman do. I knew there was someth'n wrong."

She came straight to Larrabee's dressing-room after her act, her bosom heaving, her eyes flashing from excitement and anger.

"Why, dearie, wot's the matter?" said Larrabee.

She burst out crying and sobbed as of her heart would break.

"Oh, Uncle Bill. The Dook!"

"Wot about 'im? Why did you slash 'im with your whip?"

"I don't like to tell you," she sobbed.

''Come on, dearie. Of course you'll tell your Uncle Bill."

She sobbed a while quietly, then dried her eyes. As she became calmer her grief changed to indignation.

''He said he had plenty of money and a title, and he asked me to—to "

''To marry him?" queried Bill.

''No, Uncle. To— to go away with him. He said he'd give me a good time, and take me to Europe."

''Oh," said Larrabee, and his eyes flashed fire. "He wants y' without a wedding ring. Well, we'll 'ave t' explain t' 'im that that's not the circus way."

He got up, picked up his big ring whip, and strode towards the door of the dressing tent.

Minnie jumped up hastily and barred his way.

''Don't, Uncle Bill," she pleaded.

"Nonsense, I'll teach him manners," roared Larrabee. ''l'll show him wot circus people are. I'll— let me go, Minnie."

But Minnie clung to him till he stood still.

"Don't forget I give 'im a good hiding meself," she whispered.

"'So you did, Minnie. So you did. All right," said Bill, mollified. ''You're fond of 'im?"

"Well I don't— I don't— dislike 'im. But I'm a good girl, Uncle Bill." She bridled up "If ' e thinks I ain't I'll show 'im."

She switched her riding whip as if she were slashing the Dock's face again.

CORA CHINIZELLI, in her dressing-tent that night, as she washed the make-up off her face expressed to her husband the general opinion of the circus company.

"That's the end of Mr. Dook, with 'is scented andkachefs. That'll settle 'im with 'is rings, an' 'is pins, an' 'is cuffs an' collars!"

But it wasn't and it didn't.

True, he disappeared for a fortnight. Then one day the circus caught up to a strange ragged object limping along the road to Bathurst. It's straw hat was a wreck, it had tan boots worn to the uppers. It's jewellery was scarcely visible through the black and red soil which caked its garments, and even smudged its face. It looked ill-fed, tired, and done up in short, a perfect scarecrow.

Bill Larrabee, in advance of the procession on the band wagon, stopped as he got level with this scarecrow. The whole procession halted behind, save the loose horses, which ran along the road cropping the Scotch thistles on the roadside, and the red-tongued, barking dogs that followed. Heads were thrust from living wagons to see the cause of the halt. Minnie, looking touzle-headed from the tilt of the living wagon, fixed her eyes on the scarecrow.

One general exclamation ran down the twenty-four wagons:

"Why, it's the Dook!"

It was at once recognised that a dramatic situation had arisen.

After a colloquy lasting ten minutes between the boss and the Dook, the company were surprised to see the Dook, apparently with Larrabee's permission, given by a pointed horse whip, scramble up on the band wagon beside Bill, and the procession moved on.

The cause of this sudden change is explained in the hurried consultation between Larrabee and the Dook. Cutting into the former's preliminary objurgations, the Dook summed up the matter in these words :

"It was all a mistake, Mr. Larrabee. I've written and asked her since to be my wife. I really love her, and want to marry her. She can be Lady Ainley any time she likes."

But wot do y' want dogging my circus round the country like this? I thought I'd got rid of you."

"I wasn't dogging the circus, really. I didn't know you were coming along this road. I didn't know what road I was on. I've been lost I've been tramping for a fortnight, hardly eating anything. I was a fool. I'm sorry— really really sorry. Let me come back as her groom. She said, last thing, that she'd sooner be the wife of an honest circus groom than the mistress of a prince. I want to be an honest circus groom, Mr. Larrabee. Give me a job, and a chance to win her."

Bill reflected for a moment. Then he gathered his reins, and lifted the whip for a start.

"Maskee! Jump up!" said he, with a gesture of his whip.

Only Cora Chinizelli saw, but pretended not to see, Minnie's face turn from fear to joy. She put her head on Cora's lap and cried softly, much to the discomfort of the suckling baby, which was severely squashed as the good-hearted Cora caught the girl to her motherly bosom.

AT THE wedding breakfast Sir James Ainley's handsome face gave the lie to all police descriptions as he sat next to Bill Larrabee, with Minnie on the other side; and Bill's speech, though no press record was ever made, must have been a remarkable example of post-prandial eloquence, as it was punctuated continuously with laughter and cheers.

"FILL 'EM UP AGAIN, boys. There yuh have the story of a circus girl. Oh, yes, she writes to me regular," said Larrabee, with careless manner, in answer to Clare the pressman, "and I'm godfather by proxy to the eldest boy, who will be Sir James 'imself some day. The real proxy on the spot was a Viss-count. If ever I go to Surope, I'm to stay at their place. Yes, that's 'er picture. She ain't changed a bit, as hansome as ever, and looks quite at home in the character of a baronet's wife, don't she? I suppose she knows the King and Queen as well as you know me. Not bad for an Australian circus girl, is it?"

2: The Honeymoon Crime

Albert Dorrington

1847-1953

Chronicle (Adelaide, SA) 3 Dec 1931

MARGARET'S hour had arrived. Judd was due about midnight. The steamer would berth at the pier for twenty-four hours, allowing time for their marriage at the little chapel of the Magdalen Sisters, at Monsoon Point.

She had not seen Archie Judd for three years. The tragedy of her position lay in the fact that she had almost forgotten him. Her work at Payne's Silk House, on Malay avenue, had so pleasantly and completely absorbed her young thoughts. On her desk lay Judd's big, red sealed envelope, delivered by the morning Indian mail. It contained bank notes to the value of five thousand rupees. Judd insisted that the money was essential for the purchase of her travelling outfit, she could buy everything on Malay avenue.

It went without saying that during her three happy years at Payne's she had saved little. Judd had been her father's secretary in China, until the endless revolutions had broken the old man's heart and fortune. There had been an almost insane deathbed agreement, wherein Judd had eased her father's last moments by promising to 'see her through' after he had made enough money to start a business on his own.

Archie Judd was nearly forty, and had thrown in his lot with a trading group in Calcutta, while Margaret had gone to Mrs. Maltby, the widow of an old army officer in Songolo. Mrs. Maltby owned a red-tiled bungalow at Monsoon Point. It was through her good offices that the sixteen-year-old Margaret had found employment at Payne's big silk warehouse on Malay avenue. The palatial showrooms attached to the mammoth silk emporium were controlled and owned by Norry Payne, the youngest and most inscrutable of Songolo's silk rajahs.

Payne was barely in his twenty-sixth year. A shy and somewhat elusive type of merchant prince, he had nevertheless fought his way, unaided, through the continued opposition of native guilds and tongs, with skill and daring. Margaret had grown accustomed to his shy, quick glances whenever he passed down the bale-littered passages where the native clerks sat on their heels, or perched on high stools before their ledgers and invoices. From his morning survey of his well-organised staff he would pass to the seclusion of his fan-cooled office, where he worked alone.

How careful Norry Payne had been to avoid undue favours or attentions, despite the fact that she was the one white girl in his employ! Sometimes in passing he would pause to emphasise a clause or point in regard to a recent business communication from a foreign buyer. Yet in the moment of leisured

intercourse the eyes of a hundred watchful clerks would focus her, the lovely, aloof memsahib with the dreaming face and eyes. Well, she was going to forget it all, forget the three years of wistful dreaming within the secluded walls and gardens of Songolo's inscrutable trader, Payne. Margaret had sent in her resignation the moment Judd's letter had reached her, had left the office with the intention of completing her outfit at the imposing general store owned by Hop Sing, at the far end of the town.

Of course Norry Payne had received her letter, had probably read it, and forgotten it as completely as if she had never existed. Every day in the year someone was resigning. He had no time to feel sorry for the domestic comedies and tragedies of the wayward ones who peopled his little kingdom on Malay avenue. And, be it noted, the men and women who resigned comfortable positions in the house of Payne never returned. Not once had the rule been broken.

Norry Payne stayed late, that afternoon, in his office. Margaret's letter of resignation was on the desk before him. So the girl with the eyes of a Ridi madonna was gone, the Margaret he had taken under his house-flag, when disaster and death had overtaken her father, had slipped away without a nod or a good-bye.

Well, it had not been his custom to jump from his desk and farewell every man and woman leaving his service. They left with a year's salary and as much silk as they wanted. Yet, he reflected, Margaret might have just looked in for the last time. After all, his own days were pretty lonely. That fellow Judd from Calcutta! Would Margaret find happiness with him? Archie Judd! Good lord!

The telephone at his elbow rang. Hop Sing was speaking in his fiercest pidgin.

'Lissen to me, sah!' he raved. 'One big swindle just bin put on me! You hear, Missah Payne?'

'I hear, Hop Sing,' Norry gave back sternly. 'Don't shout at me, please. Who is the swindler?'

The Chinaman was breathing savagely as he answered, 'One of your people, sah, Missey Margaret Blake. She hand five-thousan' rupee to my cashier to pay for goods she just take away. Five thousan' rupees!' he almost screamed. 'I callee police now! You heah, sah?'

Payne sat frozen at the receiver. 'Wait a bit, Hop Sing,' he answered at last. 'I'm coming to your store. There's been a mistake.'

HOP SING received him with dangerously gleaming eyes. With scarcely a word he led the young silk merchant into his private room. On the table beside an open safe was a pile of banknotes. The Chinaman took them up, beat them with his open hand.

'Missey Blake come hear to buy wedding clothes. My people treat her with much politeness when she order leather bags, amber beads, jade an' silver bottles of perfume, sah. Allee welly expensive things foh Missey Blake's honeymoon. An' she pay us with these dam notes. All forgeries, sah? Not worth five annas!'

'Easy, Hop Sing!' Payne remonstrated. 'The notes were sent to her by her promised husband. Archie Judd, of Calcutta. Miss Blake knows nothing about Indian currency.'

Hop Sing stared at him. 'Judd has been robbin' everyone on the Peninsula foh years. Allee poor Chinaman planters, allee Malay shopkeepers. Nobody able to catchee him. He welly clever sendin' bad money to Missey Blake to cash.'

'He's a bad man,' Payne agreed readily. Hot anger kindled in him at the thought of Judd's criminal manipulations. Margaret had been used to foist the notes on traders in the hope that she would be clear of the town before the fraud was discovered! Here was a honeymoon tragedy for Margaret. Moreover, once her name was mentioned in connection with the affair life in the East would be impossible for her.

'See here, Mr. Sing,' Payne went on earnestly. 'I'll take over all those bad notes and give you my cheque for the amount in return. You shall not lose a penny on the transaction.'

Hop Sing was guilty of a bitter retort as he slammed the package of counterfeit notes into the safe. Then he faced the young silk rajah menacingly.

'Keepee your money, sah' You wantee hush hush the mattah. Allee bad notes come from your house. You onderstan'? Flom the house of Missah Payne. How muchee bad money you bin passin' lately, eh? Missey Blake your servant. You pay her to do this an' that. I wish yo' good day, sah. Me velly busy!'

Payne realised instantly as he left the Chinaman's store that Sing desired to bring calumny on his house. Once the word was passed that the forged notes were circulating from Judd via the English silk house, incalculable harm would follow. More than this, Payne was moved by the thought of Margaret having to face a charge of criminal conspiracy with her fiancé, Judd.

Back in his office Payne reflected swiftly. It was going to be a fight for more than one life and reputation. He had seen English traders ruined by the stroke of a Chinaman's pen. The fight was here and now. His fingers tingled as he took up the telephone receiver. In a few moments he was speaking to his wharfside superintendent.

'We are storing several cargoes of fine fabrics belonging to Hop Sing. There's more of his stuff unloading from the junks and lighters. Tell my stevedores not to handle any more of his goods. Turn all his merchandise out of my godowns! I want the space immediately. I've no contract with Sing to store and shelter his

goods. Up to the moment it's been a matter of goodwill between us. Throw everything on to the wharf!'

'Very good, sir.'

Payne sat back in his chair and waited. Within half an hour of Norry's declaration swarms of lightermen and coolies were seen casting piles of rare and priceless fabrics on to the open wharf, under a blazing sun. Masses of Chinese furniture, delicately fashioned, lacquered screens, and costly trays were strung out in the full glare of the destroying heat waves. The whole town stared in horror. Always these cargoes of exquisitely fashioned goods were handled with infinite care. Worse still, the long delayed rains were spreading east. The barometer had been steadily falling.

A shaven Buddhist priest stared from his ricksha at the growing mountain of spoilable. goods on the pier.

'Here be half a million tales' worth of riches to fade and blister in the sun! There is madness somewhere! Or a woman?' he lamented.

A scream of rage was heard on Malay avenue as Hop Sing tore frantically in the direction of the pier. He was met by Payne's overseers.

'Build your own godowns, Mr. Sing,' they told him. 'The rains are coming and we've our own cargoes to shelter. Sorry, but it seems to be each for himself in this town!'

At three o'clock that afternoon, while Hop Sing's coolie gangs swarmed hopelessly about the mile-long line of scattered merchandise, in their frantic efforts to improvise cover, Norry took up his receiver and called up the half-demented Chinaman, The first big raindrops were thumping on the iron roofs of the adjoining warehouses;

'Hello, Sing! Had enough?' A short silence, and then— 'I nevah think you play such a trick on me, Missah Payne!'

The Chinaman's voice quivered with suppressed wrath; for he was sure the young Englishman was laughing at the other end of the wire.

'When I start to trim a pigtail, Mr. Sing, I always cut at the roots. Have you had enough? it's beginning to rain!'

There was no doubt about the Chinaman's answer. 'I am coming to you now, Missah Payne,' he wailed.

'Then bring those false notes. I'll pay you for them. Try any more foolishness and I'll bankrupt you in three months!'

In half an hour Payne had Judd's collection of forgeries within his own safe.

Scarcely had he placed the key within his own drawer when his house boy entered the office with no more sound than a ghost.

'The sahib Judd, from the ship at the pier, has come,' he announced in a whisper.

Norry Payne stood up as though naked steel had touched him. The outer door of the office opened, bringing the sound of rain and wind into the dusk-dimmed room. A lean squall-drenched figure wearing an oil coat and topee entered. He favoured the young silk merchant with a patronising grin

'Hello, Payne! My name's Judd. Sorry to barge in at this hour. But the fact is I expected Margaret to come aboard before we adjourned to the little old chapel somewhere off Monsoon Point. I got tired of waiting.'

It was some time before Payne spoke. Anger died in him as he surveyed the man who had come to carry Margaret away to his own spheres of life, to use her as he had used others in his soulless forgeries.

'Margaret left here this morning,' he said quietly. 'Only by an effort did I prevent her arrest on a charge of uttering these!' He opened the safe quickly, drew out the pile of counterfeit notes while a slow grin touched Judd's hard mouth.

'There's nothing for you to worry about, Payne,' he sneered. 'The thought of a few dirty chinks and Malays being done in doesn't keep me awake at night. It's easier than slaving in a shop!'

'Ten years for you, Judd, the moment the word goes round you're in Songolo! There's a place in the chain gang over on the island ready for you. Somehow,' he paused an instant as though listening to the storm outside, 'I feel that Margaret will not be waiting for you at the chapel of the Magdalen Sisters. Go and see!'

Judd swallowed a bitter retort as he slunk from the office. Norry heard him go, heard the roar of the rain on roof and palm as the outer gate slammed on the heels of the note-layer.

Five hours later a report went through the town that a party of Chinese and Malays had kidnapped a white man waiting near the chapel at Monsoon Point. It was known, later, that the white man had been taken by his captors into the Lindang hills.

The following morning found Payne at the office earlier than usual. The rainclouds had blown inland. Over the palm-skirted beach the sun rode in tropic splendour. Norry stared from his window down the wide avenue where cinnamon and scarlet merged with the blue and gold of streaming shawls and turbans. Ever and ever the soft prattle of native voices rose above the boom of surf on the breakwater.

Where was Margaret? Had she returned to her work? For a while he was afflicted with a sense of pride, a feeling that his boyish dignity might suffer if he traversed the long, coolie-thronged passages to her cubicle. Always these native clerks followed his slightest movements with the avidity of expectant children.

Unable to bear the strain of waiting, he rose steadily and passed down the chattering line of native clerks to her cool little office. on the north side of the

tree-shaded warehouse. The fragrance of rain-washed earth and flowers blew in from every window and gate. At Margaret's door he halted as one caressing the last moment of life.

Then he opened it briskly and entered. There was upon him an almost suffocating fear that she had gone; vanished with the shame of Judd's treachery crying within her. The window of the tiny office was open. A sheaf of madonna lilies filled the window space. At the small desk in the centre of the room Margaret sat, head bent over a pile of native correspondence. He could scarcely see her face, but in one swift intake of breath he knew that her world had gone to pieces.

As one awakened from a dream, she became aware of Payne's presence. Her face showed no sign that she had not slept. Her eyes told nothing, except that fate's messenger had whispered something over-night. She looked up into his inscrutable face, and all the stories she had heard of his relentless attitude towards resigning employees came back to her. And she was afraid.

The East loomed cruel and menacing now. Alone, she shrank from the possibility of dismissal, the facing of new ordeals, new masters and perils. If only—

The sound of her own voice was disturbing. 'I have decided to stay on, sir. But knowing it against the rules of the house I— I—'

A silence. It was as if he were forcing her to her last rampart, as if he were waiting for the fullest and most humiliating confession. He took up the sheaf of Madonna lilies and examined them critically. Then his glance went out to the long winding avenue in the north, visible from the window where he stood.

A surging mob of Chinese and Malays appeared suddenly on the crest of the hill. Came a tornado of beating drums in their wake. From every part of the native quarter surged men and women carrying sticks and bamboos. They hurried forward in the hope of striking something that ran and dodged each blow aimed at it from the screaming, pursuing Malays and Chinese. Nearer and nearer came the runner, naked to the waist, his face a twisted agony as he made for the ship at the end of the distant pier.

Payne leaned from the window as the runner drew near. Archie Judd! Judd's eyes held the glare of a maddened beast. On his brow was the imprint of a tattooed-bank note, for India to see. A hurricane of empty bottles crashed in his path as he hurtled towards the quay. The screaming voices reached Margaret at her desk. She rose, white lipped and trembling to the window.'

'What— what was that?' she begged.

Payne barred her view.

'Just a crowd of coolie rats chasing a bazaar thief. They'll be gone in a minute and the town will be quiet again.'

The screams and shouts died away as the tattooed fugitive gained the protection of the pier and the vessel's gangway. Payne came away from the window softly, bent over the chair and the sobbing shoulders of the girl who had missed her fate by the breadth of a hand.

'The thief has gone!' he said quietly. 'Never to return.' And then, 'You are free of all rules in my house, Margaret. I want it to be your sanctuary, dear, your garden of dreams and mine!'

All that Margaret knew was that the thief had vanished, and that Norry was holding her to his breast.

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3: The Short-cut to the Township

James Hillgrove

fl 1919

The Lone Hand, 7 April 1919

The following two short stories from The Lone Hand *are, so far as I can establish, the complete works of James Hillgrove, an unknown Australian author who is effectively anonymous.*

"I'M so sorry," I said, lifting my hat and trying to coax a look of penitence into my face.

"Oh, you— you—" Anger choked her further utterance, but all that her tongue refused to say her eyes blazed forth most eloquently.

"I tried to call him back," I said lamely.

"You shouldn't be allowed to keep such a dog," she cried. "The brute! Look at the marks of him on my dress."

"He has a habit of leaping up on people," I said.

The track was muddy; and Rover in his exuberance of greeting had pasted about two pounds of well-mixed clay on her white frock. I admitted that she had cause for anger.

"The beast! The beast!" she said. "Let me pass, please."

"I'm really sorry," I said, stepping aside into the thick fern. "He often nearly tears me to pieces for sheer joy; but the dog means well."

She walked daintily on the driest bits of the mud, and I followed.

"If I had such a dog, I'd shoot him," she said.

"I think I would too," I said.

"What!" she cried, turning on me fiercely, "is he not your dog?"

"I have an idea that he thinks he owns me," I answered, "but there is a difference of opinion on the point."

"I don't see anything to make jokes about," she declared. "Of course, he's your dog."

"Well, you know, if you say so, I suppose my assurance that he isn't won't count."

"If he's not your dog, why does he follow you?"

"I haven't the least idea," I said; "he has never given me any reason."

"Oh, this is absurd. I don't know why I talk to you. Of course, he's your dog, only you want to get out of it. Dogs follow their owners."

"Well, I follow you, and I'm not your owner."

She threw up her head and forgot to pick her steps. The mud splashed gaily about her. I thought the blush on the part of her cheek I could see was very becoming. Suddenly she turned and faced me.

"Why do you follow me?"

"Because you're in front," I said.

"I think it's abominable of you," she said. "I took this short-cut, and you and your dog must follow me."

"I haven't any dog," I said; "Rover's just a casual acquaintance. Anyhow, you can't accuse him of following us now."

The dog was out of sight, but I could hear him barking somewhere. Possibly he was having a playful argument with a sheep. His surplus enthusiasm always caused him to raise a row somewhere.

"I don't care whether the dog's following or not; you are."

"Oh," I said, "I thought the dog was the centre of the argument."

Really, I was afraid she would stop being angry; and that pink flush on her neck and face was too pretty to lose.

"I think you're worse than the dog."

"Thanks."

"Are you going to keep on following me?"

"Well, I want to get across to the township, and I must either go in front or come behind you. There isn't room for two to walk together, you know."

"I don't want you to walk with me."

"All right, then, I'll come behind."

She splashed on through the mud with more emphasis than ever.

"Take it steadily," I said; "you'll spoil your stockings."

Again she faced me with flashing eyes.

"I won't have you walking behind me. You can keep the track. I'm going to cross this paddock."

"If you go there, I'll come, too."

"Why?"

"Because I can't let you go alone. There's a middle-aged bull on the other side."

"I'm not afraid of a bull."

"Neither am I."

She climbed through the fence, and I held up the barbed wire lest her dress should get into further trouble. As I crawled through after her, Rover passed, yelping in pursuit of an imaginary rabbit.

The girl walked quickly. On one side of us were tumbled sandstone rocks, on the other stunted trees, with stretches of open grass between.

"Keep close to the rocks," I said, "we may want to run for cover."

She did not turn her head, but she followed my instructions. Soon I heard Rover in hot debate with the bull. I knew that dog would invite him to join the company.

"It's time we got to cover," I

cried, "Rover is bringing the bull."

She went on with a swinging stride as if she did not hear. Then the whole face of the moving drama changed.

Up the hill, emitting yelps of fear, and racing for dear life, with his tail between his legs, came the dog. The bull was about fifty paces behind.

"Run!" I cried, "run!"

She and I made the race to the break in the sandstone rocks a dead heat. Rover was in first by a yard. The bull stopped outside and snorted.

"See," I said, "if I hadn't come— lie down there, you cur!"

"Do you think he can get in here?"

"Can't possibly. We're quite safe. He could never wedge himself between those rocks."

She sat on a ledge of sandstone, while I stood a yard away. Rover, discovering that he was in a place of safety, became defiant, and barked hoarsely at the bull.

"Lie down, you miserable cur. This is all your fault."

The girl looked dejected, and to keep her spirits up, I chased the yelping dog into a remote corner with well-aimed pieces of sandstone. The bull was digging up the loose earth with his horns.

"How long must we stay here?" she said.

"Oh, I don't know," I answered lightly. "He might go away this evening. At any rate, he's pretty sure to give it up to-morrow or the next day."

"What!" she cried, "stay here until the day after to-morrow!"

"Well, it isn't healthy to be gored by a bull."

She remained silent for a long time after that. I noticed with pleasure how fresh the country looked after the late rain.

"I suppose," she said at last, "I ought to thank you, Mr.— Mr.—"

"Tom Andrews," I said quickly.

"Thank you, Mr. Andrews. My name is Ferry— Nellie Ferry."

"Well, now we're properly introduced, that's much more comfortable. Isn't it. Nellie?"

I saw the flush on her neck and cheek again.

"Oh, I didn't mean you to call me—" Then she stopped and laughed. "Really," she said, "I think you're the most impudent—"

"Don't say it," I cried; "the last girl who called me impudent got kissed within seventeen seconds."

She edged a little away from me and nearer to the entrance of the shelter.

"Don't go too near that bull," I said.

She shuddered a little.

"Oh, the wretched beast. Must we really stay here till that thing pleases to go away, Mr. Andrews?"

"Call me Tom," I said; "I like being called Tom."

"Well, Tom."

"That sounds nice and cosy, Nellie. Now we can get on."

"I think you're horrid."

"I suppose so," I said, seating myself on the sandstone ledge beside her.

She really was a very pretty girl, even when she wasn't angry. I told her about bulls. I described the difference between a Jersey and a Shorthorn. I explained the show points of a Hereford; and pointed out that the animal snorting outside belonged to no known breed, I proved to her that that was the bond of affinity between it and Rover. I told her that the moon would rise about nine o'clock, and that we would have a fine view of it from the cave.

As she got more interested, I slipped my arm round her for support. She really was a very pretty girl.

"Is that thing never going away?" she asked with a sigh.

"Never mind, Nellie dear," I said, "we are together, and we can be brave."

She nestled a little closer to me. I stole a kiss on the white part of her neck just below her ear.

"You shouldn't do that," she whispered, but there was no downright conviction in that whisper. I told her some stories of adventure with bulls. They were good stories, and she listened with interest.

"Is there no chance of anybody coming to take that bull away?"

she asked.

"I'm afraid not," I answered, and I looked into the deeps of her lovely eyes. "You are very beautiful," I added thoughtfully.

"Do you think so?" she said.

"Sweetheart, give me a kiss "

"Oh, no— Mr. Andrews— Tom— well, only one then."

And so I took three.

We were very comfortable for a while.

"Tom, dear, must we really sit here all night? Is there no way of getting out of this fix?"

"Of course there is, darling," I said. "Why didn't you mention it before? We can climb up through the rocks. I noticed that as soon as we took shelter here."

"And you really mean to say— oh, Tom, you are mean."

"But if I had shown you the way we wouldn't have become engaged."

"Engaged?"

"Yes, aren't we engaged, dearest?"

"You know very well we're nothing of the kind."

"Oh, my mistake," I said; "but, sweetheart, that's easily remedied. Won't you?— will you?— what do you say?"

And, of course, she said yes; but she wouldn't say it till we were out of hearing of the bull.

4: The Man They Could Not Understand

James Hillgrove

The Lone Hand, 10 May 1919

UNDER the cliffs of stone and brick that shut in that portion of Pitt Street where the Tank Stream flowed in Sydney's earliest days there are comedies and tragedies played which are of keener interest for the performers and the nearer spectators than any photo-play that reels off its miles of censored sensation in the picture theatres that shelter in the next block. Business is written in prose; but because it is conducted by men the old elements of the epic poem are there, and eager lyric fragments occasionally make a silent rhythm above the desk and ledger.

All day long the trams roar below and the traffic moves forward in a steady stream. All day long there is the sound of countless voices and the scrape of myriad feet; but in the offices a great quiet reigns, and there men think with concentration and handle affairs that are big with purpose. From Pitt Street to the slopes of Mosman, overlooking the Middle Harbour you can travel in forty-five minutes; but the distance by thought measurement is as wide as a continent.

MacFarlane Street thinks about a trimly kept square of garden, the aspect of its lace curtains as seen from the street, and the musical evening Mrs. Jones is giving tomorrow night; and when Jones comes home from Pitt Street he puts on an old coat, grasps the handle of the garden roller, and forgets that there ever was such a thing as an office or a row of figures to be added up for the half-yearly balance.

Yet once in a way Pitt and MacFarlane Streets meet on the private stage of a manager's room, and then there may be comedy or tragedy as the fates decide. Raymond Hunter-Brice is the controller of some big concerns, nominal secretary of several trusts, and high in repute among those to whom finance is the world and the men who handle its intricacies, world-kings. People called him hard, with tolerably good reasons. He had started somewhere with half-a-crown, a keen eye and a hard jaw. The eye was as keen as ever, the jaw remained an aggressive bridgehead protruding into the enemy's territory; but the half-crown had earned several millions per cent, of interest since the hour of its first investment.

Raymond Hunter-Brice was a lonely man. Outside his own family circle few knew him and still fewer loved him. He had none of the gifts of popularity; but there was a stiff rectitude about him that made men trust him. If he never failed to make a threat good, he never broke a promise. Under the cliffs of Pitt Street his name evoked reverence and fear; and that was the reason I laughed aloud when Winston called him Christlike.

But he told me the tale and that modified my opinion.

When Winston, confidential man and private secretary to Raymond Hunter-Brice, went out on war work he did so at his employer's expense. There was no advertisement of the fact, but the big man was quietly insistent that he should draw his full salary all the while. Winston went with some misgiving, knowing that Smith was to fill his place in his absence; and Winston on no evidence that he could explain distrusted Smith.

The distrust was well grounded. Although Smith pushed a lawnmower with dignity and energy at Mosman, his fingers had an unhappy itch. Raymond Hunter-Brice found him guilty of the misappropriation of nearly a thousand pounds, dismissed him promptly, and because of his wife and children in Mosman consented to do nothing more about it.

The leniency surprised Smith. In his view the man whom he had regarded as possessing granite strength was a weakling. He regretted that the thousand pounds was gone; it might so easily have been made two thousand.

To his wife at Mosman he explained that owing to one unfortunate suspicion of drunkenness during business hours he had been told that his services would no longer be required. The little woman thought it was hard, and said so to her neighbours; in fact, having a ready tongue, she said it frequently and always with growing emphasis.

Winston had been home a fortnight and had gathered up the threads of his old work when MacFarlane Street visited Pitt Street.

It came in the form of an indignant little woman who railed about Raymond Hunter-Brice and his shameful treatment of her husband. She spoke very loudly, too. The whole office heard what she had to say; and the music of her voice travelled to the outer corridors where men who did not love the big financier heard her tale and noted it for future use.

Winston bit his pen and listened. To tell her the true story might be impolitic. He must see his employer about it; and in the meantime his business was to get rid of the disturbance.

She was not easy to get rid of, but she went at last, leaving behind her a row of clerks who grinned and nodded, and a general atmosphere of discomfort.

Winston went straight to Raymond Hunter-Brice. He explained what had occurred.

"The woman must be stopped," he said. "You have acted more than generously to Smith. The fellow ought to be in prison now. I must tell his wife the circumstances. If she continues to talk as she is doing now, it will be very damaging."

The big man rose from his seat and paced up and down the room. His jaw was like the North Head; there was a fierce light of battle in his eye.

For a minute he did not speak. His business reputation for fair dealing had been laboriously built up; and now, as a reward for a generosity with which few would have credited him, it was being blasted by a woman's tongue.

Winston waited. There seemed to be tragedy in the air. Then the financier threw himself in his chair and his large hands were locked behind his head.

"The money Smith embezzled I can afford to lose," he said, "but this thing must not be done."

"She must have the whole story," said Winston.

Raymond Hunter-Brice's eye flashed.

"Why?" he asked.

Winston looked puzzled.

"Well, a woman like that can do so much damage," he said. "The clerks have all heard her and they are discussing what she told me as if it were the truth. The whole town will be buzzing about it soon."

The big man brought his hand down with violence on the table.

"Listen to me, Winston," he cried in a voice that was not loud, but tense with emotion, "what the woman thinks about me matters nothing. What the clerks think matters nothing. What the world thinks matters nothing. But Smith has children; and what those children think of their father matters everything. For their sake, what his wife thinks of him matters everything. Do you think I would destroy their faith for the sake of refuting a paltry accusation against myself? Let them all talk as they please and tell her nothing."

"But—" began Winston.

"But, nothing," said Raymond Hunter-Brice with decision.

When he passed the place where the clerks were working and on through the swing doors his jaw seemed to have more of granite firmness than ever,

"He doesn't like it," said Jones, looking up from his figures. "Trust a woman to get even."

"Good enough for him," said Briggs. "He ought to hear now and again what people think of him."

"A lot he need care, anyhow," Milson muttered. "It's people of his sort who get on. They walk roughshod over anyone that gets in the way."

But Winston, in the quiet of his own office, was wondering why he had never understood Raymond Hunter-Brice before.

5: The Expiation of Madame De Coulevain

Rafael Sabatini

1875-1950

Pearson's Magazine, July 1930

In: *The Chronicles of Captain Blood*, 1931

Sabatini's greatest hero, Captain Peter Blood, arrived brilliantly in the histroical adventure novel "Captain Blood", subsequently filmed with a young Errol Flynn as Blood. In addition to the novel, there are two volumes of "Captain Blood" short stories.

ON A DAY-BED under the wide square sternposts of the luxurious cabin of the *Estremadura* lounged Don Juan de la Fuente, Count of Medians, twanging a beribboned guitar and singing an indelicate song, well known in Malaga at the time, in a languorous baritone voice.

He was a young man of thirty, graceful and elegant, with soft dark eyes and full red lips that were half veiled by small moustaches and a little peaked black beard. Face, figure, dress and posture advertised the voluptuary, and the setting afforded him by the cabin of the great forty-gun galleon he commanded was proper to its tenant. From bulkheads painted an olive green detached gilded carvings of cupids and dolphins, fruit and flowers, whilst each stanchion was in the shape of a fish-tailed caryatid. Against the forward bulkhead a handsome buffet was laden with gold and silver plate; between the doors of two cabins on the larboard side hung a painting of Aphrodite; the floor was spread with a rich Eastern carpet; a finer one covered the quadrangular table, above which was suspended a ponderous lamp of chiselled silver. There were books in a rack: the Ars Amatoria of Ovid, the Satiricon, a Boccaccio and a Poggio, to bear witness to the classico-licentious character of this student. The chairs, like the daybed on which Don Juan was sprawling, were of Cordovan leather, painted and gilded, and although the sternports stood open to the mild airs that barely moved the galleon, the place was heavy with ambergris and other perfumes.

Don Juan's song extolled life's carnal joys and, in particular, bewailed the Pope's celibacy amid opulence:

"Vida sin niña no es vida, es muerte,
Y del Padre Santo muy triste es la suerte."

That was its envoy and at the same time its mildest ribaldry. You conceive the rest.

Don Juan was singing this song of his to Captain Blood, who sat with an elbow leaning on the table and a leg thrown across a second chair. On his dark aquiline face there was a set mechanical smile, put on like a mask, to dissemble his weariness and disgust. He wore a suit of grey camlett with silver lace, which

had come from Don Juan's wardrobe, for they were much of the same height and shape as they were akin in age, and a black periwig, that was likewise of Don Juan's providing, framed his countenance.

A succession of odd chances had brought about this incredible situation, in which that detested enemy of Spain came to find himself an honoured guest aboard a Spanish galleon, crawling north across the Caribbean, with the Windward Islands some twenty miles abeam. Let it be explained at once that the langourous Don who entertained him was very far from suspecting whom he entertained.

The tale of how he came there, set forth at great and almost tedious length by Pitt in his chronicle, must here be briefly summarized.

A week ago, on Margarita, in a secluded cove of which his own great ship the *Arabella* was careened to clear her keel of accumulated foulness, word had been brought him by some friendly Carib Indians of a Spanish pearling fleet at work in the Gulf of Cariaco, which had already collected a rich harvest.

The temptation to raid it proved irresistible to Captain Blood. In his left ear he wore a great pear-shaped pearl of enormous price that was part of the magnificent haul they had once made from a similar fleet in the Rio de la Hacha. So with three piraguas and forty men carefully picked from his crew of close upon two hundred, Blood slipped one night across the narrow sea between Margarita and the Main, and lay most of the following day under the coast, to creep towards evening into the Gulf of Cariaco. There, however they were surprised by a Spanish guarda-costa whose presence they had been far from suspecting.

They put about in haste, and ran for the open. But the guardship gave chase in the brief dusk, opened fire, and shattered the frail boats that bore the raiders. Of the forty buccaneers, some must have been shot, some drowned, and others picked up to be made prisoners. Blood himself had spent the night clinging to a stout piece of wreckage. A stiffish southerly breeze had sprung up at sunset, and driven by this and borne by the currents, he had miraculously been washed ashore at dawn, exhausted, benumbed, and almost pickled by the long briny immersion, on one of the diminutive islands of the Hermanos group.

It was an island not more than a mile and a half in length and less than a mile across, sparsely grown with coconut palms and aloes, and normally uninhabited save by sea-birds and turtles. But at the time of Blood's arrival there, it happened to be tenanted in addition by a couple of castaway Spaniards. These unfortunates had escaped in a sailing pinnace from the English settlement of Saint Vincent, where they had been imprisoned. Ignorant of navigation, they had entrusted themselves to the sea, and with water and provisions exhausted, and at the point of death from thirst and hunger, they had fortuitously made their landfall a month ago. Not daring after that experience to venture forth

again, they had subsisted there on shell-fish taken from the rocks and on coconuts, yams, and berries.

Since Captain Blood could not be sure that Spaniards, even when in these desperate straits, would not slit his throat if they guessed his real identity, he announced himself as shipwrecked from a Dutch brig which had been on its way to Curaco, gave himself the name of Peter Vandermeer, and attributed to himself a mixed parentage of Dutch father and Spanish mother, thus accounting for the fluent Castilian which he spoke.

Finding the pinnace in good order, he provisioned her with a store of yams and of turtle, which he himself boucanned, filled her water-casks, and put to sea with the two castaways. By sun and stars he trusted to steer a course due east for Tobago, whose Dutch settlers were sufficiently neutral to, give them shelter. He deemed it prudent, however to inform his trusting companions that he was making for Trinidad.

But neither Trinidad nor Tobago was to prove their destination. On the third day out they were picked up by the Spanish galleon *Estremadura*, to the jubilation of the two Spaniards and the dismay at first of Captain Blood. However he put a bold face on the matter and trusted to fortune and to the ragged condition in which he went aboard the galleon to escape recognition. When questioned he maintained the fictions of his shipwreck, his Dutch nationality and his mixed parentage, and conceiving that since he was plunging he might as well plunge deeply, and that since he claimed a Spanish mother, he might as well choose one amongst the noblest Spain could afford, he announced her a Trasmiera of the family of the Duke of Arcos, who, therefore, was his kinsman.

The authoritative bearing, which not even his ragged condition could diminish, his intrepid aquiline countenance, dark skin and black hair, and, above all, his fluent, cultured Castilian, made credible the imposture. And, anyway, since he desired no more than to be set ashore on some Dutch or French settlement, whence he could resume his voyage to Curacao, there seemed no reason why he should magnify his identity.

The sybaritic Don Juan de la Fuente who commanded the *Estremadura*, impressed by this shipwrecked gentleman's tale of high connections, treated him generously, placed a choice and extensive wardrobe at his disposal, gave him a stateroom off the main cabin, and used him in every way as one person of distinction should use another. It contributed to this that Don Juan found in Peter Vandermeer a man after his own heart. He insisted upon calling him Don Pedro, as if to stress the Spanish part in him, swearing that his Vandermeer blood had been entirely beneaped by that of the Trasmieras. It was a subject on which the Spanish gentleman made some ribaldries. Indeed, ribaldry flowed from him naturally and copiously on all occasions, and infected his officers, four

of whom, young gentlemen of lineage, dined and supped with him daily in the great cabin.

Proclivities which in a raw lad of eighteen Blood might have condoned, trusting to time to correct them, he found frankly disgusting in this man of thirty. Under the courtly elegant exterior he perceived the unclean spirit of the rakehell. But he was far indeed from betraying his contempt. His own safety, resting precariously as it did upon maintaining the good impression he had made at the outset, compelled him to adapt himself to the company, to represent himself as a man of their own licentious kidney.

Thus it came about that during those days when, almost becalmed on the tropical sea, they crawled slowly north under a mountain of canvas that was often limp, something akin to a friendship sprang up between Don Juan and this Don Pedro. Don Juan found much to admire in him: his obvious vigour of body and of spirit, the deep knowledge of men and of the world which he displayed, his ready wit and the faintly cynical philosophy which his talk revealed. Spending long hours together daily, their intimacy grew at the rate peculiar to growths in that tropical region.

And that, briefly, is how you come to find these two closeted together on this the sixth day of Blood's voyage as a guest of honour in a ship in which he would have been travelling in irons had his identity been so much as suspected. Meanwhile her commander wearied him with lascivious songs, whilst Blood pondered the amusing side of the situation, which, nevertheless, it would be well to end at the earliest opportunity.

So presently, when the song had ceased and the Spaniard was munching Peruvian sweetmeats from a silver box beside him, Captain Blood approached the question. The pinnace in which he had travelled with the castaway Spaniards had been taken in tow by the *Estremadura*, and the time, he thought, had come to use it.

"We should now be abeam of Martinique," he said. "It cannot be more than six or seven leagues to land."

"Very true, thanks to this cursed lack of wind. I could blow harder from my own lungs."

"You cannot, of course, put in for me," said Blood. There was war at the time between France and Spain, which Blood understood to be one of the reasons of Don Juan's presence in these waters. "But in this calm sea I could easily pull myself ashore in the boat that brought me. Suppose, Don Juan, I take my leave of you this evening."

Don Juan looked aggrieved. "Here's a sudden haste to leave us! Was it not agreed that I carry you to Saint Martin?"

"True. But, thinking of it, I remember that ships are rare there, and I may be delayed some time in finding a vessel for Curacao; whereas from Martinique..."

"Ah, no," he was peevishly interrupted. "You shall land, if you please, at Mariegalante, where I myself have business, or at Guadeloupe if you prefer it, as I think you may. But I vow I do not let you go just yet."

Captain Blood had checked in the act of filling himself a pipe of finest Sacerdotes tobacco from a jar of broken leaf upon the table. "You have business at Mariegalante?" So surprised was he that he abandoned for that question the matter more personal to himself. "What business is possible at present between you and the French?"

Don Juan smiled darkly. "The business of war, my friend. Am I not a man of war?"

"You are going to raid Mariegalante?"

The Spaniard was some time in answering. Softly he stirred the chords of his guitar into sound. The smile still hovered about his full red lips, but it had assumed a faintly cruel character and his dark eyes glowed.

"The garrison at Basseterre is commanded by a dog named Coulevain with whom I have an account to settle. It is over a year old, but at last we are approaching pay-day. The war gives me my opportunity. I serve Spain and myself at a single stroke."

Blood kindled a light, applied it to his pipe, and fell to smoking. It did not seem to him to be a very commendable service to Spain to risk one of her ships in an attack upon so negligible a settlement as Mariegalante. When presently he spoke, however, it was to utter the half of his thought upon another subject, and he said nothing more of landing on Martinique.

"It will be something to add to my experience, to have been aboard a ship in action. It will be something not easily forgotten—unless we are sunk by the guns of Basseterre."

Don Juan laughed. For all his profligacy, the fellow seemed of a high stomach, not easily disturbed at the imminence of a fight. Rather did the prospect fill him now with glee. This increased when that evening, at last, the breeze freshened and they began to make better speed, and that night in the cabin of the *Estremadura* spirits ran high, boisterously led by Don Juan himself. There was deep drinking of heady Spanish wines and a deal of easily excited laughter.

Captain Blood conjectured that heavy indeed must be the account of the French commander of Mariegalante with Don Juan if the prospect of a settlement could so exalt the Spaniard. His own sympathies went out freely to the French settlers who were about to suffer one of those revolting raids by which the Spaniards had rendered themselves so deservedly detested in the New World. But he was powerless to raise a finger or utter a word in their defence, compelled to join in this brutal mirth at the prospect of French

slaughter, and to drink damnation to the French in general and to Colonel de Coulevain in particular.

In the morning, when he went on deck, Captain Blood beheld the long coastline of Dominica, ten or twelve miles away on the larboard quarter, and in the distance ahead a vague grey mass which he knew to be the mountain that rises in the middle of the round Island of Mariegalante. They had come south of Dominica in the night, and so had passed out of the Caribbean Sea into the open Atlantic.

Don Juan, in high spirits and apparently none the worse for last night's carouse, came to join him on the poop and to inform him of that which he already knew, but of which he was careful to betray no knowledge.

For a couple of hours they held to their course, driving straight before the wind with shortened sail. When within ten miles of the island, which now seemed to rise from the turquoise sea like a wall of green, the crew became active under sharp words of command and shrill notes from the boatswain's pipe. Nettings were spread above the *Estremadura's* decks to catch any spars that might be brought down in action; the shot-racks were filled; the leaden aprons were cleared from the guns, and buckets for seawater were distributed beside them.

From the carved poop-rail, at Don Juan's side, Captain Blood looked on with interest and approval as the musketeers in corselet and peaked headpiece were marshalled in the waist. And all the while Don Juan was explaining to him the significance of things with which no man afloat was better acquainted than Captain Blood.

At eight bells they went below to dine, Don Juan less boisterous now that action was imminent. His face had lost some of its colour, and there was a restlessness about his long slender hands, a feverish glitter in his velvet eyes. He ate little, and this little quickly; but he drank copiously; and he was still at table when one of his officers, a squat youngster named Veraguas, who had remained on duty, came to announce that it was time for him to take command.

He rose, and, with the aid of his negro steward Absolom, armed himself quickly in back and breast and steel cap; then went on deck. Captain Blood accompanied him, despite the Spaniard's warning that he should not expose himself without body-armour.

The *Estremadura* had come within three miles of the port of Basseterre. She flew no flag, from a natural reluctance to advertise her nationality more than it was advertised already by her lines and rig. Within a mile Don Juan could, through his telescope, survey the whole of the wide-mouthed harbour, and he announced that at least no ships of war were present. The fort would be the only antagonist in the preliminary duel.

A shot just then across the *Estremadura's* bows proclaimed that at least the commandant of the fort was a man who understood his business. Despite that definite signal to heave to, the *Estremadura* raced on and met the roar of a dozen guns. Unscathed by the volley, she held to her course, reserving her fire. Thus Don Juan earned the unspoken approval of Captain Blood. He ran the gauntlet of a second volley, and still held his fire until almost at point-blank range. Then he loosed a broadside, went smartly about, loosed another, and then ran off, close-hauled, to reload, offering only the narrow target of his stern to the French gunners.

When he returned to the attack he trailed astern the three boats that hitherto had been on the booms amidship, in addition to the useful pinnace in which Captain Blood had travelled.

He suffered now some damage to the mizzen yards, and the tall deck structures of his ornate forecastle were heavily battered. But there was nothing in this to distress him, and, handling his ship with great judgment, he smashed at the fort with two more heavy broadsides of twenty guns each, so well-delivered that he effectively silenced it for the moment.

He was off again, and when next he returned the boats in tow were filled with his musketeers. He brought them to within a hundred yards of the cliff, to seaward of the fort and at an angle at which the guns could hardly reach him, and sending the boats ashore, he stood there to cover their landing. A party of French that issued from the half-ruined fortress to oppose them were mown down by a discharge of gangrel and case-shot. Then the Spaniards were ashore and swarming up the gentle slope to the attack whilst the empty boats were being rowed back for reinforcements.

Whilst this was happening, Don Juan moved forward again and crashed yet another broadside at the fort to create a diversion and further to increase the distress and confusion there. Four or five guns answered him, and a twelve-pound shot came to splinter his bulwarks amidships; but he was away again without further harm, and going about to meet his boats. He was, still loading them with a further contingent when the musketry ashore fell silent. Then a lusty Spanish cheer came over the water, and soon thereafter the ring of hammers upon metal to announce the spiking of the fort's now undefended guns...

Hitherto Captain Blood's attitude had been one of dispassionate criticism of proceedings in which he was something of an authority. Now, however, his mind turned to what must follow, and from his knowledge of the ways of Spanish soldiery on a raid, and his acquaintance with the rakehell who was to lead them, he shuddered, hardened buccaneer though he might be, at the prospective sequel. To him war was war, and he could engage in it ruthlessly against men as ruthless. But the sacking of towns with the remorselessness of a brutal inflamed

soldiery towards peaceful colonists and their women was something he had never tolerated.

That Don Juan de la Fuente, delicately bred gentleman of Spain though he might be, shared no particle of Blood's scruples was evident. For Don Juan, his dark eyes aglow with expectancy, went ashore with his reinforcements, personally to lead that raid. At the last, with a laugh, he invited his guest to accompany him, promising him rare sport and a highly diverting addition to his experiences of life. Blood commanded himself and remained outwardly cold.

"My nationality forbids it, Don Juan. The Dutch are not at war with France."

"Why, who's to know you're Dutch? Be entirely a Spaniard for once, Don Pedro, and enjoy yourself. Who is to know?"

"I am," said Blood. "It is a question of honour." Don Juan stared at him as if he were ludicrous. "You must be the victim of your scruples, then;" and still laughing he went down the accommodation ladder to the waiting boat.

Captain Blood remained upon the poop, whence he could watch the town above the shore, less than a mile away; for the *Estremadura* now rode at anchor in the roadstead. Of the officers, only Veraguas remained aboard, and of the men not more than fourteen or fifteen. But they kept a sharp watch, and there was a master gunner amongst them for emergencies.

Don Sebastian Veraguas bewailed his fate that he should have been left out of the landing party, and spoke wistfully of the foul joys that might have been his ashore. He was a sturdy, bovine fellow of five and-twenty, prominent of nose and chin, and he chattered self-sufficiently whilst Blood kept his glance upon the little town. Even at that distance they could hear the sounds of the horrid Spanish handiwork, and already more than one house was in flames. Too well Blood knew what was taking place at the instigation of a gentleman of Spain, and as grim-faced he watched, he would have given much to have had a hundred of his buccaneers at hand with whom to sweep this Spanish rubbish from the earth. Once before he had witnessed at close quarters such a raid, and he had sworn then that never thereafter would he show mercy to a Spaniard. To that oath he had been false in the past; but he vowed now that he would not fail to keep it in future.

And meanwhile the young man at his elbow, whom he could gladly have strangled with his hands, was calling down the whole heavenly hierarchy to witness his disappointment at being absent from that Hell.

It was evening when the raiders returned, coming, as they had gone, by the road which led to the now silent fort, and there taking boat to cross a hundred yards of jade-green water to the anchored ship. They sang as they came, boisterous and hilarious, a few of them with bandaged wounds, many of them flushed with wine and rum, and all of them laden with spoils. They made vile jests of the desolation they had left behind and viler boasts of the abominations

they had practised. No buccaneers in the world, thought Blood, could ever have excelled them in brutality. The raid had been entirely successful and they had lost not more than a half-dozen men whose deaths had been terribly avenged.

And then in the last boat came Don Juan. Ahead of him up the accommodation ladder went two of his men bearing a heaving bundle, which Blood presently made out to be a woman whose head and shoulders were muffled in a cloak. Below the black folds of this he beheld a petticoat of flowered silk and caught a glimpse of agitated legs in silken hose and dainty high-heeled shoes. In mounting horror he judged from this that the woman was a person of quality.

Don Juan, with face and hands begrimed with sweat and powder, followed closely. From the head of the ladder he uttered a command: "To my cabin."

Blood saw her borne across the deck, through the ranks of men who jeered their ribaldries, and then she vanished in the arms of her captors down the gangway.

Now whatever he may have been towards men, towards women Blood had never been other than chivalrous. This, perhaps, for the sake of that sweet lady in Barbadoes to whom he accounted himself nothing, but who was to him an inspiration to more honour than would be thought possible in a buccaneer. That chivalry arose in him now full-armed. Had he yielded to it completely and blindly he would there and then have fallen upon Don Juan, and thus wrecked at once all possibility of being of service to his unfortunate captive. Her presence here could be no mystery to any. She was the particular prize that the profligate Spanish commander reserved to himself, and Blood felt his flesh go crisp and cold at the thought.

Yet when presently he came down the companion and crossed the deck to the gangway he was calm and smiling. In that narrow passage he joined Don Juan's officers, the three who had been ashore with him as well as Veraguas. They were all talking at once and laughing boisterously, and the subject of their approving mirth was their captain's vileness.

Together they burst into the cabin, Blood coming last. The negro servant had laid the table for supper with the usual six places, and had just lighted the great silver lamp, for with sunset the daylight faded almost instantly.

Don Juan was emerging at that moment from one of the larboard cabins. He closed the door, and stood for a dozen heart-beats with his back to it, surveying that invasion almost mistrustfully. It determined him to turn the key in the lock, draw it out and put it in his pocket. From that lesser cabin, in which clearly the lady had been bestowed, there came no sound.

"She's quiet at last, God be praised," laughed one of the officers.

"Worn out with screeching," explained another. "Lord! Was there ever such a wild-cat? A woman of spirit that, from the way she fought; a little devil worth the taming. It's a task I envy you, Juan."

Veraguas hailed the prize as well-deserved by such brilliant leadership, and then whilst questionable quips and jests were still being bandied, Don Juan, smiling grimly, introspectively, ordered them to table.

"We'll sup briefly, if you please," he announced, as he unbuckled his harness, and by the remark produced a fresh storm of hilarity on the subject of his haste and at the expense of the poor victim beyond that door.

When at last they sat down Captain Blood thrust himself upon Don Juan's notice with a question: "And Colonel de Coulevain?"

The handsome face darkened. "A malediction on him! He was away from Basseterre, organizing defences at Les Carmes."

Blood raised his brows, adopted a tone of faint concern. "Then the account remains unsettled in spite of all your brave efforts."

"Not quite. Not quite."

"By Heaven, no!" said another with a laugh. "Madame de Coulevain should give an ample quittance."

"Madame de Coulevain?" said Blood, although the question was unnecessary as were the glances that travelled towards the locked cabin door to answer him. He laughed. "Now that..." He paused. "That is an artistic vengeance, Don Juan, whatever the offence." And, with Hell in his soul, he laughed again, softly, in admiring approval.

Don Juan shrugged and sighed. "Yet I would I had found him and made him pay in full."

But Captain Blood would not leave it there. "If you really hate the man, think of the torment to which you have doomed him, always assuming that he loves his wife. Surely by comparison with that the peace of death would be no punishment at all."

"Maybe, maybe." Don Juan was short. Disappointment seemed to have spoiled his temper, or perhaps impatience fretted him. "Give me wine, Absolom. God of my life! How I thirst!"

The negro poured for them. Don Juan drained his bumper at a draught. Blood did the same, and the goblets were replenished.

Blood toasted the Spanish commander in voluble terms. He was no great judge, he declared, of an action afloat; but he could not conceive that the one he had witnessed that day could have been better fought by any commander living.

Don Juan smiled his gratification; the toast was drunk with relish, and the cups were filled again. Then others talked, and Blood lapsed into thought.

He reflected that soon now, supper being done, Don Juan would drive them all to their quarters. Captain Blood's own were on the starboard side of the great cabin. But would he be suffered to remain there now, so near at hand? If so, he might yet avail that unhappy lady, and already he knew precisely how. The danger lay in that he might be sent elsewhere to-night.

He roused himself and broke in upon the talk, called noisily for more wine, and after that for yet more, in which the others who had sweated profusely in that day's action kept him company gladly enough. He broke into renewed eulogies of Don Juan's skill and valour, and it was presently observed that his speech was slurred and indistinct, and that he hiccoughed and repeated himself foolishly.

Thus he provoked ridicule, and when it was forthcoming he displayed annoyance, and appealed to Don Juan to inform these merry and befuddled gentlemen that he at least was sober; but his speech grew thicker even whilst he was protesting.

When Veraguas taxed him with being drunk he grew almost violent, spoke of his Dutch origin to remind them that he came of a nation of great drinkers, and offered to drink any man in the Caribbean under the table. Boastfully, to prove his words, he called for more wine, and having drunk it lapsed gradually into silence. His eyelids dropped heavily, his body sagged, and presently, to the hilarity of all who beheld here a boaster confounded, he slid from his chair and came to rest upon the cabin floor, nor attempted to rise again.

Veraguas stirred him contemptuously and ungently with his foot. He gave no sign of life. He lay inert as a log, breathing stertorously.

Don Juan got up abruptly. "Put the fool to bed. And get you gone too; all of you."

Don Pedro was borne, insensible, amid laughter and some rude handling, to his cabin. His neckcloth was loosed, and so they left him, closing the door upon him.

Then, in compliance with Don Juan's renewed command, they all departed noisily, and the commander locked the door of the now empty great cabin.

Alone, he came slowly back to the table, and stood a moment listening to the uncertain steps and the merry voices retreating down the gangway. His goblet stood half-full. He picked it up and drank. Then, setting it down, and proceeding without haste, he drew from his pocket the key of the cabin in which Madame de Coulevain had been bestowed. He crossed the floor, thrust the key into the lock and turned it. But before he could throw open the door a sound behind him made him turn again.

His drunken guest was leaning against the bulkhead beside the open door of his stateroom. His clothes were in disorder, his face vacuous, and he stood so precariously that it was a wonder the gentle heave of the ship did not pitch him

off his balance. He moved his lips like a man nauseated, and parted them with a dry click.

"Wha's o'clock?" was his foolish question.

Don Juan relaxed his stare to smile, although a thought impatiently.

The drunkard babbled on: "I...I don't...remember..." He broke off. He lurched forward. "Thousand devils! I...I thirst!"

"To bed with you! To bed!" cried Don Juan. "To bed? Of...of course to bed. Whither...else? Eh? But first...a cup."

He reached the table. He lurched round it, a man carried forward by his own impetus, and came to rest opposite the Spaniard, whose velvet eyes watched him with angry contempt. He found a goblet and a jug, a heavy, encrusted silver jug, shaped like an amphora with a handle on either side of its long neck. He poured himself wine, drank, and set down the cup; then he stood swaying slightly, and put forth his right hand as if to steady himself. It came to rest on the neck of the silver jug.

Don Juan, watching him ever with impatient scorn, may have seen for the fraction of a second the vacuity leave that countenance, and the vivid blue eyes under their black brows grow cold and hard as sapphires. But before the second was spent, before the brain could register what the eyes beheld, the body of that silver jug had crashed into his brow, and the commander of the *Estremadura* knew nothing more.

Captain Blood, without a trace now of drunkenness in face or gait, stepped quickly round the table, and went down on one knee beside the man he had felled. Don Juan lay quite still on the gay Eastern carpet, his handsome face clay-coloured with a trickle of blood across it from the wound between the half-closed eyes. Captain Blood contemplated his work without pity or compunction. If there was cowardice in the blow which had taken the Spaniard unawares from a hand which he supposed friendly, that cowardice was born of no fear for himself, but for the helpless lady in that larboard cabin. On her account he could take no risk of Don Juan's being able to give the alarm; and, anyway, this cruel, soulless profligate deserved no honourable consideration.

He stood up briskly, then stooped and placed his hand under the inert Spaniard's armpits. Raising the limp body, he dragged it with trailing heels to the stern window, which stood open to the soft, purple, tropical night. He took Don Juan in his arms, and, laden with him, mounted the day-bed. A moment he steadied his heavy burden upon the sill; then he thrust it forth, and, supporting himself by his grip of a stanchion, leaned far out to observe the Spaniard's fall.

The splash he made in the phosphorescent wake of the gently moving ship was merged into the gurgle of water about the vessel. For an instant as it took the sea the body glowed, sharply defined in an incandescence that was as

suddenly extinguished. Phosphorescent bubbles arose and broke in the luminous line astern; then all was as it had been.

Captain Blood was still leaning far out, still peering down, when a voice in the cabin behind him came to startle him. It brought him instantly erect, alert; but he did not yet turn round. Indeed, he checked himself in the very act, and remained stiffly poised, his left hand supporting him still upon the stanchion, his back turned squarely upon the speaker.

For the voice was the voice of a woman. Its tone was tender, gentle, inviting. The words it had uttered in French were:

"Juan! Juan! Why do you stay? What do you there? I have been waiting. Juan!"

Speculation treading close upon amazement, he continued to stand there, waiting for more that should help him to understand. The voice came again, more insistently now.

"Juan! Don't you hear me? Juan!"

He swung round at last, and beheld her near the open door of her cabin, from which she had emerged: a tall, handsome woman, in the middle twenties, partly dressed, with a mantle of unbound golden tresses about her white shoulders. He had imagined this lady cowering, terror-stricken, helpless, probably pinioned, in the cabin to which the Spanish ravisher had consigned her. Because of that mental picture, intolerable to his chivalrous nature, he had done what he had done. Yet there she stood, not merely free, nor merely having come forth of her own free will, but summoning Don Juan in accents that are used to a lover.

Horror stunned him: horror of himself and of the dreadful murderous blunder he had committed in his haste to play at knight-errantry: to usurp the place of Providence.

And then another deeper horror welled up to submerge the first: horror of this woman as she stood suddenly revealed to him. That dreadful raid on Basseterre had been no more than a pretext to cloak her elopement, and must have been undertaken at her invitation. The rest, her forcible conveyance aboard, her bestowal in the cabin, had all been part of a loathly comedy she had played—a comedy set against a background of fire and rape and murder, by all of which she remained so soullessly unperturbed that she could come forth to coo her lover's name on that seductive note.

It was for this harpy, who waded complacently through blood and the wreckage of a hundred lives to the fulfilment of her desires, that he had soiled his hands. The situation seemed to transmute his chivalrously-inspired deed into a foulness.

He shivered as he regarded her, and she, confronted by that stern aquiline face and those ice-cold blue eyes, that were certainly not Don Juan's, gasped,

recoiled, and clutched her flimsy silken body-garment chosen to her generous breast.

"Who are you?" she demanded. "Where is Don Juan de la Fuente?"

He stepped down from the day-bed, and something bodeful in his countenance changed her surprise to incipient alarm.

"You are Madame de Coulevain?" he asked, using her own language. He must make no mistake.

She nodded. "Yes, yes." Her tone was impatient, but the fear abode in her eyes. "Who are you? Why do you question me?" She stamped her foot. "Where is Don Juan?"

He knew that truth is commonly the shortest road, and he took it. He jerked a thumb backwards over his shoulder. "I've just thrown him through the window."

She stared and stared at this cold, calm man about whom she perceived something so remorseless and terrifying that she could not doubt his incredible words.

Suddenly she loosed a scream. It did not disconcert or even move him. He began to speak again, and, dominated by those brilliant intolerable eyes which were like points of steel, she controlled herself to listen.

"You are supposing me one of Don Juan's companions; perhaps even that, covetous of the noble prize he took to-day at Basseterre I have murdered him to possess it. That far indeed from the truth. Deceived like the rest by the comedy of your being brought forcibly aboard, imagining you the unhappy victim of a man I knew for a profligate voluptuary, I was moved to unutterable compassion on your behalf, and to save you from the horror I foresaw for you I killed him. And now," he added with a bitter smile, "it seems that you were in no need of saving, that I have thwarted you no less than I have thwarted him. This comes of playing Providence."

"You killed him!" she said. She staggered where she stood, and, ashen-faced, looked as if she would swoon. "You killed him! Killed him! Oh, my God! My God! You've killed my Juan." Thus far she had spoken dully, as if she were repeating something so that she might force it upon her own understanding. But now she wrought herself to frenzy. "You beast! You assassin!" she screamed. "You shall pay! I'll rouse the ship! You shall answer, as God's in Heaven!"

She was already across the cabin hammering on the door; already her hand was upon the key when he came up with her. She struggled like a wild-cat in his grip, screaming the while for help. At last he wrenched her away, swung her round and hurled her from him. Then he withdrew, and pocketed the key.

She lay on the floor, by the table, where he had flung her, and sent scream after scream to alarm the ship.

Captain Blood surveyed her coldly. "Aye, aye, breathe your lungs, my child," he bade her. "It will do you good and me no harm."

He sat down to await the exhaustion of her paroxysm. But his words had already quieted her. Her round eyes asked a question. He smiled sourly as he answered it.

"No man aboard this ship will stir a foot for all your cries, or even heed them, unless it be as a matter for amusement. That is the kind of men they are who follow Don Juan de la Fuente."

He saw by her stricken expression how well she understood. He nodded with that faint sardonic smile which she found hateful. "Aye, madame. That's the situation. You were best bring yourself to a calm contemplation of it."

She got to her feet, and stood leaning heavily against the table, surveying him with rage and loathing. "If they do not come to-night, they will come to-morrow. Some time they must come. And when they come it will be very ill for you, whoever you may be."

"Will it not also be very ill for you?" quoth Blood.

"For me? I did not murder him."

"You'll not be accused of it. But in him you've lost your only protector aboard this ship. What will betide you, do you suppose, when you are alone and helpless in their power, a prisoner of war, the captive of a raid, in the hands of these merry gentlemen of Spain?"

"God of Heaven!" She clutched her breast in terror.

"Quiet you," he bade her, almost contemptuously. "I did not rescue you, as I supposed, from one wolf, merely to fling you to the pack. That will not happen—unless you yourself prefer it to returning to your husband."

She grew hysterical.

"To my husband? Ah, that, no! Never that! Never that!"

"It is that or..."—he pointed to the door—"...The pack. I perceive no choice for you save between those alternatives."

"Who are you?" she asked abruptly. "What are you, you devil, who have destroyed me and yet torment me?"

"I am your saviour, not your destroyer. Your husband, for his own sake, shall be left to suppose, as all have been led to suppose, that you were violently carried off. He will receive you back with relief of his own anguish and with tenderness, and make amends to you for all that the poor fool will fancy you have suffered."

She laughed on a note of hysteria.

"Tenderness! Tenderness in my husband! If he had ever been tender I should not be where I now am." And suddenly, to his surprise, she was moved to explain, to exculpate herself. "I was married to a cold, gross, stupid, cruel animal. That is Monsieur de Coulevain, a fool who has squandered his

possessions and is forced to accept a command in these raw barbarous colonies to which he has dragged me.

"Oh, you think the worst of me, of course. You account me just a light woman. But you shall know the truth.

"At the height of my disillusion some few months after my marriage, Don Juan de la Fuente came to us at Pau, where we lived, for my husband is a Gascon. My Don Juan was travelling in France. We loved each other from our first meeting. He saw my unhappiness, which was plain to all. He urged me to fly to Spain with him, and I would to Heaven I had yielded then, and so put an end to misery. Foolishly I resisted. A sense of duty kept me faithful to my vows. I dismissed him. Since then my cup of misery and shame has overflowed, and when a letter from him was brought to me here at Basseterre on the outbreak of war with Spain, to show me that his fond, loyal, noble heart had not forgotten, I answered him, and in my despair I bade him come for me whenever he would."

She paused a moment, looking at Captain Blood with tragic eyes from which the tears were flowing.

"Now, sir, you know precisely what you have done, what havoc you have made."

Blood's expression had lost some of its sternness. His voice, as he answered her, assumed a gentler note.

"The havoc exists only in your mind, madame. The change which you conceived to be from hell to heaven would have been from hell to deeper hell. You did not know this man, this loyal, noble heart, this Don Juan de la Fuente. You were taken by the external glitter of him. But it was the glitter, I tell you of decay, for at the core the man was rotten, and in his hands your fate would have been infamy."

"Do you mend your case or mine by maligning the man you've murdered?"

"Malign him? Nay, madame. Proof of what I say is under my hand. You were in Basseterre to-day. You know something of the bloodshed, the slaughter of almost defenceless men, the dreadful violence to women..."

Faintly she interrupted him. "These things...in the way of war..."

"The way of war?" he roared. "Madame, undeceive yourself. Look truth boldly in the face though it condemn you both. Of what consequence Mariegalante to Spain? And, having been taken, is it held? War served your lover as a pretext. He let loose his dreadful soldiery upon the ill-defended place, solely so that he might answer your invitation. Men who to-day have been wantonly butchered, and unfortunate women who have suffered brutal violence, would now be sleeping tranquilly in their beds but for you and your evil lover. But for you—"

She interrupted him. She had covered her face with her hands while he was speaking, and sat rocking herself and moaning feebly. Now suddenly she uncovered her face again, and he saw that her eyes were fierce.

"No more!" she commanded, and stood up. "I'll hear no more. It's false! False what you say! You distort things to justify your own wicked deed."

He considered her grimly with those cold, penetrating eyes of his.

"Your kind," he said slowly, "will always believe what it chooses to believe. I do not think that I need pity you too much. But since I know that I have distorted nothing, I am content that expiation now awaits you. You shall choose the form of it, madame. Shall I leave you to these Spanish gentlemen, or will you come with me to your husband?"

She looked at him, her eyes distraught, her bosom in tumult. She began to plead with him. Awhile he listened; then he cut her short.

"Madame, I am not the arbiter of your fate. You have shaped it for yourself. I but point out the only two roads it leaves you free to tread."

"How...how can you take me back to Basseterre?" she asked him presently.

He told her, and without waiting for her consent, which he knew could not be withheld, he made swift preparation. He flung some provisions into a napkin, took a skin of wine, and a little cask of water, and by a rope which he fetched from his state-room lowered these things to the pinnace, which was again in tow, and which he drew under the counter of the galleon.

Next he lashed the shortened tow-rope to a cleat on one of the stanchions, then summoned her to make with him the airy passage down that rope.

It appalled her. But he conquered her fears, and when she had come to stand beside him, he seized the rope and swung out on it and slid down a little way to make room for her above him. At his command, although almost sick with terror, she grasped the rope and placed her feet on his shoulders. Then she slid down between the rope and him, until his hold embraced her knees and held her firmly.

Gently now, foot by foot, they began to descend. From the decks above came the sound of voices raised in song. The men were singing some Spanish scrannel in chorus.

At last his toe was on the gunwale of the pinnace. He worked her nose forward with that foot, sufficiently to enable him to plant the other firmly in the foresheets. After that it was an easy matter to step backwards, drawing her after him whilst still she clung to the rope. Thus he hauled the boat a little farther under the counter until he could take his companion about the waist and gently lower her.

After that he attacked the tow-rope with a knife and sawed it swiftly through. The galleon with its glowing sternport and the three great golden poop

lamps sped serenely on close-hauled to the breeze, leaving them gently oscillating in her wake.

When he had recovered breath he bestowed Madame de Coulevain in the sternsheets, then hoisting the sail and trimming it, he broached to, and with his eyes on the brilliant stars in the tropical sky he steered a course which, with the wind astern, should bring them to Basseterre before sunrise.

In the sternsheets the woman was now gently weeping. With her, expiation had begun, as it does when it is possible to sin no more.

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6: The Pillar of Fire

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"BILL," TONY INQUIRED suddenly, "do you believe in mind reading?"

It was Bill's twenty-fifth birthday, and Tony, nobly resolving to help him celebrate it, had invited him— urged him— plagued him to spend a week with him enjoying the many attractions offered by one of Tony's clubs. Bill had held out manfully— some sixth sense had warned him that a week in the company of his restless friend would be anything but a vacation— but even granite will wear away under the drip of water, and after the forty-seventh invitation Bill had capitulated. "I want it understood, however," he bargained, "that if I go with you this time you won't ask me again for a whole year."

Tony stiffened. "Don't you expect to enjoy it?"

"Why, of course "

"You know I'll do everything in the world to give you a good time "

"I'm a farmer," Bill had explained hastily. "My idea of a good time is different from yours."

Tony had grunted, and Bill, reluctant to offend his friend, had hastily packed a suitcase. But once installed in the privacy of a stateroom on the train, Tony had welcomed the opportunity to ask questions. Now an inquiring youngster of six can propound riddles which even a wise man cannot answer, and Tony, being five and one-half times that age, was as many times as inquisitive— and even more persistent.

For six years Bill Parmelee had followed the hazardous calling of a professional cardsharp. He had reformed; had done much to atone for his past by unmasking those of his former colleagues who still insisted upon preying on too-trustful acquaintances; and while the train speeded southward along the Atlantic coast he did even more by attempting valorously to answer the deluge of questions hurled at him by his insatiably curious friend.

For some deep, mysterious reason, unexplained and unexplainable, anything that has to do with the subject of dishonest gambling is fascinatingly interesting to the average man. Tony showed himself no exception. Methodically, proceeding in orderly fashion from year to year, from month to month, even from day to day, he pumped his informant dry of every detail having to do with his much-chequered career.

Bill had nothing to conceal and met him in a spirit of complete frankness. He told how he had run away from home at the age of eighteen; how he had been introduced to the methods employed to make games of chance less chancy;

how he had gradually become so familiar with those methods that he had qualified as a master of them. He unlocked the door of his reminiscences, and dwelt upon its high lights— and its shadows; its triumphs— and its reverses; its brief periods of prosperity— and its long periods of adversity; and Tony Claghorn, like Oliver Twist, demanded more and more.

Time and again Bill leaped desperately for the end of his story, attempted to terminate his autobiography by explaining, in a few words, how and why he had finally turned a new leaf, become a farmer, and forsworn the devious ways of his youth. But Tony, enjoying himself hugely, would not permit this, and kept his friend busy describing and annotating the earlier episodes which he found so interesting.

Anything— even an autobiography— must come to an end, and at quarter-past four in the afternoon Tony had asked and Bill had answered the final question. And then, while Bill, gazing out of the window, was mentally comparing a herd of Guernseys with his own sleek Jerseys, Tony opened a subject whose discussion might well prove interminable.

"Bill," he repeated, "do you believe in mind reading?"

Bill sighed. "Well, do you believe in it?" he countered wearily.

Tony settled himself in a judicial attitude. "Yes and no," he admitted.

"Meaning?"

"I'm a broad-minded man and I'm always open to conviction."

"And have you ever been convicted— I mean, convinced?" inquired Bill.

Tony nodded gravely. "Yes," he admitted.

Bill nodded with equal gravity. "Then there's nothing more to be said," he declared. The rhythmic click of the wheels was lulling him; he half-closed his eyes.

But Tony had barely begun. "Bill," he commanded, "get your mind on this."

"I can talk just as well in my sleep."

"Not to me," declared Tony emphatically. "We were discussing mind reading," he recalled, somewhat superfluously, "and I was about to tell you that I had seen examples of it."

"Such as?"

"Well," said Tony reflectively, "there was a chap I met some years ago who could do a very wonderful trick with three cards. He'd show you the faces before he started— one of them was a king "

Bill interrupted. "And then he'd shuffle them clumsily, and bet you couldn't locate it."

"Yes."

"You'd win the first time, and the second time, but the third time, if the bet was big enough, you'd lose. You'd think that was impossible, because you'd noticed that the king was dog-eared. You knew the back of the card as well as

you knew the face. Only when you put your money on it, you'd find that the dog-ear had gotten straightened out, and that another card— not the king— had become dog-eared at the same time. Is that correct?"

"Yes."

"And you called that mind reading? Tony, I'm ashamed of you!

"He knew what was in my mind, didn't he?" persisted the clubman. "He knew I noticed the dog-ear. If that wasn't mind reading, what is it?"

"It was nothing but relying on an old, old maxim," retorted Bill.

"What maxim?" demanded Tony somewhat angrily.

Bill gazed innocently out of the window. "Tony, old fellow, it's a maxim to the effect that there's one born every minute."

"A sucker?"

"That word will do as well as any other."

Tony snorted. "Perhaps you'll say the same thing about the Marleys."

"Who are they?"

"Haven't you heard of them? The woman sits on the stage, blindfolded, and the man goes out into the audience—"

"And then the woman reads out what you've written on a piece of paper "

"Yes."

"Or tells you the number engraved in your watch; or the initials on your ring; or the name of the maker of your hat—"

"Yes. Now that's mind reading, isn't it?"

Bill smiled wearily. "Tony, some time when we've got a few hours to spare I'll teach you how to do that with me. It might come in handy some time."

"You mean," gasped Tony, "that you know how it's done?"

Bill nodded. "I was taught by a tramp whom I met in a freight car. He had played the vaudeville houses with his partner. Then he took to drink, and got his signals mixed one night. That finished him. You see, when the sheriff's wife wrote on a bit of paper 'Whom does my husband love?' something went wrong, and the blindfolded lady answered, 'A beautiful young woman with blue eyes and golden hair."

"What of that?" queried Tony.

"Not much," said Bill, "only the sheriff's wife was so far from beautiful that she had no delusions on the subject— and she wasn't young— and, barring streaks of grey in her hair, she was a decided brunette. And she'd been having her suspicions about that husband of hers for a long time! The show stopped right there and the mind reader hopped on the first train leaving that town. He knew that the sheriff would be after him if he lingered."

"If he had been a mind reader," commented Tony, "a real mind reader, he would have foreseen trouble."

Bill laughed. "He foresaw trouble without the least difficulty, and he wasn't a mind reader! It didn't take a mind reader to do that—it needed nothing but plain common sense." Again he closed his eyes. "And now for a snooze," he murmured.

"What happened to the mind reader?" insisted Tony.

"Oh, he stuck to his trade and became prosperous again. We landed in St. Louis together. We were broke, both of us. He fixed that in short order. He'd walk into a saloon. He'd start talking about cards. He'd start talking about mind reading. Then he'd get into an argument with the best-dressed man in the place, and he'd invite him to pick any card out of a deck, call me on the telephone, and hear me tell him what card he held in his hand."

"It can't be done!" ejaculated Tony.

"There were lots of fellows who thought that way. In fact, they'd bet real money that it couldn't be done. My partner never went near the telephone, mind you. He'd say, "Call such and such a number, and ask for Mr. Parmelee."

"And you would name the card?"

"Every time."

"By George," admitted Tony, "that's wonderful!"

"Quite so," drawled Bill. "My partner visited eight or ten places a night. We started off with small bets: we had to, because we began with only five dollars between us. But we split up over a thousand when we decided that it was time for us to make tracks."

"There was no reason that you should not have stayed there indefinitely."

"Oh, yes, there was! You see, the men who lost their bets might have found out that "

"What could they have found out?"

Bill grinned reminiscently. "They might have found out that I had fifty-two different names! They'd call the same number every time—it was a public telephone in a cigar store— but once my partner would tell them to ask for 'Mr. Parmelee,' and once for 'Mr. Henderson,' and once for 'Mr. Bancroft,' and sometimes for 'Mr. Conroy,' or 'Mr, Hanford.' Of course I'd be standing right next to the 'phone all the time."

Tony corrugated his brows. "What's the big idea?"

"Don't you see it yet?" laughed Bill. "Each name indicated a different card. 'Parmelee' was the jack of spades— that was my partner's idea of humour; 'Henderson' was the queen of hearts; 'Hanford' was the queen of spades. Nothing could have been simpler: the first letter of the name told me the denomination of the card; the first vowel told me the suit. We had memorised a code—that was all."

"Whew!" whistled Tony.

"We couldn't work it more than once on the same crowd. That was the only objection to the scheme," confessed Bill, "but in a good-sized town we wouldn't do badly— not at all."

He turned to his bewildered friend, who was gazing at him with open mouth. "Tony," he declared, "any time you hear of a mind reading exhibition more wonderful than that, you let me know where it is—I want to see it."

"I'll remember that," Tony promised. And he was so impressed that he allowed Bill to go to sleep without a protest, not to be wakened until they reached their destination.

ii

WHEN a man belongs to one club, he is likely to belong to another; and when he belongs to two, a third is nearly as inevitable as death and taxes. Tony belonged to the Windsor and to the Himalaya— had joined the first because it was the thing to do, and had joined the second in reaction against the oppressive respectability of the first.

The Windsor was rich, dignified, and exclusive; the Himalaya was rich, undignified, and the reverse of exclusive. By dividing his time between the two Tony convinced himself that he was neither too respectable nor too disreputable, neither a prig nor a sporting man, and ambled along on a middle course which impressed him as being just right. A spree at the Himalaya was atoned for by a staid evening at the Windsor; and after sojourning a while in the highly moral atmosphere of the latter organisation, a visit to the former would bring Tony back to the less exalted plane upon which he felt that he belonged. Membership in the Windsor alone would have branded Tony a snob; membership in the Himalaya alone would have marked him out as a rounder; membership in both qualified him far more congenially as a man about town, a true democrat equally at home in every society.

Yet a third club was necessary to the complete happiness of Tony and of other young men similarly situated, with the result that a select group of them, taking into consideration the frequent vacations which a lifetime of doing nothing demanded, founded that justly celebrated organisation, the Riggs Island Association.

There were rumours that the association had been formed because Huntley Thornton, who had owned Riggs Island, a scrubby patch of sand off the South Carolina coast, had been anxious to sell it, and being in the real-estate business had painted its attractions to his friends in such glowing colours that he had been enabled to get out at a profit. This, however, was mere hearsay, and was never substantiated. Certain it was that Huntley Thornton had been a prime mover in bringing the Riggs Island Association into existence, and that his

friends, oversupplied with money, and enraptured at the thought of an island paradise whither they might retreat to recuperate whenever so minded, had rallied loyally to his support.

To them it mattered nothing that the property consisted only of a few barren acres, a clump of discouraged scrub pines, and a billion gnats. The architect's drawings, prepared under Huntley Thornton's personal direction, featured a golf course, half a dozen tennis courts, a stone clubhouse, and a magnificent beach, and made no mention at all of the already existing features. Thornton's friends gazed upon the handsomely-framed water colours, admired the details, commended the general plan, and dug deep into their pockets for the funds which presently transformed a dream into a reality. In the process the original subscribers nobly paid assessment after assessment, but, as Chet Moulton said, "After we've spent a fortune on the clubhouse we can't shy at the cost of a breakwater. Hang it all, if we do, the clubhouse will be washed into the Atlantic Ocean!" The breakwater had been merely one of the costly necessities which Huntley Thornton's architect had not thought it necessary to mention.

There were others— many, many others.

When the clubhouse was finished, when the tennis courts had been rolled to a glass-like smoothness, and the golf course had been completed, Thornton's friends journeyed down in groups, strolled over the property, admired the perfection of its appointments, and decided that it would do. Tony Claghorn trod experimentally on the tennis courts, hazarded the opinion that they would be fast— and never played. Chet Moulton cast an appraising eye upon the golf links, opined that par on the first hole should be four and not five—and never teed up a ball. Steve Forrester inspected the billiard tables, cast a languid glance at the rows of gleaming cues— but did not remove his coat to click off a few caroms. By tacit agreement the older men— those over thirty— left all forms of exercise to their juniors.

But it was on the beach, a spotless white strip protected by the costly breakwater, that all members met. It was Chet Moulton who first donned a bathing-suit, stuck an experimental toe into the water, and declared that the Atlantic Ocean, as sampled at Riggs Island, met with his approval. It was neither too cold nor too warm; there was neither too much nor too little current— this he discovered upon venturing in farther; and there was just enough tingle in the waves to make Chet— aged thirty-four— feel, as he himself expressed it, twenty years younger.

It was Steve Forrester, however, who discovered that the beach, gently sloping, firm, and warm to sit upon, was quite as suitable for games of chance as for more strenuous pursuits. "Think of it, boys," he exclaimed, "I'll go home tanned like a bronze statue, and if anybody asks me where I got it, I'll mention I got sun-burned playing poker!"

The conception tickled Steve's risibilities mightily. To don a bathing-suit immediately upon rising; to proceed to the beach after breakfast; to remain there, with occasional intermissions for meals, a stack of chips at one hand, and a long, cold drink at the other, from morning till night!— the programme was most attractive. His fellow members voted for it enthusiastically, and the demand for lotions to be applied to smarting shoulders was heavy for a few days. But after that the participants in the game became well hardened, and at nearly any hour a group of young men, tanned to a chrome-leather hue, might have been discovered squatting on the sand, listening to the plash of the waves, and debating mentally whether to raise or to call.

The tennis courts were often deserted, the golf links neglected; but the beach was patronised so incessantly that one could not walk across it, Chet Moulton complained, without stubbing a toe on a poker chip. "What are the wild waves saying?" inquired Chet. "Are they saying, 'Splash'? Not on your life. They're whispering 'Ante up!' "

In games, as everywhere else, there is the struggle for existence, and the survival of the fittest. At the Riggs Island Association, beach poker, as it was quickly called, drove everything else to the wall. They all played—all except Huntley Thornton, who made up for his non-participation in the games by acting as a lone spectator at them. Attired in immaculate flannels, jaunty in a Panama hat, with a cigarette, in a six-inch amber holder, decorating his smiling countenance all day long, Thornton wandered from group to group, congratulating the winners, sympathising with the losers, and sooner or later squatting down to give his undivided attention to the play in the steepest game.

Repeatedly urged to take a hand, he had as often declined. "It may seem funny to you," he admitted, with a smile, "but I've never sat in a poker game in my life."

"No time to learn like the present."

"I promised my old mother," said Thornton, "that I would never gamble. I have yet to break that promise. I kept it in college. I kept it after college. I intend to keep it now."

Chet Moulton, who had just seen the most lucrative pot of the hour pass to an opponent, grinned ruefully. "Huntley," he declared, "I wish my mother had exacted a promise like that from me. It would have saved me a lot of money." Chet's sentiments were sincere. He had shown unlimited faith in a full hand, jacks up. He had backed it magnificently, only to see it lose dismally to a quartet of five-spots held by Don Felton. "If I had made a promise like that," mourned Chet, "and if I had kept it, I might have been a bloated capitalist to-day. Who knows."

"And if I had made such a promise," said Felton, carefully stacking his winnings, "I wouldn't be taking in this pot now."

"Never too late to start," suggested Chet. "You might give it back."

"I might— and then again, I might not," murmured Felton. He glanced at his cards, grinned at the disconsolate Chet, and tossed a chip into the centre of the little patch of sand about which they were sitting. "I'll open for the limit," he challenged. It was into this atmosphere that Tony Claghorn brought his friend, Bill Parmelee, for a complete rest.

iii

"YOUR COMING will be something of a sensation," predicted Tony, as he led the way to the launch which was to take them from the mainland to the island.

"How so?"

"You're a very well-known man, Bill. Everybody else knows it, even if you don't. I dare say that there's not a member of the club who hasn't heard of you."

"And you expect me to enjoy my vacation?"

"Why not?"

The ex-gambler shook his head. "I was never a great hand at advertising," he declared. "I'd prefer it— I'd prefer it greatly if not a soul knew me. Look here, he demanded suddenly, "have you told anybody I'm coming?"

"No," said Tony reluctantly, "I was saving that for a surprise."

"Well, suppose you save it a little longer."

"What do you mean?"

"Introduce me as your friend Brown— Bill Brown— that's a nice inoffensive name. Let me forget business— my peculiar kind of business— for a few days."

Tony's face fell. "I was rather set on introducing you to the boys. You see, I've told them so much about you."

Bill laughed. "Look here, old man," he inquired, "for whose pleasure did you get up this vacation? Theirs— or mine?"

"Yours, of course."

"Then remember my name is Bill Brown."

It hurt to do it, but it was under that name that Tony presented his friend to Huntley Thornton— and to Chet Moulton— and to Steve Forrester— and to the twenty or thirty other congenial spirits sojourning at the club. When, in conformity with established custom, the new arrivals donned bathing-suits, and were promptly drafted into games of beach poker, Tony nearly burst in the effort to keep his secret buried in his bosom. Felton, indeed, had asked Bill if he played, and Tony, beginning indignantly, "Does he play!" had been reminded to keep silence by a violent dig in his unprotected ribs.

To his distress, his friend was separated from him. As a newcomer, Felton, who invariably played in the steepest game, invited Bill to sit in. Tony, being a regular, found himself seated some twenty feet away— and nearly broke his

neck in an attempt to observe what was happening to Bill. From time to time voices reached his ear; from time to time he observed Huntley Thornton, the lone spectator, intently watching the game in which he never took part; from time to time the players in his own game invited him to pay a little attention to it. But it was not until darkness had put an end to the afternoon's play that Tony received any authentic news from the front.

He led his friend out of earshot of the others. "How much did you win?" he inquired eagerly.

"I lost," said Bill.

"W-what?" stammered Tony. "You— you lost?"

"I lost. I lost heavily."

To Tony it seemed impossible that such a thing should ever occur to his friend. Then an improbable explanation flashed into his mind. "I understand, Bill," he guessed, "you were afraid of making them suspicious. You lost on purpose."

Bill laughed. "Why should I lose on purpose?" he countered.

"In any event, why should I let them get into me for more than five hundred dollars? And what on earth should they be suspicious of? No; I didn't lose on purpose? I'm not a philanthropist. I tried my darndest to win. And I didn't win because another fellow played a better game than I did. That happens sometimes, you know."

Tony choked. "But— but it's impossible!" he sputtered.

"Thanks for the compliment," smiled Bill.

"It's impossible," Tony insisted, "and I know it's impossible because I've played with every man in this club. There's not one of them that's in a class with you."

"How about Felton?"

"Don Felton?"

"The big fellow with the sandy hair."

"Was he the big winner?" gasped Tony.

"The big winner and the only winner."

Tony swallowed hard. "I played with him in New York, at the Himalaya, only a month ago, and I cleaned him out."

It was Bill's turn to swallow. "You— you cleaned him out?" he stammered.

"Without the least difficulty," asseverated Tony. His brain was whirling. "Lord knows I'm no crack," he pursued, "I play a tolerable game— a good average game— and I've played with enough really good players to know just where I get off. I'm not an expert "

"And Felton?"

Tony threw up his hands. "Felton's game is to mine as my game is to yours. A month ago he wasn't even near my class."

"Yet to-day he played better poker than I did. He outguessed me from beginning to end. If he called, his cards were just a shade better than mine. And every time I had a really good hand he didn't even raise. He'd drop."

"He must have improved," said Tony idiotically.

"I'll say so," declared Bill. "If the man I played with to-day wasn't in your class a month ago—"

"He must have improved lots."

The eyes of the two men met. Yet it was Tony who voiced the thought that both were probably thinking. "There are many cheating devices," he murmured, "but which of them could be used by a man sitting on a sandy beach, in blazing sunlight, dressed in a one-piece bathing-suit?"

"None that I know of," said Bill.

iv

TONY returned to the attack at the first opportunity and that meant immediately after supper. With great self-control he had refrained from alluding to the subject for ninety consecutive minutes.

"The cards might have been marked," he suggested.

"They weren't."

"Are you sure.?"

"I gathered up three or four after our talk, Tony. I have them in my pocket this minute. They're not marked— and I've gone over them with a glass."

"Felton might have resorted to sleight of hand."

"Not with me watching," said the ex-gambler emphatically. "It's gotten to be unconscious with me, I suppose, but I always watch the deal carefully,"

"Then how did he do it?"

Bill's blue eyes twinkled. "Maybe he studied some good book on poker."

"Be serious, Bill."

"All right, I'll be serious," Bill promised. "On my word of honour, old fellow, I don't know how he did it. But I mean to find out."

It was Tony's turn to smile, "Nice, pleasant way of spending a vacation, isn't it.? This is how you get away from cards for a change."

Bill grinned. "If I learn something new I won't complain."

"And in the meantime the problem is how can a man cheat, without marked cards, without sleight-of-hand, and dressed in a bathing-suit."

"That's all," assented Bill.

It is to be feared that Tony's night was far from peaceful. He tossed from side to side, a prey to weird speculations, racking his brains in an effort to discover some solution to the mystery. Dawn found him advanced not a step. In desperation he appealed to his friend.

"Bill, to-day when you play, let me watch."

"What for?"

"I might see something you don't."

Parmelee shook his head emphatically. "Tony, old fellow, you'd spoil it all. Felton's playing me for a sucker. It's an unusual part for me, and I'm enjoying it. But he'd stop like a shot if he thought I suspected. No, Tony, you can help me most by going about your own business and leaving me strictly alone."

Tony refused to be put off. "Look here," he insisted, "if you won't let me watch, you won't mind if I pass the word to Huntley Thornton?"

"What good would that do?"

"Huntley would keep his weather-eye open. Huntley always looks on."

It spoke volumes for Bill's self-control that he replied civilly.

"He knows nothing about cards. He told me so himself."

"Even so—"

"Tony, with what you know about me, are you really advising me to go to an amateur for assistance?"

"I don't know why not," ventured Tony.

"If you don't, then I do," said Bill decisively. "When I need a guardian, old man, I'll let you know. But for the time being I'll struggle on without help. And if you breathe a word to a soul I'll brain you!"

That threat kept Claghorn silent during the morning, but it did not prevent him from sidling up to Bill at noon to inquire, "How did it go?"

"Great!"

"You won?"

"I lost six hundred more."

"And you call that great?" gasped Tony.

"I call that most satisfactory," Bill declared. "For the first time I'm beginning to get my bearings."

Despite Tony's urgent questions he declined to add another word and left his friend in a condition bordering on collapse. Not once, but a dozen times, had Tony been an eye-witness of Bill's expertness at the profession which had been forced upon him: the profession of unmasking sharpers. Yet the memory of his repeated triumphs was less potent than the realisation that for once Bill was facing an extraordinary situation, and had, so far, met nothing but defeat.

Pride goeth before a fall; and Tony's pride in his idol departed on wings. Twenty-four hours earlier he would unhesitatingly have wagered his last cent that no problem connected with the devious arts of dishonest gambling was too difficult for the man who had solved so many. The events of the immediate past had shattered his faith to such an extent that he had seriously offered his own help. That declined, he had offered, with equal seriousness, to ask Huntley

Thornton— whose ignorance of cards was well known— to take Bill— whose knowledge of the subject was profound— under his wing.

The utter insanity of his proposals never occurred to Tony. Uppermost in his mind was the thought that his friend was in trouble, and that any straw was necessarily a promising straw. During the afternoon Tony played so carelessly that for the first time in several sessions he found himself a winner. Had he stopped to analyse his own game he might have made the instructive discovery that it was undoubtedly at its best when his mind was not on it. But Tony was far too much concerned with graver matters to indulge in any such reflections. Being a winner, he retired from the game after an hour, and nonchalantly strolled towards the group which included Bill. At a distance of fifteen feet he was greeted with a look so fearful that he beat a hasty retreat.

Somewhat offended, he strode manfully into the water, and splashed around for an unconscionable period, a prey to disturbing meditations. How, he asked himself repeatedly, could a man cheat— attired only in a bathing-suit? The answer was perfectly clear: it could not be done, and Tony was reluctantly forced to the conclusion that his friend's game had deteriorated.

This decision was confirmed when at the end of the afternoon's play he made his way to Bill's side and hissed, "Well?" The ex-gambler smiled cryptically.

"Well?" repeated Tony.

"Very well," said Bill.

Tony might have pursued his investigations further had he not, at that moment, discerned Huntley Thornton, immaculate as always, stealthily endeavouring to attract his attention from the other end of the beach.

v

"CLAGHORN," began Thornton, "you don't mind if I ask you a few questions?"

"Not at all."

"Not even if they're rather personal questions about a friend of yours?"

"Why, what do you mean?"

Thornton wasted no time in beating around the bush. "Claghorn, I want to find out something about your guest, Mr. William Brown. Who is he? What is he? What do you know about him?"

Utterly astounded;, Tony sparred for time. "Why do you ask?"

"Because he's a card-cheat," said Thornton flatly.

Tony gasped. "W-what did you say?" he sputtered.

"He's a card-cheat," Thornton repeated dispassionately. "How he does it, what methods he uses, I don't know. But the fact remains, nevertheless. I don't pretend to be an authority on cards. Quite the contrary, I am rather less than a

novice; so I can't say how it's possible for a man— dressed in a bathing-suit— to cheat "

The familiar words echoed in Tony's ears. "Possible?" he interrupted, "Why, it isn't possible."

"That's what I would have said in advance; but after what he did to poor Don Felton "

"What he did?" Tony interrupted again. "Why, he lost five hundred to him yesterday."

"Yes,"

"He lost six hundred more this morning."

"Quite so."

"And this afternoon I suppose he lost seven hundred."

"I'm sorry to say he didn't, Claghorn," said Thornton coldly. "This afternoon he got Don to raise the stakes, and he picked him—"

"What?" gasped Tony. "He won?"

"He began by winning back the eleven hundred he had lost," said Thornton, "Then he won as much more from Don. Then he suggested raising the limit— which Don did, very foolishly— and it took your friend Brown less than an hour more to separate Don from every cent he had in the world."

Something in Tony urged him to cheer; to execute a dance of triumph; to shout his satisfaction aloud. But, for once, soberer second thought was with him, and he only murmured, "Isn't that too bad?"

"It's much too bad, Claghorn; it's very much too bad!"

"Tst! Tst!" clucked Tony.

"Don isn't a rich man "

"No."

"The loss of the money means a lot to him."

"Of course it does."

"If he had lost it fairly and squarely—"

"What makes you think he didn't?" Tony interrupted.

"Impossible!" Thornton snapped. "This morning your friend Brown— so Felton said— played like a beginner. This afternoon he was infallible. Now, a man doesn't improve that much in an hour or two."

Familiar words! Familiar words! Inwardly Tony exulted, but he remarked shrewdly, "It was all right, you mean, so long as Brown played like a beginner, but it was all wrong the moment he began to play like an expert."

"That's not what I mean," said Thornton, "and you know it isn't."

"Well, what do you mean.?"

"I mean this," and in the gathering darkness Tony could see his fists clench, "there's something wrong— something very wrong, indeed— somewhere. I want to find out what it is."

Tony smiled happily. "Why do you come to me?" he asked innocently.

"Because, like everybody else, I've heard of this Parmelee friend of yours, this man who makes it a business to expose cheats. I've heard how he showed up Graham in Palm Beach; and I've heard how he showed up others in New York. Now, if you will be so kind, I'd like you to wire Parmelee, and ask him to come here at once, at my expense, to investigate this man Brown."

Describing the episode afterwards Tony said: "I don't know how I stopped myself from breaking out into laughter. The idea was rich: asking Bill Parmelee to investigate himself! I was thankful that it was dark, and that Thornton couldn't see my face. Never in my life did I have a harder time keeping it straight!"

Thornton repeated his request: "I want you to wire for Parmelee. He's the man for the job. I want him to watch Brown play; to play with him himself if he wants to. And then I want him to expose him."

It was at this point that a familiar figure approached through the darkness, and Bill Parmelee— alias Brown— fully dressed, joined the speakers. "I couldn't help overhearing what you just said, Mr. Thornton," he declared. "I'm a great hand at coming right down to brass tacks. Let's have it out."

To say that Thornton was angry would be an under-statement. He was furious; beside himself with rage; and he began to speak in a tone which trembled with passion. Tony, listening, wondered why Thornton should take Felton's troubles so greatly to heart; and he wondered still more why Parmelee, sitting near him in the darkness, allowed the vitriolic blast to continue unchecked. Thornton was nothing if not specific: he did not hesitate to call names; to couple them with unpleasant adjectives; to express his opinions in the most elaborately insulting language. To the torrent of invective, Bill answered not a word. It was only when Thornton ran out of breath, and stopped temporarily that Bill asked calmly, "Mr. Thornton, have you a cigarette?"

Utterly taken aback Thornton offered his case. Bill reached for it in the darkness, and found it. "Have you a match?" Bill asked.

Tony had never seen his friend smoke. To his boundless astonishment, Bill now lighted a cigarette, inhaled a breath or two, and turned to his enemy.

"Go ahead, Mr. Thornton," he invited.

What followed according to Tony beggared description. Thornton, curiously confused, launched again into his invective. That it did not disturb Bill greatly was evidenced by the intermittent glimmer from his cigarette in the darkness. And then, in the middle of a word, Thornton stopped—stopped dead.

For a minute— two minutes— while Tony marvelled— there was absolute silence. Then, in curiously different voice, Thornton said, "I understand, Mr. Parmelee."

"Mr. Parmelee!" Tony felt his hair rising on end. By what process had Thornton discovered his identity? But he was speaking again.

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Claghorn," faltered Thornton. "I'm sorry I made such a scene." He paused— paused for another unearthly wait while the cigarette twinkled. "In the morning, Mr. Parmelee; yes, I'll leave in the morning. Felton will go, too. I will answer for him. We are grateful, Mr. Parmelee, both of us."

Again an unearthly pause, while Tony clenched his fists and wondered what supernatural forces were at work. Then, in a broken voice, Thornton was speaking: "Do you insist, Mr. Parmelee?"

Utterly crushed, he turned to Tony. "Mr. Claghorn, at Mr. Parmelee's request, I tell you that Felton cheated—and that I was his accomplice. Is that enough, Mr. Parmelee?... Thank you... Good night."

Through the darkness came the sound of Thornton's retreating footsteps. Then, in a glowing arc. Bill's cigarette flew through the air, to fall with a gentle hiss into the ocean.

Again Tony felt his hair rising. He had been in the presence of something strangely mysterious, something so uncanny that it partook of the miraculous. He stretched out a trembling hand and seized his friend's knee. "Bill," he begged, "for Heaven's sake, what was it?"

Came the familiar laugh, and then, for the first time in many minutes, the sound of Bill's voice. "It was mind reading," he said.

vi

IT WAS NOT until they were again seated in the train, nearly a week later, that Bill consented to answer Tony's innumerable questions. Prior to that time he had maintained a stony silence. Even when Huntley Thornton and Don Felton had suddenly decided to go fishing in southern Florida, and had departed, bag and baggage, before daybreak, Bill had had no comment to offer.

"Surely you could have told me then," Tony protested.

"Why? You would never have been satisfied until you had told it to every man in the club."

"And why not?"

"You would have shown them up."

"They should have been shown up."

"I wonder!" said Bill. "They were amateurs— nothing but amateurs— and it's so much easier to ruin reputations than to make them. If I had spoken, I would have branded those two men for the rest of their lives. As it is, they've gone off together where they can think things over, and they may decide that honesty isn't such a bad policy after all."

"Humph!" snorted Tony.

"In the bottom of your heart, old fellow, you agree with me. I've shown up a good many men— but they've deserved it. These two were in a class by themselves. They'd made a mistake. I've given them a chance to let it be forgotten. If they go wrong again— well, it won't be on my conscience." He smiled. "Is that so, Tony?"

"I guess so," Tony admitted. "In fact, I'll agree with anything if you tell me just what happened. To me, it's all as clear as mud."

Bill laughed. "It began in a funny way. When I lost to Felton on that first afternoon, I had no suspicion that anything was wrong. He played as if he knew every card in my hand. Well, that's what I'd expect of a really fine player. I thought Felton was one.

"Then you told me what you knew about him: that he wasn't even in your class, and I tried to put two and two together. Generally two and two make four— but this time they didn't, and it wasn't until the next morning that I began to suspect what was going on. It was really the simplest thing in the world when I once put my mind on it. The cards weren't marked; Felton wasn't doing any legerdemain— he wasn't nearly clever enough for that— yet he played as if he knew just what I held. There could be only one answer: he did actually know, and that meant that somebody was telling him.

"When you play indoors, your cards are dealt on to a table; you gather them together; you raise the pips just enough to read them, and you leave them right on the table. At any rate, that's what you do if you're a professional gambler— and I'm a professional. But playing on the sand you can't do that because it would take acrobatics. Instead, you take up your cards—and unless you hold them mighty close, a man sitting behind you can read them.

"That's where Thornton came in. I'm not a stingy player, and the moment I started betting liberally, Thornton plunked himself down where he could watch. Then he signalled my holdings to his partner."

"How did he do it?"

"It cost me six hundred dollars to find out. Naturally I couldn't face him. I watched him out of the corner of my eye: that was all I dared. Even then, it took me an hour to discover his system— it was so beautifully simple that you would never notice it if you weren't looking for it."

"Well? Well?" said Tony impatiently.

"Did you ever see Thornton without a cigarette in his mouth?" Bill inquired.

Tony could not control his vexation. "Bill," he pleaded, "I'm not a bit interested in Thornton's personal habits. And I'm very much interested in his method of signalling."

"You won't see a thing when it's right under your nose— or under his nose, I should say," laughed Bill. "That was how he did it. His cigarette, man! His cigarette!"

"What about it?"

"Well, it smoked, didn't it? It could produce short puffs, and it could produce long puffs— and it could produce any required alternation of them, couldn't it?"

"You mean?" gasped Tony.

"I mean Thornton's cigarette was sending perfectly good Morse. And I thanked my lucky stars that telegraphy was one of the things I picked up in my six years on the road. Of course Thornton abbreviated: he didn't have to spell out, 'He's holding two pairs, kings up,' when it took no particular genius to condense that into three letters, and he didn't have to telegraph, 'Mr. Brown has just filled a straight, jack high,' when he could say the same thing in two letters. In fact, he didn't have to use Morse— a prearranged code would have answered just as well— and it would have given me no more trouble."

"How on earth could you beat such a team.?"

"By playing straight poker," said Bill. "In the afternoon, instead of sitting up, I lay down, held my cards so that I could barely see them myself, and played the great American game just as well as I knew how. One of the peculiarities of beach poker," commented Bill, "is that you can play it lying on your stomach. I did— and for twenty-four hours afterwards I had a crick in the neck to show for it.

"I won back the eleven hundred I had lost in short order; and then Felton made the mistake of losing his temper. He had whipped me so easily that morning— and the day before— that he couldn't quite reconcile himself to the sudden change in the state of affairs. He got angry, and when I suggested raising the limit, he got angrier, but he didn't decline." Bill sighed reminiscently.

"It was quick work after that, and towards the end I had Thornton telegraphing, 'Stop! Stop! Stop!' That was all he could telegraph, and it only made his partner more furious than ever." He chuckled. "I enjoyed that game: 'pon my word, I did!"

"And then?" said Tony.

"What do you mean?"

"How do you explain what you did to Thornton? I never saw anything more wonderful in my life. He started in to abuse you— to call you every name he could think of— and you stopped him, you crushed him, you made him confess without saying a word. And then you insisted it was mind reading!"

Bill laughed. "Tony, old fellow, my artistic temperament is to blame. I hadn't thought of it until I walked back to the beach, but it suddenly struck me what a masterly touch it would be to pay Thornton out in his own coin— to tell him what I had to say with one of his own cigarettes!"

"You mean— you telegraphed?"

"I did."

"With puffs of smoke?"

"Not in the dark, old fellow. I remembered the Good Book: the 'pillar of cloud' and the 'pillar of fire'; I said what I had to say with the burning tip of my cigarette, and believe me, I didn't mince matters!"

He smiled as Tony gazed at him open-mouthed. "I am not ordinarily a profane man," said Bill, "but if you had been able to read what I said to Thornton, even you would have blushed. I'll bet he did."

He paused, to witness Tony shaking in the throes of Homeric laughter. "There's something about it," Tony gasped, between explosions, "something about— the idea— of swearing— profanely— with the end— of a cigarette— that strikes me— as being awfully— awfully— funny!" For an instant he mastered himself. Then he was off again. "To think— to think— that he asked me to send for Bill Parmelee— to investigate Bill Parmelee!"

"It would have been awkward, wouldn't it?" Bill admitted.

He grinned as his friend went into spasm after spasm of uncontrollable laughter.

But the final question came later. "Bill," asked Tony, long after, "did those fellows— Thornton and Felton— actually think you cheated?"

Bill chuckled. "They did, Tony, and that's the chief reason why I forgave them. I didn't cheat. Of course I didn't cheat. But they thought I did. They were sure I did. They were such awful dubs, such hopeless amateurs, that they didn't recognise really good play when they saw it."

"Tony, old man," Bill concluded, "in my long career I've had compliments— many compliments. But to be accused of cheating because my game is so good: I'll never ask for a finer one than that!"

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7: Behind The Door

Percival Wilde

Collier's, 4 Feb, 1928

IT LOOKED easy, and it was easy. The second key in the bunch opened the_ basement door, and Benny found himself in the house. It was . dark— very dark— and he stood still while his eyes accustomed themselves to the obscurity. Then, inch by inch, he edged to the stairs and up them to the' main floor.

Here darkness yielded to a subdued lighting, and, flattening himself against the paneled walls, Benny paused again to take stock of the situation.

It was a venture in a field new to him. By inclination, by aptitude, by a love of the art which was so intense that he was usually engaged in scrawling on every flat surface within reach, he was a wielder of the pen, an expert in the production of signatures warranted to defy any but the closest inspection. His dexterity had been capitalized by bolder men who had directed him, had profited by his skill— and were now paying for their boldness behind steel bars.

Benny had escaped arrest, but he had lost his guides. Promptly he found himself starving, and, being a simple soul, hoped to remedy that condition in the most direct manner. Robison's house, he had heard in the underworld, contained a mass of treasure. There was a coin collection that filled many cases.

That the house was guarded by a burglar alarm that was almost human was blissfully unknown to Benny. He flattered himself that his entrance was undetected.

The aroma of burning cigars was wafted to him from the near-by library. Now was the time to charge upon the inhabitants of the house with his pistol drawn— but the thought was abhorrent to him. Benny hated violence.

He was smiling over hiS problem when suddenly— so suddenly that he never quite understood how it happened— a ring of chilly metal touched the nape of his neck, and an even chillier voice bade him drop his revolver.

He followed orders— he was accustomed to doing that— and he shuffled meekly into the library when his captor commanded him to do so.

It was a warm, cheerful place, and the stout man who sat in an easy chair, puffing at a cigar, looked warm and cheerful.

"Mister—" began Benny.

An icy voice at his back interrupted him. "I'm Robison," it said. Benny wheeled, and his heart dropped a beat. A tall, lean individual, with the thinnest lips and the beadiest eyes that Benny had ever seen, was covering him.

"Going to tell me it's your first time?" Robison sneered.

Benny nodded mutely.

"Wife and eleven children starving at home eh? Is the gun loaded?"

Benny nodded unhappily as Robison methodically verified the fact by breaking and recharging the weapon.

"I'd phone for the police," suggested the warm, cheerful man.

"Not yet," said Robison. He opened a closet door and pointed with his automatic. "Get in there," he said to Benny. "I'll be on the other side of this," he warned; "don't try to break it down."

The latch clicked, a key turned, and Benny sat down in utter darkness, to wonder what was to become of him. Disarmed, helpless, a prisoner, the fu¬ ture was unpromising. His hand stole into his pocket to caress the stub of a pencil— that was companionable.

He expected to hear a voice telephoning for the police. He heard it presently, but it was not telephoning. It was addressing the warm, cheerful man, and Benny was not the subject of the conversation. Stocks— the name of a railroad— Wall Street— the mysterious phrase "selling short." Queer!

The men outside began to raise their voices. "I've made you a fair offer," he heard Robison saying.

"It's not for you to say what's fair."

"I've told you my limit," shrilled Robison. "I won't pay another cent!"

Robison's identification could not have been more convincing

The warm, cheerful man laughed. "He who sells what isn't his'n," he quoted, "must buy it back or go to pris'n! You broke me five years ago, Robison, and I've been laying for you ever since. It's your turn to shell out now."

Abruptly Robison's voice rose to an excited screech: "I give you one minute to make up your mind! One minute!"

There was the sound of an overturned chair, and the cheerful man's voice was suddenly panic-stricken. "Put down that gun, Robison," it pleaded, "put it down!"

Then, muffled by the door between, came the report of a revolver shot, and Benny heard a heavy fall. He rose to his feet, quivering, trembling.

THE closed door was flung open, and a smoking weapon was thrust into his hand. He had a glimpse of the room beyond. He saw a body sprawled on the floor and he noticed a pool of red lending sudden life to the somber colors of a Persian rug.

"Quick," came Robison's command, "out with you!"

Benny did not pause to reason. He knew only that he wanted to leave the place without delay.

He took the gun. He burst out of the house. He plunged down the steps.

Before he could reach the pavement he was gathered in by a pair of policemen who had heard the shot and who wanted to find out what it meant.

Robison's identification could not have been more convincing'.

"This is the man," he said positively. "I was talking with Holloway when he broke in, waving a gun. He aimed it at me. He was about to fire when Holloway rushed him." He glanced at the body and wiped away a tear. "Gentlemen, Holloway was my dearest friend."

The police captain, who had been hastily summoned to Robison's library, frowned at the prisoner. He knew him.

"What have you got to say, Benny?" he demanded.

"That guy— he done it himself!"

Benny's auditors snickered. "With your gun?"

"That's just what he done!" Benny saw the electric chair coming nearer and nearer. "Honest to God, I didn't croak nobody! Why, that guy caught me when I come in! He took the gat away from me! He locked me up in the closet— himself!"

"That's pure invention," said Robison calmly; "he wasn't in the closet."

The police captain crossed the room to the closet, observed its bare interior with a swift glance, and returned. "Go on, Mr. Robison," he invited.

"It's my word against the word of a criminal," Robison said confidently— "my word, and the fact that his gun, with one chamber empty, was found on him when you caught him. That ought to be enough."

"It's almost enough."

Robison's eyebrows lifted ever so slightly. "Almost? Almost?"

"Almost. If he was in the closet, he didn't commit the murder— and you swear he was never in the closet."

"I do!"

The captain slipped a pair of handcuffs on Robison's wrists. "Mr. Robison," he said, "you should have looked at the closet yourself. He's written his name on the inside of the door!"

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8: The Thing from— "Outside"

George Allen England

1877-1936

Science and Invention, April 1923

Amazing Stories, April, 1926

THEY sat about their camp-fire, that little party of Americans retreating southward from Hudson Bay before the on-coming menace of the great cold. Sat there, stolid under the awe of the North, under the uneasiness that the day's trek had laid upon their souls. The three men smoked. The two women huddled close to each other. Fireglow picked their faces from the gloom of night among the dwarf firs. A splashing murmur told of the Albany River's haste to escape from the wilderness, and reach the Bay.

"I don't see what there was in a mere circular print on a rock-ledge to make our guides desert," said Professor Thorburn. His voice was as dry as his whole personality. "Most extraordinary."

"*They* knew what it was, all right," answered Jandron, geologist of the party. "So do I." He rubbed his cropped mustache. His eyes glinted grayly. I've seen prints like that before. That was on the Labrador. And I've seen things happen, where they were."

"Something surely happened to our guides, before they'd got a mile into the bush," put in the Professor's wife; while Vivian, her sister, gazed into the fire that revealed her as a beauty, not to be spoiled even by a tam and a rough-knit sweater. "Men don't shoot wildly, and scream like that, unless—"

"They're all three dead now, anyhow," put in Jandron. "So they're out of harm's way. While we— well, we're two hundred and fifty wicked miles from the C. P. R. rails."

"Forget it, Jandy!" said Marr, the journalist. "We're just suffering from an attack of nerves, that's all. Give me a fill of 'baccy. Thanks. We'll all be better in the morning. Ho-hum! Now, speaking of spooks and such—"

He launched into an account of how he had once exposed a fraudulent spiritualist, thus proving—to his own satisfaction— that nothing existed beyond the scope of mankind's everyday life. But nobody gave him much heed. And silence fell upon the little night-encampment in the wilds; a silence that was ominous.

Pale, cold stars watched down from spaces infinitely far beyond man's trivial world.

Next day, stopping for chow on a ledge miles upstream, Jandron discovered another of the prints. He cautiously summoned the other two men. They examined the print, while the women-folk were busy by the fire. A harmless thing the marking seemed; only a ring about four inches in diameter, a kind of

cup-shaped depression with a raised center. A sort of glaze coated it, as if the granite had been fused by heat.

Jandron knelt, a well-knit figure in bright mackinaw and canvas leggings, and with a shaking finger explored the smooth curve of the print in the rock. His brows contracted as he studied it.

"We'd better get along out of this as quick as we can," said he in an unnatural voice, "You've got your wife to protect, Thorburn, and I,— well, I've got Vivian. And—"

"*You* have?" nipped Marr. The light of an evil jealously gleamed in his heavy-lidded look. "What you need is an alienist."

"Really, Jandron," the Professor admonished, "you mustn't let your imagination run away with you."

"I suppose it's imagination that keeps this print cold!" the geologist retorted. His breath made faint, swirling coils of vapor above it.

"Nothing but a pot-hole," judged Thorburn, bending his spare, angular body to examine the print. The Professor's vitality all seemed centered in his big-bulged skull that sheltered a marvelous thinking machine. Now he put his lean hand to the base of his brain, rubbing the back of his head as if it ached. Then, under what seemed some powerful compulsion, he ran his bony finger around the print in the rock.

"By Jove, but it is cold!" he admitted. "And looks as if it had been stamped right out of the stone. Extraordinary!"

"Dissolved out, you mean," corrected the geologist. "By cold."

The journalist laughed mockingly.

"Wait till I write this up!" he sneered. "'Noted, Geologist Declares Frigid Ghost Dissolves Granite!'"

Jandron ignored him. He fetched a little water from the river and poured it into the print.

"Ice!" ejaculated the Professor. "Solid ice!"

"Frozen in a second," added Jandron, while Marr frankly stared. "And it'll never melt, either. I tell you, I've seen some of these rings before; and every time, horrible things have happened. Incredible things! Something burned this ring out of the stone—burned it out with the cold interstellar space. Something that can import cold as a permanent quality of matter. Something that can kill matter, and totally remove it."

"Of course that's all sheer poppycock," the journalist tried to laugh, but his brain felt numb.

"This something, this Thing," continued Jandron, "is a Thing that can't be killed by bullets. It's what caught our guides on the barrens, as they ran away—poor fools!"

A shadow fell across the print in the rock, Mrs. Thorburn had come up, was standing there. She had overheard a little of what Jandron had been saying.

"Nonsense!" she tried to exclaim, but she was shivering so she could hardly speak.

That night, after a long afternoon of paddling and portaging—laboring against inhibitions like those in a nightmare—they camped on shelving rocks that slanted to the river.

"After all," said the Professor, when supper was done, "we mustn't get into a panic. I know extraordinary things are reported from the wilderness, and more than one man has come out, raving. But we, by Jove! with our superior brains—we aren't going to let Nature play us any tricks!"

"And of course," added his wife, her arm about Vivian, "everything in the universe is a natural force. There's really no super-natural, at all."

"Admitted," Jandron replied. "But how about things *outside* the universe?"

"And they call you a scientist?" gibed Marr; but the Professor leaned forward, his brows knit.

"Hm!" he grunted. A little silence fell.

"You don't mean, really," asked Vivian, "that you think there's life and intelligence—Outside?"

Jandron looked at the girl. Her beauty, haloed with ruddy gold from the firelight, was a pain to him as he answered:

"Yes, I do. And dangerous life, too. I know what I've seen, in the North Country. I know what I've seen!"

Silence again, save for the crepitation of the flames, the fall of an ember, the murmur of the current. Darkness narrowed the wilderness to just that circle of flickering light ringed by the forest and the river, brooded over by the pale stars.

"Of course you can't expect a scientific man to take you seriously," commented the Professor.

"I know what I've seen! I tell you there's Something entirely outside man's knowledge."

"Poor fellow!" scoffed the journalist; but even as he spoke his hand pressed his forehead.

"There are Things at work," Jandron affirmed, with dogged persistence. He lighted his pipe with a blazing twig. Its flame revealed his face drawn, lined. "Things. Things that reckon with us no more than we do with ants. Less, perhaps."

The flame of the twig died. Night stood closer, watching.

"Suppose there are?" the girl asked. "What's that got to do with these prints in the rock?"

"They," answered Jandron, "are marks left by one of those Things. Footprints, maybe. That Thing is near us, here and now!"

Marr's laugh broke a long stillness.

"And you," he exclaimed, "with an A. M. and a B. S. to write after your name."

"If you knew more," retorted Jandron, "you'd know a devilish sight less. It's only ignorance that's cock-sure."

"But," dogmatized the Professor, "no scientist of any standing has ever admitted any outside interference with this planet."

"No, and for thousands of years nobody ever admitted that the world was round, either. What I've seen, I know."

"Well, what *have* you seen?" asked Mrs. Thorburn, shivering.

"You'll excuse me, please, for not going into that just now."

"You mean," the Professor demanded, dryly, "if the— hm!— this supposition Thing wants to—?"

"It'll do any infernal thing it takes a fancy to, yes! If it happens to want us—"

"But what *could* Things like that want of us? Why should They come here, at all?"

"Oh, for various reasons. For inanimate objects, at times, and then again for living beings. They've come here lots of times, I tell you," Jandron asserted with strange irritation, "and got what They wanted, and then gone away to— Somewhere. If one of Them happens to want us, for any reason. It will take us, that's all. If It doesn't want us, It will ignore us, as we'd ignore gorillas in Africa if we were looking for gold. But if it was gorilla-fur we wanted, that would be different for the gorillas, wouldn't it?"

"What in the world," asked Vivian, "could a— well, a Thing from Outside want of *us?*"

"What do men want, say, of guinea-pigs? Men experiment with 'em, of course. Superior beings use inferior, for their own ends. To assume that man is the supreme product of evolution is gross self-conceit. Might not some superior Thing want to experiment with human beings?

"But how?" demanded Marr.

"The human brain is the most highly-organized form of matter known to this planet. Suppose, now—"

"Nonsense!" interrupted the Professor. "All hands to the sleeping-bags, and no more of this. I've got a wretched headache. Let's anchor in Blanket Bay!"

He, and both the women, turned in. Jandron and Marr sat a while longer by the fire. They kept plenty of wood piled on it, too, for an unnatural chill transfixed the night-air. The fire burned strangely blue, with greenish flicks of flame.

At length, after vast acerbities of disagreement, the geologist and the newspaperman sought their sleeping-bags. The fire was a comfort. Not that a fire could avail a pin's weight against a Thing from interstellar space, but

subjectively it was a comfort. The instincts of a million years, centering around protection by fire, cannot be obliterated.

After a time— worn out by a day of nerve-strain and of battling with swift currents, of flight from Something invisible, intangible— they all slept.

The depths of space, star-sprinkled, hung above them with vastness immeasurable, cold beyond all understanding of the human mind.

Jandron woke first, in a red dawn.

He blinked at the fire, as he crawled from his sleeping-bag. The fire was dead; and yet it had not burned out. Much wood remained unconsumed, charred over, as if some gigantic extinguisher had in the night been lowered over it.

"*Hmmm!*" growled Jandron. He glanced about him, on the ledge. "Prints, too. I might have known!"

He aroused Marr. Despite all the journalist's mocking hostility, Jandron felt more in common with this man of his own age than with the Professor, who was close on sixty.

"Look here, now!" said he. "*It* has been all around here. See? *It* put out our fire— maybe the fire annoyed *It*, some way— and *It* walked round us, everywhere." His gray eyes smouldered. "I guess, by gad, you've got to admit facts, now!"

The journalist could only shiver and stare.

"Lord, what a head I've got on me, this morning!" he chattered. He rubbed his forehead with a shaking hand, and started for the river. Most of his assurance had vanished. He looked badly done up.

"Well, what say?" demanded Jandron. "See these fresh prints?"

"Damn the prints!" retorted Marr, and fell to grumbling some unintelligible thing. He washed unsteadily, and remained crouching at the river's lip, inert, numbed.

Jandron, despite a gnawing at the base of his brain, carefully examined the ledge. He found prints scattered everywhere, and some even on the river-bottom near the shore. Wherever water had collected in the prints on the rock, it had frozen hard. Each print in the river-bed, too, was white with ice. Ice that the rushing current could not melt.

"Well, by gad!" he exclaimed. He lighted his pipe and tried to think. Horribly afraid— yes, he felt horribly afraid, but determined. Presently, as a little power of concentration came back, he noticed that all the prints were in straight lines, each mark about two feet from the next.

"*It* was observing us while we slept," said Jandron.

"What nonsense are you talking, eh?" demanded Marr. His dark, heavy face sagged. "Fire, now, and grub!"

He got up and shuffled unsteadily away from the river. Then he stopped with a jerk, staring.

"Look! Look a' that axe!" he gulped, pointing.

Jandron picked up the axe, by the handle, taking good care not to touch the steel. The blade was white-furred with frost. And deep into it, punching out part of the edge, one of the prints was stamped.

"This metal," said he, "is clean gone. It's been absorbed. The Thing doesn't recognize any difference in materials. Water and steel and rock are all the same to It.

"You're crazy!" snarled the journalist. "How could a Thing travel on one leg, hopping along, making marks like that?"

"It could roll, if it was disk-shaped. And—"

A cry from the Professor turned them. Thorburn was stumbling toward them, hands out and tremulous.

"My wife—!" he choked.

Vivian was kneeling beside her sister, frightened, dazed.

"Something's happened!" stammered the Professor. "Here— come here—!"

Mrs. Thorburn was beyond any power of theirs, to help. She was still breathing; but her respirations were stertorous, and a complete paralysis had stricken her. Her eyes, half-open and expressionless, showed pupils startlingly dilated. No resources of the party's drug-kit produced the slightest effect on the woman.

The next half-hour was a confused panic, breaking camp, getting Mrs. Thorburn into a canoe, and leaving that accursed place, with a furious energy of terror that could no longer reason. Up-stream, ever up against the swirl of the current the party fought, driven by horror. With no thought of food or drink, paying no heed to landmarks, lashed forward only by the mad desire to be gone, the three men and the girl flung every ounce of their energy into the paddles. Their panting breath mingled with the sound of swirling eddies. A mist-blurred sun brooded over the northern wilds. Unheeded, hosts of black-flies sang high-pitched keenings all about the fugitives. On either hand the forest waited, watched.

Only after two hours of sweating toil had brought exhaustion did they stop, in the shelter of a cove where black waters circled, foam-flecked. There they found the Professor's wife— she was dead.

Nothing remained to do but bury her. At first Thorburn would not hear of it. Like a madman he insisted that through all hazards he would fetch the body out. But no—impossible. So, after a terrible time, he yielded.

In spite of her grief, Vivian was admirable. She understood what must be done. It was her voice that said the prayers; her hand that— lacking flowers—

laid the fir boughs on the cairn. The Professor was dazed past doing anything, saying anything.

Toward mid-afternoon, the party landed again, many miles up-river. Necessity forced them to eat. Fire would not burn. Every time they lighted it, it smouldered and went out with a heavy, greasy smoke. The fugitives ate cold food and drank water, then shoved off in two canoes and once more fled.

In the third canoe, hauled to the edge of the forest, lay all the rock-specimens, data and curios, scientific instruments. The party kept only Marr's diary, a compass, supplies, fire-arms and medicine-kit.

"We can find the things we've left— sometime," said Jandron, noting the place well. "Sometime— after *It* has gone."

"And bring the body out," added Thorburn. Tears, for the first time, wet his eyes. Vivian said nothing. Marr tried to light his pipe. He seemed to forget that nothing, not even tobacco, would burn now.

Vivian and Jandron occupied one canoe. The other carried the Professor and Marr. Thus the power of the two canoes was about the same. They kept well together, up-stream.

The fugitives paddled and portaged with a dumb, desperate energy. Toward evening they struck into what they believed to be the Mamattawan. A mile up this, as the blurred sun faded beyond a wilderness of ominous silence, they camped. Here they made determined efforts to kindle fire. Not even alcohol from the drug-kit would start it. Cold, they mumbled a little food; cold, they huddled into their sleeping-bags, there to lie with darkness leaden on their fear. After a long time, up over a world void of all sound save the river-flow, slid an amber moon notched by the ragged tops of the conifers. Even the wail of a timber-wolf would have come as welcome relief; but no wolf howled.

Silence and night enfolded them. And everywhere they felt that It was watching.

Foolishly enough, as a man will do foolish things in a crisis, Jandron laid his revolver outside his sleeping-bag, in easy reach. His thought— blurred by a strange, drawing headache— was:

"If *It* touches Vivian, I'll shoot!"

He realized the complete absurdity of trying to shoot a visitant from interstellar space; from the Fourth Dimension, maybe. But Jandron's ideas seemed tangled. Nothing would come right. He lay there, absorbed in a kind of waking nightmare. Now and then, rising on an elbow, he hearkened; all in vain. Nothing so much as stirred.

His thought drifted to better days, when all had been health, sanity, optimism; when nothing except jealousy of Marr, as concerned Vivian, had troubled him. Days when the sizzle of the frying-pan over friendly coals had made friendly wilderness music; when the wind and the northern star, the whirr

of the reel, the whispering vortex of the paddle in clear water had all been things of joy. Yes, and when a certain happy moment had, through some word or look of the girl, seemed to promise his heart's desire. But now—

"Damn it, I'll save *her*, anyhow!" he swore with savage intensity, knowing all the while that what was to be, would be, unmitigably. Do ants, by any waving of antenna, stay the down-crushing foot of man?

Next morning, and the next, no sign of the Thing appeared. Hope revived that possibly It might have flitted away elsewhere; back, perhaps, to outer space. Many were the miles the urging paddles spurned behind. The fugitives calculated that a week more would bring them to the railroad. Fire burned again. Hot food and drink helped, wonderfully. But where were the fish?

"Most extraordinary," all at once said the Professor, at noonday camp. He had become quite rational again. "Do you realize, Jandron, we've seen no traces of life in some time?"

The geologist nodded. Only too clearly he had noted just that, but he had been keeping still about it.

"That's so, too!" chimed in Marr, enjoying the smoke that some incomprehensible turn of events was letting him have. "Not a muskrat or beaver. Not even a squirrel or bird."

"Not so much as a gnat or black-fly!" the Professor added. Jandron suddenly realized that he would have welcomed even those.

That afternoon, Marr fell into a suddenly vile temper. He mumbled curses against the guides, the current, the portages, everything. The Professor seemed more cheerful. Vivian complained of an oppressive headache. Jandron gave her the last of the aspirin tablets; and as he gave them, took her hand in his.

"I'll see *you* through, anyhow," said he. "I don't count, now. Nobody counts, only you!"

She gave him a long, silent look. He saw the sudden glint of tears in her eyes; felt the pressure of her hand, and knew they two had never been so near each other as in that moment under the shadow of the Unknown.

Next day— or it may have been two days later, for none of them could be quite sure about the passage of time— they came to a deserted lumber-camp. Even more than two days might have passed; because now their bacon was all gone, and only coffee, tobacco, beef-cubes and pilot-bread remained. The lack of fish and game had cut alarmingly into the duffle-bag. That day—whatever day it may have been— all four of them suffered terribly from headache of an odd, ring-shaped kind, as if something circular were being pressed down about their heads. The Professor said it was the sun that made his head ache. Vivian laid it to the wind and the gleam of the swift water, while Marr claimed it was the heat. Jandron wondered at all this, inasmuch as he plainly saw that the river had almost stopped flowing, and the day had become still and overcast.

They dragged their canoes upon a rotting stage of fir-poles and explored the lumber-camp; a mournful place set back in an old "slash," now partly overgrown with scrub poplar, maple and birch. The log buildings, covered with tar-paper partly torn from the pole roofs, were of the usual North Country type. Obviously the place had not been used for years. Even the landing-stage where once logs had been rolled into the stream had sagged to decay.

"I don't quite get the idea of this," Marr exclaimed. "Where did the logs go to? Downstream, of course. But *that* would take 'em to Hudson Bay, and there's no market for spruce timber or pulp-wood at Hudson Bay." He pointed down the current.

"You're entirely mistaken," put in the Professor. "Any fool could see this river runs the other way. A log thrown in here would go down toward the St. Lawrence!"

"But then," asked the girl, "why can't we drift back to civilization?" The Professor retorted:

"Just what we *have* been doing, all along! Extraordinary, that I have to explain the obvious!" He walked away in a huff.

"I don't know but he's right, at that," half admitted the journalist. "I've been thinking almost the same thing, myself, the past day or two—that is, ever since the sun shifted."

"What do you mean, shifted?" from Jandron.

"You haven't noticed it?"

"But there's been no sun at all, for at least two days!"

"Hanged if I'll waste time arguing with a lunatic!" Marr growled. He vouchsafed no explanation of what he meant by the sun's having "shifted," but wandered off, grumbling.

"What are we going to do?" the girl appealed to Jandron. The sight of her solemn, frightened eyes, of her palm-outward hands and (at last) her very feminine fear, constricted Jandron's heart.

"We're going through, you and I," he answered simply. "We've got to save them from themselves, you and I have."

Their hands met again, and for a moment held. Despite the dead calm, a fir-tip at the edge of the clearing suddenly flicked aside, shrivelled as if frozen. But neither of them saw it.

The fugitives, badly spent, established themselves in the "bar-room" or sleeping-shack of the camp. They wanted to feel a roof over them again, if only a broken one. The traces of men comforted them: a couple of broken peavies, a pair of snowshoes with the thongs all gnawed off, a cracked bit of mirror, a yellowed almanac dated 1899.

Jandron called the Professor's attention to this almanac, but the Professor thrust it aside.

"What do *I* want of a Canadian census-report?" he demanded, and fell to counting the bunks, over and over again. His big bulge of his forehead, that housed the massive brain of him, was oozing sweat. Marr cursed what he claimed was sunshine through the holes in the roof, though Jandron could see none; claimed the sunshine made his head ache.

"But it's not a bad place," he added. "We can make a blaze in that fireplace and be comfy. I don't like that window, though."

"What window?" asked Jandron. "Where?"

Marr laughed, and ignored him. Jandron turned to Vivian, who had sunk down on the "deacon-seat" and was staring at the stove.

"*Is* there a window here?" he demanded.

"Don't ask me," she whispered. "I— I don't know."

With a very thriving fear in his heart, Jandron peered at her a moment. He fell to muttering:

"I'm Wallace Jandron. Wallace Jandron, 37 Ware Street, Cambridge, Massachusetts. I'm quite sane. And I'm going to stay so. I'm going to save her! I know perfectly well what I'm doing. And I'm sane. Quite, quite sane!"

After a time of confused and purposeless wrangling, they got a fire going and made coffee. This, and cube bouillon with hardtack, helped considerably. The camp helped, too. A house, even a poor and broken one, is a wonderful barrier against a Thing from— Outside.

Presently darkness folded down. The men smoked, thankful that tobacco still held out. Vivian lay in a bunk that Jandron had piled with spruce boughs for her, and seemed to sleep. The Professor fretted like a child, over the blisters his paddle had made upon his hands. Marr laughed, now and then; though what he might be laughing at was not apparent. Suddenly he broke out:

"After all, what should *It* want of us?"

"Our brains, of course," the Professor answered, sharply.

"That lets Jandron out," the journalist mocked.

"But," added the Professor, "I can't imagine a Thing callously destroying human beings. And yet—"

He stopped short, with surging memories of his dead wife.

"What was it," Jandron asked, "that destroyed all those people in Valladolid, Spain, that time so many of 'em died in a few minutes after having been touched by an invisible Something that left a slight red mark on each? The newspapers were full of it."

"Piffle!" yawned Marr.

"I tell you," insisted Jandron, "there are forms of life as superior to us as we are to ants. We can't see 'em. No ant ever saw a man. And did any ant ever form the least conception of a man? These Things have left thousands of traces, all over the world. If I had my reference-books—"

"Tell that to the marines!"

"Charles Fort, the greatest authority in the world on unexplained phenomena," persisted Jandron, "gives innumerable cases of happenings that science can't explain, in his '*Book of the Damned*.' He claims this earth was once a No-Man's land where all kinds of Things explored and colonized and fought for possession. And he says that now everybody's warned off, except the Owners. I happen to remember a few sentences of his: 'In the past, inhabitants of a host of worlds have dropped here, hopped here, wafted here, sailed, flown, motored, walked here; have come singly, have come in enormous numbers; have visited for hunting, trading, mining. They have been unable to stay here, have made colonies here, have been lost here."

"Poor fish, to believe that!" mocked the journalist, while the Professor blinked and rubbed his bulging forehead.

"I *do* believe it!" insisted Jandron, "The world is covered with relics of dead civilizations, that have mysteriously vanished, leaving nothing but their temples and monuments."

"Rubbish!"

"How about Easter Island? How about all the gigantic works there and in a thousand other places— Peru, Yucatan and so on— which certainly no primitive race ever built?"

"That's thousands of years ago," said Marr, "and I'm sleepy. For heaven's sake, can it!"

"Oh, all right. But *how* explain things, then!"

"What the devil could one of those Things want of our brains?" suddenly put in the Professor. "After all, what?"

"Well, what do we want of lower forms of life? Sometimes food. Again, some product or other. Or just information. Maybe *It* is just experimenting with us, the way we poke an ant-hill. There's always this to remember, that the human brain-tissue is the most highly-organized form of matter in this world."

"Yes," admitted the Professor, "but what—?"

"*It* might want brain-tissue for food, for experimental purposes, for lubricant— how do *I* know?"

Jandron fancied he was still explaining things; but all at once he found himself waking up in one of the bunks. He felt terribly cold, stiff, sore. A sift of snow lay here and there on the camp floor, where it had fallen through holes in the roof.

"Vivian!" he croaked hoarsely. "Thorburn! Marr!"

Nobody answered. There was nobody to answer. Jandron crawled with immense pain out of his bunk, and blinked round with bleary eyes. All of a sudden he saw the Professor, and gulped.

The Professor was lying stiff and straight in another bunk, on his back. His waxen face made a mask of horror. The open, staring eyes, with pupils immensely dilated, sent Jandron shuddering back. A livid ring marked the forehead, that now sagged inward as if empty.

"*Vivian!*" croaked Jandron, staggering away from the body. He fumbled to the bunk where the girl had lain. The bunk was quite deserted.

On the stove, in which lay half-charred wood—; wood smothered out as if by some noxious gas— still stood the coffee-pot. The liquid in it was frozen solid. Of Vivian and the journalist, no trace remained.

Along one of the sagging beams that supported the roof, Jandron's horror-blasted gaze perceived a straight line of frosted prints, ring-shaped, bitten deep.

"Vivian! Vivian!"

No answer.

Shaking, sick, gray, half-blind with a horror not of this world, Jandron peered slowly around. The duffle-bag and supplies were gone. Nothing was left but that coffee-pot and the revolver at Jandron's hip.

Jandron turned, then. A-stare, his skull feeling empty as a burst drum, he crept lamely to the door and out— out into the snow.

Snow. It came slanting down. From a gray sky it steadily filtered. The trees showed no leaf. Birches, poplars, rock-maples all stood naked. Only the conifers drooped sickly-green. In a little shallow across the river snow lay white on thin ice.

Ice? Snow? Rapt with terror, Jandron stared. Why, then, he must have been unconscious three or four weeks? But how—?

Suddenly, all along the upper branches of trees that edged the clearing, puffs of snow flicked down. The geologist shuffled after two half-obliterated sets of footprints that wavered toward the landing.

His body was leaden. He wheezed, as he reached the river. The light, dim as it was, hurt his eyes. He blinked in a confusion that could just perceive one canoe was gone. He pressed a hand to his head, where an iron band seemed screwed up tight, tighter.

"Vivian! Marr! Halloooo!"

Not even an echo. Silence clamped the world; silence, and a cold that gnawed. Everything had gone a sinister gray.

After a certain time— though time now possessed neither reality nor duration— Jandron dragged himself back to the camp and stumbled in. Heedless of the staring corpse he crumpled down by the stove and tried to think, but his brain had been emptied of power. Everything blent to a gray blur. Snow kept slithering in through the roof.

"Well, why don't you come and get me, Thing?" suddenly snarled Jandron. "Here I am. Damn you, come and get me!"

Voices. Suddenly he heard voices. Yes, somebody was outside, there. Singularly aggrieved, he got up and limped to the door. He squinted out into the gray; saw two figures down by the landing. With numb indifference he recognized the girl and Marr.

"Why should they bother me again?" he nebulously wondered. Can't they go away and leave me alone?" He felt peevish irritation.

Then, a modicum of reason returning, he sensed that they were arguing. Vivian, beside a canoe freshly dragged from thin ice, was pointing; Marr was gesticulating. All at once Marr snarled, turned from her, plodded with bent back toward the camp.

"But listen!" she called, her rough-knit sweater all powdered with snow. "*That's* the way!" She gestured downstream.

"I'm not going either way!" Marr retorted. "I'm going to stay right here!" He came on, bareheaded. Snow grayed his stubble of beard; but on his head it melted as it fell, as if some fever there had raised the brain-stuff to improbable temperatures. "I'm going to stay right here, all summer." His heavy lids sagged. Puffy and evil, his lips showed a glint of teeth. "Let me alone!"

Vivian lagged after him, kicking up the ash-like snow. With indifference, Jandron watched them. Trivial human creatures!

Suddenly Marr saw him in the doorway and stopped short. He drew his gun; he aimed at Jandron.

"You get out!" he mouthed. "Why in— can't you stay dead?"

"Put that gun down, you idiot!" Jandron managed to retort. The girl stopped and seemed trying to understand. "We can get away yet, if we all stick together."

"Are you going to get out and leave me alone?" demanded the journalist, holding his gun steadily enough.

Jandron, wholly indifferent, watched the muzzle. Vague curiosity possessed him. Just what, he wondered, did it feel like to be shot?

Marr pulled trigger.

Snap!

The cartridge missed fire. Not even powder would burn.

Marr laughed, horribly, and shambled forward.

"Serves him right!" he mouthed. "He'd better not come back again!"

Jandron understood that Marr had seen him fall. But still he felt himself standing there, alive. He shuffled away from the door. No matter whether he was alive or dead, there was always Vivian to be saved.

The journalist came to the door, paused, looked down, grunted and passed into the camp. He shut the door. Jandron heard the rotten wooden bar of the latch drop. From within echoed a laugh, monstrous in its brutality.

Then quivering, the geologist felt a touch on his arm.

"Why did you desert us like that?" he heard Vivian's reproach. "Why?"

He turned, hardly able to see her at all,

"Listen," he said, thickly. "I'll admit anything. It's all right. But just forget it, for now. We've got to get out o' here. The Professor is dead, in there, and Marr's gone mad and barricaded himself in there. So there's no use staying. There's a chance for us yet. Come along!"

He took her by the arm and tried to draw her toward the river, but she held back. The hate in her face sickened him. He shook in the grip of a mighty chill.

"Go, with— you?" she demanded.

"Yes, by God!" he retorted, in a swift blaze of anger, "or I'll kill you where you stand. *It* shan't get you, anyhow!"

Swiftly piercing, a greater cold smote to his inner marrows. A long row of the cup-shaped prints had just appeared in the snow beside the camp. And from these marks wafted a faint, bluish vapor of unthinkable cold.

"What are you staring at?" the girl demanded.

"Those prints! In the snow, there— see?" He pointed a shaking finger.

"How can there be snow at this season?"

He could have wept for the pity of her, the love of her. On her red tarn, her tangle of rebel hair, her sweater, the snow came steadily drifting; yet there she stood before him and prated of summer. Jandron heaved himself out of a very slough of down-dragging lassitudes. He whipped himself into action.

"Summer, winter— no matter!" he flung at her. "You're coming along with me!" He seized her arm with the brutality of desperation that must hurt, to save. And murder, too, lay in his soul. He knew that he would strangle her with his naked hands, If need were, before he would ever leave her there, for *It* to work Its horrible will upon.

"You come with me," he mouthed, "or by the Almighty—!"

Marr's scream in the camp, whirled him toward the door. That scream rose higher, higher, even more and more piercing, just like the screams of the runaway Indian guides in what now appeared the infinitely long ago. It seemed to last hours; and always it rose, rose, as if being wrung out of a human body by some kind of agony not conceivable in this world. Higher, higher—

Then it stopped,

Jandron hurled himself against the plank door. The bar smashed; the door shivered inward.

With a cry, Jandron recoiled. He covered his eyes with a hand that quivered, claw-like.

"Go away, Vivian! Don't come here— don't look—"

He stumbled away, babbling.

Out of the door crept something like a man. A queer, broken, bent over thing; a thing crippled, shrunken and flabby, that whined.

This thing— yes, it was still Marr— crouched down at one side, quivering, whimpering. It moved its hands as a crushed ant moves its antenna, jerkily, without significance.

All at once Jandron no longer felt afraid. He walked quite steadily to Marr, who was breathing in little gasps. From the camp issued an odor unlike anything terrestrial. A thin, grayish grease covered the sill.

Jandron caught hold of the crumpling journalist's arm. Marr's eyes leered, filmed, unseeing. He gave the impression of a creature whose back has been broken, whose whole essence and energy have been wrenched asunder, yet in which life somehow clings, palpitant. A creature vivisected.

Away through the snow Jandron dragged him. Marr made no resistance; just let himself be led, whining a little, palsied, rickety, shattered. The girl, her face whitely cold as the snow that fell on it, came after.

Thus they reached the landing at the river.

"Come, now, let's get away!" Jandron made shift to articulate. Marr said nothing. But when Jandron tried to bundle him into a canoe, something in the journalist revived with swift, mad hatefulness. That something lashed him into a spasm of wiry, incredibly venomous resistance. Slavers of blood and foam streaked Marr's lips. He made horrid noises, like an animal. He howled dismally, and bit, clawed, writhed and grovelled! He tried to sink his teeth into Jandron's leg. He fought appallingly, as men must have fought in the inconceivably remote days even before the Stone Age. And Vivian helped him. Her fury was a tiger-cat's.

Between the pair of them, they almost did him in. They almost dragged Jandron down— and themselves, too— into the black river that ran swiftly sucking under the ice. Not till Jandron had quite flung off all vague notions and restraints of gallantry; not until he struck from the shoulder—to kill, if need were—did he best them.

He beat the pair of them unconscious, trussed them hand and foot with the painters of the canoes, rolled them into the larger canoe, and shoved off.

After that, the blankness of a measureless oblivion descended.

Only from what he was told, weeks after, in the Royal Victoria Hospital at Montreal, did Jandron ever learn how and when a field-squad of Dominion Foresters had found them drifting in Lake Moosawamkeag. And that knowledge filtered slowly into his brain during a period inchoate as Iceland fogs.

That Marr was dead and the girl alive—that much, at all events, was solid. He could hold to that; he could climb back, with that, to the real world again.

Jandron climbed back, came back. Time healed him, as it healed the girl. After a long, long while, they had speech together. Cautiously he sounded her wells of memory. He saw that she recalled nothing. So he told her white lies

about capsized canoes and the sad death— in realistically-described rapids— of all the party except herself and him.

Vivian believed. Fate, Jandron knew, was being very kind to both of them.

But Vivian could never understand in the least why her husband, not very long after marriage, asked her not to wear a wedding-ring or any ring whatever.

"Men are so queer!" covers a multitude of psychic agonies.

Life, for Jandron— life, softened by Vivian— knit itself up into some reasonable semblance of a normal pattern. But when, at lengthening intervals, memories even now awake— memories crawling amid the slime of cosmic mysteries that it is madness to approach— or when at certain times Jandron sees a ring of any sort, his heart chills with a cold that reeks of the horrors of Infinity.

And from shadows past the boundaries of our universe seem to beckon
Things that, God grant, can never till the end of time be known on earth.

———————

9: The Diamond Lens

Fitz-James O'Brien

1828-1862

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FROM a very early period of my life the entire bent of my inclinations had been toward microscopic investigations. When I was not more than ten years old, a distant relative of our family, hoping to astonish my inexperience, constructed a simple microscope for me by drilling in a disk of copper a small hole in which a drop of pure water was sustained by capillary attraction. This very primitive apparatus, magnifying some fifty diameters, presented, it is true, only indistinct and imperfect forms, but still sufficiently wonderful to work up my imagination to a preternatural state of excitement.

Seeing me so interested in this rude instrument, my cousin explained to me all that he knew about the principles of the microscope, related to me a few of the wonders which had been accomplished through its agency, and ended by promising to send me one regularly constructed, immediately on his return to the city. I counted the days, the hours, the minutes that intervened between that promise and his departure.

Meantime, I was not idle. Every transparent substance that bore the remotest resemblance to a lens I eagerly seized upon, and employed in vain attempts to realize that instrument the theory of whose construction I as yet only vaguely comprehended. All panes of glass containing those oblate spheroidal knots familiarly known as "bull's-eyes" were ruthlessly destroyed in the hope of obtaining lenses of marvelous power. I even went so far as to extract the crystalline humor from the eyes of fishes and animals, and endeavored to press it into the microscopic service. I plead guilty to having stolen the glasses from my Aunt Agatha's spectacles, with a dim idea of grinding them into lenses of wondrous magnifying properties—in which attempt it is scarcely necessary to say that I totally failed.

At last the promised instrument came. It was of that order known as Field's simple microscope, and had cost perhaps about fifteen dollars. As far as educational purposes went, a better apparatus could not have been selected. Accompanying it was a small treatise on the microscope—its history, uses, and discoveries. I comprehended then for the first time the "Arabian Nights' Entertainments." The dull veil of ordinary existence that hung across the world seemed suddenly to roll away, and to lay bare a land of enchantments. I felt toward my companions as the seer might feel toward the ordinary masses of men. I held conversations with nature in a tongue which they could not understand. I was in daily communication with living wonders such as they never imagined in their wildest visions, I penetrated beyond the external portal

of things, and roamed through the sanctuaries. Where they beheld only a drop of rain slowly rolling down the window-glass, I saw a universe of beings animated with all the passions common to physical life, and convulsing their minute sphere with struggles as fierce and protracted as those of men. In the common spots of mould, which my mother, good housekeeper that she was, fiercely scooped away from her jam-pots, there abode for me, under the name of mildew, enchanted gardens, filled with dells and avenues of the densest foliage and most astonishing verdure, while from the fantastic boughs of these microscopic forests hung strange fruits glittering with green and silver and gold.

It was no scientific thirst that at this time filled my mind. It was the pure enjoyment of a poet to whom a world of wonders has been disclosed. I talked of my solitary pleasures to none. Alone with my microscope, I dimmed my sight, day after day and night after night, poring over the marvels which it unfolded to me. I was like one who, having discovered the ancient Eden still existing in all its primitive glory, should resolve to enjoy it in solitude, and never betray to mortal the secret of its locality. The rod of my life was bent at this moment. I destined myself to be a microscopist.

Of course, like every novice, I fancied myself a discoverer. I was ignorant at the time of the thousands of acute intellects engaged in the same pursuit as myself, and with the advantage of instruments a thousand times more powerful than mine. The names of Leeuwenhoek, Williamson, Spencer, Ehrenberg, Schultz, Dujardin, Schact, and Schleiden were then entirely unknown to me, or, if known, I was ignorant of their patient and wonderful researches. In every fresh specimen of cryptogamia which I placed beneath my instrument I believed that I discovered wonders of which the world was as yet ignorant. I remember well the thrill of delight and admiration that shot through me the first time that I discovered the common wheel animalcule (*Rotifera vulgaris*) expanding and contracting its flexible spokes and seemingly rotating through the water. Alas! as I grew older, and obtained some works treating of my favorite study, I found that I was only on the threshold of a science to the investigation of which some of the greatest men of the age were devoting their lives and intellects.

As I grew up, my parents, who saw but little likelihood of anything practical resulting from the examination of bits of moss and drops of water through a brass tube and a piece of glass, were anxious that I should choose a profession.

It was their desire that I should enter the counting-house of my uncle, Ethan Blake, a prosperous merchant, who carried on business in New York. This suggestion I decisively combated. I had no taste for trade; I should only make a failure; in short, I refused to become a merchant.

But it was necessary for me to select some pursuit. My parents were staid New England people, who insisted on the necessity of labor, and therefore, although, thanks to the bequest of my poor Aunt Agatha, I should, on coming of

age, inherit a small fortune sufficient to place me above want, it was decided that, instead of waiting for this, I should act the nobler part, and employ the intervening years in rendering myself independent.

After much cogitation, I complied with the wishes of my family, and selected a profession. I determined to study medicine at the New York Academy. This disposition of my future suited me. A removal from my relatives would enable me to dispose of my time as I pleased without fear of detection. As long as I paid my Academy fees, I might shirk attending the lectures if I chose; and, as I never had the remotest intention of standing an examination, there was no danger of my being "plucked." Besides, a metropolis was the place for me. There I could obtain excellent instruments, the newest publications, intimacy with men of pursuits kindred with my own—in short, all things necessary to ensure a profitable devotion of my life to my beloved science. I had an abundance of money, few desires that were not bounded by my illuminating mirror on one side and my object-glass on the other; what, therefore, was to prevent my becoming an illustrious investigator of the veiled worlds? It was with the most buoyant hope that I left my New England home and established myself in New York.

ii

MY FIRST STEP, of course, was to find suitable apartments. These I obtained, after a couple of days' search, in Fourth Avenue; a very pretty second floor, unfurnished, containing sitting-room, bedroom, and a smaller apartment which I intended to fit up as a laboratory. I furnished my lodgings simply, but rather elegantly, and then devoted all my energies to the adornment of the temple of my worship. I visited Pike, the celebrated optician, and passed in review his splendid collection of microscopes—Field's Compound, Hingham's, Spencer's, Nachet's Binocular (that founded on the principles of the stereoscope), and at length fixed upon that form known as Spencer's Trunnion Microscope, as combining the greatest number of improvements with an almost perfect freedom from tremor. Along with this I purchased every possible accessory—draw-tubes, micrometers, a camera lucida, lever-stage, achromatic condensers, white cloud illuminators, prisms, parabolic condensers, polarizing apparatus, forceps, aquatic boxes, fishing-tubes, with a host of other articles, all of which would have been useful in the hands of an experienced microscopist, but, as I afterward discovered, were not of the slightest present value to me. It takes years of practice to know how to use a complicated microscope. The optician looked suspiciously at me as I made these valuable purchases. He evidently was uncertain whether to set me down as some scientific celebrity or a madman. I

think he was inclined to the latter belief. I suppose I was mad. Every great genius is mad upon the subject in which he is greatest. The unsuccessful madman is disgraced and called a lunatic.

Mad or not, I set myself to work with a zeal which few scientific students have ever equaled. I had everything to learn relative to the delicate study upon which I had embarked—a study involving the most earnest patience, the most rigid analytic powers, the steadiest hand, the most untiring eye, the most refined and subtle manipulation.

For a long time half my apparatus lay inactively on the shelves of my laboratory, which was now most amply furnished with every possible contrivance for facilitating my investigations. The fact was that I did not know how to use some of my scientific implements—never having been taught microscopies—and those whose use I understood theoretically were of little avail until by practice I could attain the necessary delicacy of handling. Still, such was the fury of my ambition, such the untiring perseverance of my experiments, that, difficult of credit as it may be, in the course of one year I became theoretically and practically an accomplished microscopist.

During this period of my labors, in which I submitted specimens of every substance that came under my observation to the action of my lenses, I became a discoverer—in a small way, it is true, for I was very young, but still a discoverer. It was I who destroyed Ehrenberg's theory that the Volvox globator was an animal, and proved that his "monads" with stomachs and eyes were merely phases of the formation of a vegetable cell, and were, when they reached their mature state, incapable of the act of conjugation, or any true generative act, without which no organism rising to any stage of life higher than vegetable can be said to be complete. It was I who resolved the singular problem of rotation in the cells and hairs of plants into ciliary attraction, in spite of the assertions of Wenham and others that my explanation was the result of an optical illusion.

But notwithstanding these discoveries, laboriously and painfully made as they were, I felt horribly dissatisfied. At every step I found myself stopped by the imperfections of my instruments. Like all active microscopists, I gave my imagination full play. Indeed, it is a common complaint against many such that they supply the defects of their instruments with the creations of their brains. I imagined depths beyond depths in nature which the limited power of my lenses prohibited me from exploring. I lay awake at night constructing imaginary microscopes of immeasurable power, with which I seemed to pierce through all the envelopes of matter down to its original atom. How I cursed those imperfect mediums which necessity through ignorance compelled me to use! How I longed to discover the secret of some perfect lens, whose magnifying power should be limited only by the resolvability of the object, and which at the same time

should be free from spherical and chromatic aberrations—in short, from all the obstacles over which the poor microscopist finds himself continually stumbling! I felt convinced that the simple microscope, composed of a single lens of such vast yet perfect power, was possible of construction. To attempt to bring the compound microscope up to such a pitch would have been commencing at the wrong end; this latter being simply a partially successful endeavor to remedy those very defects of the simplest instrument which, if conquered, would leave nothing to be desired.

It was in this mood of mind that I became a constructive microscopist. After another year passed in this new pursuit, experimenting on every imaginable substance—glass, gems, flints, crystals, artificial crystals formed of the alloy of various vitreous materials—in short, having constructed as many varieties of lenses as Argus had eyes—I found myself precisely where I started, with nothing gained save an extensive knowledge of glass-making. I was almost dead with despair. My parents were surprised at my apparent want of progress in my medical studies (I had not attended one lecture since my arrival in the city), and the expenses of my mad pursuit had been so great as to embarrass me very seriously.

I was in this frame of mind one day, experimenting in my laboratory on a small diamond—that stone, from its great refracting power, having always occupied my attention more than any other—when a young Frenchman who lived on the floor above me, and who was in the habit of occasionally visiting me, entered the room.

I think that Jules Simon was a Jew. He had many traits of the Hebrew character: a love of jewelry, of dress, and of good living. There was something mysterious about him. He always had something to sell, and yet went into excellent society. When I say sell, I should perhaps have said peddle; for his operations were generally confined to the disposal of single articles—a picture, for instance, or a rare carving in ivory, or a pair of duelling-pistols, or the dress of a Mexican *caballero*. When I was first furnishing my rooms, he paid me a visit, which ended in my purchasing an antique silver lamp, which he assured me was a Cellini—it was handsome enough even for that—and some other knick-knacks for my sitting-room. Why Simon should pursue this petty trade I never could imagine. He apparently had plenty of money, and had the entrée of the best houses in the city—taking care, however, I suppose, to drive no bargains within the enchanted circle of the Upper Ten. I came at length to the conclusion that this peddling was but a mask to cover some greater object, and even went so far as to believe my young acquaintance to be implicated in the slave-trade. That, however, was none of my affair.

On the present occasion, Simon entered my room in a state of considerable excitement.

"Ah! *mon ami*!" he cried, before I could even offer him the ordinary salutation, "it has occurred to me to be the witness of the most astonishing things in the world. I promenade myself to the house of Madame ——. How does the little animal— *le renard*— name himself in the Latin?"

"*Vulpes*," I answered.

"Ah! yes—Vulpes. I promenade myself to the house of Madame Vulpes."

"The spirit medium?"

"Yes, the great medium. Great heavens! what a woman! I write on a slip of paper many of questions concerning affairs of the most secret—affairs that conceal themselves in the abysses of my heart the most profound; and behold, by example, what occurs? This devil of a woman makes me replies the most truthful to all of them. She talks to me of things that I do not love to talk of to myself. What am I to think? I am fixed to the earth!"

"Am I to understand you, M. Simon, that this Mrs. Vulpes replied to questions secretly written by you, which questions related to events known only to yourself?"

"Ah! more than that, more than that," he answered, with an air of some alarm. "She related to me things—But," he added after a pause, and suddenly changing his manner, "why occupy ourselves with these follies? It was all the biology, without doubt. It goes without saying that it has not my credence. But why are we here, mon ami? It has occurred to me to discover the most beautiful thing as you can imagine—a vase with green lizards on it, composed by the great Bernard Palissy. It is in my apartment; let us mount. I go to show it to you."

I followed Simon mechanically; but my thoughts were far from Palissy and his enameled ware, although I, like him, was seeking in the dark a great discovery. This casual mention of the spiritualist, Madame Vulpes, set me on a new track. What if, through communication with more subtle organisms than my own, I could reach at a single bound the goal which perhaps a life, of agonizing mental toil would never enable me to attain?

While purchasing the Palissy vase from my friend Simon, I was mentally arranging a visit to Madame Vulpes.

iii

TWO EVENINGS after this, thanks to an arrangement by letter and the promise of an ample fee, I found Madame Vulpes awaiting me at her residence alone. She was a coarse-featured woman, with keen and rather cruel dark eyes, and an exceedingly sensual expression about her mouth and under jaw. She received me in perfect silence, in an apartment on the ground floor, very sparsely furnished. In the centre of the room, close to where Mrs. Vulpes sat, there was a common round mahogany table. If I had come for the purpose of

sweeping her chimney, the woman could not have looked more indifferent to my appearance. There was no attempt to inspire the visitor with awe. Everything bore a simple and practical aspect. This intercourse with the spiritual world was evidently as familiar an occupation with Mrs. Vulpes as eating her dinner or riding in an omnibus.

"You come for a communication, Mr. Linley?" said the medium, in a dry, businesslike tone of voice.

"By appointment—yes."

"What sort of communication do you want—a written one?"

"Yes, I wish for a written one."

"From any particular spirit?"

"Yes."

"Have you ever known this spirit on this earth?"

"Never. He died long before I was born. I wish merely to obtain from him some information which he ought to be able to give better than any other."

"Will you seat yourself at the table, Mr. Lin-ley," said the medium, "and place your hands upon it?"

I obeyed, Mrs. Vulpes being seated opposite to me, with her hands also on the table. We remained thus for about a minute and a half, when a violent succession of raps came on the table, on the back of my chair, on the floor immediately under my feet, and even on the window-panes. Mrs. Vulpes smiled composedly.

"They are very strong to-night," she remarked. "You are fortunate." She then continued, "Will the spirits communicate with this gentleman?"

Vigorous affirmative.

"Will the particular spirit he desires to speak with communicate?"

A very confused rapping followed this question.

"I know what they mean," said Mrs. Vulpes, addressing herself to me; "they wish you to write down the name of the particular spirit that you desire to converse with. Is that so?" she added, speaking to her invisible guests.

That it was so was evident from the numerous affirmatory responses. While this was going on, I tore a slip from my pocket-book and scribbled a name under the table.

"Will this spirit communicate in writing with this gentleman?" asked the medium once more.

After a moment's pause, her hand seemed to be seized with a violent tremor, shaking so forcibly that the table vibrated. She said that a spirit had seized her hand and would write. I handed her some sheets of paper that were on the table and a pencil. The latter she held loosely in her hand, which presently began to move over the paper with a singular and seemingly involuntary motion. After a few moments had elapsed, she handed me the

paper, on which I found written, in a large, uncultivated hand, the words, "He is not here, but has been sent for." A pause of a minute or so ensued, during which Mrs. Vulpes remained perfectly silent, but the raps continued at regular intervals. When the short period I mention had elapsed, the hand of the medium was again seized with its convulsive tremor, and she wrote, under this strange influence, a few words on the paper, which she handed to me. They were as follows:

"I am here. Question me.

"Leeuwenhoek."

I was astounded. The name was identical with that I had written beneath the table, and carefully kept concealed. Neither was it at all probable that an uncultivated woman like Mrs. Vulpes should know even the name of the great father of microscopies. It may have been biology; but this theory was soon doomed to be destroyed. I wrote on my slip—still concealing it from Mrs. Vulpes—a series of questions which, to avoid tediousness, I shall place with the responses, in the order in which they occurred:

I.—Can the microscope be brought to perfection?

Spirit—Yes.

I.—Am I destined to accomplish this great task?

Spirit.—You are.

I.—I wish to know how to proceed to attain this end. For the love which you bear to science, help me!

Spirit—A diamond of one hundred and forty carats, submitted to electro-magnetic currents for a long period, will experience a rearrangement of its atoms inter se and from that stone you will form the universal lens.

I.—Will great discoveries result from the use of such a lens?

Spirit—So great that all that has gone before is as nothing.

I.—But the refractive power of the diamond is so immense that the image will be formed within the lens. How is that difficulty to be surmounted?

Spirit—Pierce the lens through its axis, and the difficulty is obviated. The image will be formed in the pierced space, which will itself serve as a tube to look through. Now I am called. Good-night.

I can not at all describe the effect that these extraordinary communications had upon me. I felt completely bewildered. No biological theory could account for the discovery of the lens. The medium might, by means of biological rapport with my mind, have gone so far as to read my questions and reply to them coherently. But biology could not enable her to discover that magnetic currents would so alter the crystals of the diamond as to remedy its previous defects and admit of its being polished into a perfect lens. Some such theory may have passed through my head, it is true; but if so, I had forgotten it. In my excited condition of mind there was no course left but to become a

convert, and it was in a state of the most painful nervous exaltation that I left the medium's house that evening. She accompanied me to the door, hoping that I was satisfied. The raps followed us as we went through the hall, sounding on the balusters, the flooring, and even the lintels of the door. I hastily expressed my satisfaction, and escaped hurriedly into the cool night air. I walked home with but one thought possessing me—how to obtain a diamond of the immense size required. My entire means multiplied a hundred times over would have been inadequate to its purchase. Besides, such stones are rare, and become historical. I could find such only in the regalia of Eastern or European monarchs.

iv

THERE WAS a light in Simon's room as I entered my house. A vague impulse urged me to visit him. As I opened the door of his sitting-room unannounced, he was bending, with his back toward me, over a Carcel lamp, apparently engaged in minutely examining some object which he held in his hands. As I entered, he started suddenly, thrust his hand into his breast pocket, and turned to me with a face crimson with confusion.

"What!" I cried, "poring over the miniature of some fair lady? Well, don't blush so much; I won't ask to see it."

Simon laughed awkwardly enough, but made none of the negative protestations usual on such occasions. He asked me to take a seat.

"Simon," said I, "I have just come from Madame Vulpes."

This time Simon turned as white as a sheet, and seemed stupefied, as if a sudden electric shock had smitten him. He babbled some incoherent words, and went hastily to a small closet where he usually kept his liquors. Although astonished at his emotion, I was too preoccupied with my own idea to pay much attention to anything else.

"You say truly when you call Madame Vulpes a devil of a woman," I continued. "Simon, she told me wonderful things to-night, or rather was the means of telling me wonderful things. Ah! if I could only get a diamond that weighed one hundred and forty carats!"

Scarcely had the sigh with which I uttered this desire died upon my lips when Simon, with the aspect of a wild beast, glared at me savagely, and, rushing to the mantelpiece, where some foreign weapons hung on the wall, caught up a Malay creese, and brandished it furiously before him.

"No!" he cried in French, into which he always broke when excited. "No! you shall not have it! You are perfidious! You have consulted with that demon, and desire my treasure! But I will die first! Me, I am brave! You can not make me fear!"

All this, uttered in a loud voice, trembling with excitement, astounded me. I saw at a glance that I had accidentally trodden upon the edges of Simon's secret, whatever it was. It was necessary to reassure him.

"My dear Simon," I said, "I am entirely at a loss to know what you mean. I went to Madame Vulpes to consult with her on a scientific problem, to the solution of which I discovered that a diamond of the size I just mentioned was necessary. You were never alluded to during the evening, nor, so far as I was concerned, even thought of. What can be the meaning of this outburst? If you happen to have a set of valuable diamonds in your possession, you need fear nothing from me. The diamond which I require you could not possess; or, if you did possess it, you would not be living here."

Something in my tone must have completely reassured him, for his expression immediately changed to a sort of constrained merriment, combined however, with a certain suspicious attention to my movements. He laughed, and said that I must bear with him; that he was at certain moments subject to a species of vertigo, which betrayed itself in incoherent speeches, and that the attacks passed off as rapidly as they came.

He put his weapon aside while making this explanation, and endeavored, with some success, to assume a more cheerful air.

All this did not impose on me in the least. I was too much accustomed to analytical labors to be baffled by so flimsy a veil. I determined to probe the mystery to the bottom.

"Simon," I said gayly, "let us forget all this over a bottle of Burgundy. I have a case of Lausseure's Clos Vougeot downstairs, fragrant with the odors and ruddy with the sunlight of the Côte d'Or. Let us have up a couple of bottles. What say you?"

"With all my heart," answered Simon smilingly.

I produced the wine and we seated ourselves to drink. It was of a famous vintage, that of 1848, a year when war and wine throve together, and its pure but powerful juice seemed to impart renewed vitality to the system. By the time we had half finished the second bottle, Simon's head, which I knew was a weak one, had begun to yield, while I remained calm as ever, only that every draught seemed to send a flush of vigor through my limbs. Simon's utterance became more and more indistinct. He took to singing French chansons of a not very moral tendency. I rose suddenly from the table just at the conclusion of one of those incoherent verses, and, fixing my eyes on him with a quiet smile, said, "Simon, I have deceived you. I learned your secret this evening. You may as well be frank with me. Mrs. Vulpes—or rather, one of her spirits—told me all."

He started with horror. His intoxication seemed for the moment to fade away, and he made a movement toward the weapon that he had a short time before laid down, I stopped him with my hand.

"Monster!" he cried passionately, "I am ruined! What shall I do? You shall never have it! I swear by my mother!"

"I don't want it," I said; "rest secure, but be frank with me. Tell me all about it."

The drunkenness began to return. He protested with maudlin earnestness that I was entirely mistaken—that I was intoxicated; then asked me to swear eternal secrecy, and promised to disclose the mystery to me. I pledged myself, of course, to all. With an uneasy look in his eyes, and hands unsteady with drink and nervousness, he drew a small case from his breast and opened it. Heavens! How the mild lamplight was shivered into a thousand prismatic arrows as it fell upon a vast rose-diamond that glittered in the case! I was no judge of diamonds, but I saw at a glance that this was a gem of rare size and purity. I looked at Simon with wonder and—must I confess it?—with envy. How could he have obtained this treasure? In reply to my questions, I could just gather from his drunken statements (of which, I fancy, half the incoherence was affected) that he had been superintending a gang of slaves engaged in diamond-washing in Brazil; that he had seen one of them secrete a diamond, but, instead of informing his employers, had quietly watched the negro until he saw him bury his treasure; that he had dug it up and fled with it, but that as yet he was afraid to attempt to dispose of it publicly—so valuable a gem being almost certain to attract too much attention to its owner's antecedents—and he had not been able to discover any of those obscure channels by which such matters are conveyed away safely. He added that, in accordance with oriental practice, he had named his diamond with the fanciful title of "The Eye of Morning."

While Simon was relating this to me, I regarded the great diamond attentively. Never had I beheld anything so beautiful. All the glories of light ever imagined or described seemed to pulsate in its crystalline chambers. Its weight, as I learned from Simon, was exactly one hundred and forty carats. Here was an amazing coincidence. The hand of destiny seemed in it. On the very evening when the spirit of Leeuwenhoek communicates to me the great secret of the microscope, the priceless means which he directs me to employ start up within my easy reach! I determined, with the most perfect deliberation, to possess myself of Simon's diamond.

I sat opposite to him while he nodded over his glass, and calmly revolved the whole affair. I did not for an instant contemplate so foolish an act as a common theft, which would of course be discovered, or at least necessitate flight and concealment, all of which must interfere with my scientific plans. There was but one step to be taken—to kill Simon. After all, what was the life of a little peddling Jew in comparison with the interests of science? Human beings are taken every day from the condemned prisons to be experimented on by surgeons. This man, Simon, was by his own confession a criminal, a robber, and I

believed on my soul a murderer. He deserved death quite as much as any felon condemned by the laws: why should I not, like government, contrive that his punishment should contribute to the progress of human knowledge?

The means for accomplishing everything I desired lay within my reach. There stood upon the mantelpiece a bottle half full of French laudanum. Simon was so occupied with his diamond, which I had just restored to him, that it was an affair of no difficulty to drug his glass. In a quarter of an hour he was in a profound sleep.

I now opened his waistcoat, took the diamond from the inner pocket in which he had placed it, and removed him to the bed, on which I laid him so that his feet hung down over the edge. I had possessed myself of the Malay creese, which I held in my right hand, while with the other I discovered as accurately as I could by pulsation the exact locality of the heart. It was essential that all the aspects of his death should lead to the surmise of self-murder. I calculated the exact angle at which it was probable that the weapon, if leveled by Simon's own hand, would enter his breast; then with one powerful blow I thrust it up to the hilt in the very spot which I desired to penetrate. A convulsive thrill ran through Simon's limbs. I heard a smothered sound issue from his throat, precisely like the bursting of a large air-bubble sent up by a diver when it reaches the surface of the water; he turned half round on his side, and, as if to assist my plans more effectually, his right hand, moved by some mere spasmodic impulse, clasped the handle of the creese, which it remained holding with extraordinary muscular tenacity. Beyond this there was no apparent struggle. The laudanum, I presume, paralyzed the usual nervous action. He must have died instantly.

There was yet something to be done. To make it certain that all suspicion of the act should be diverted from any inhabitant of the house to Simon himself, it was necessary that the door should be found in the morning locked on the inside. How to do this, and afterward escape myself? Not by the window; that was a physical impossibility. Besides, I was determined that the windows also should be found bolted. The solution was simple enough. I descended softly to my own room for a peculiar instrument which I had used for holding small slippery substances, such as minute spheres of glass, etc. This instrument was nothing more than a long, slender hand-vise, with a very powerful grip and a considerable leverage, which last was accidentally owing to the shape of the handle. Nothing was simpler than, when the key was in the lock, to seize the end of its stem in this vise, through the keyhole, from the outside, and so lock the door. Previously, however, to doing this, I burned a number of papers on Simon's hearth. Suicides almost always burn papers before they destroy themselves. I also emptied some more laudanum into Simon's glass—having first removed from it all traces of wine—cleaned the other wine-glass, and brought the bottles away with me. If traces of two persons drinking had been

found in the room, the question naturally would have arisen, Who was the second? Besides, the wine-bottles might have been identified as belonging to me. The laudanum I poured out to account for its presence in his stomach, in case of a post-mortem examination. The theory naturally would be that he first intended to poison himself, but, after swallowing a little of the drug, was either disgusted with its taste, or changed his mind from other motives, and chose the dagger. These arrangements made, I walked out, leaving the gas burning, locked the door with my vise, and went to bed.

Simon's death was not discovered until nearly three in the afternoon. The servant, astonished at seeing the gas burning—the light streaming on the dark landing from under the door—peeped through the keyhole and saw Simon on the bed.

She gave the alarm. The door was burst open, and the neighborhood was in a fever of excitement.

Every one in the house was arrested, myself included. There was an inquest; but no clew to his death beyond that of suicide could be obtained. Curiously enough, he had made several speeches to his friends the preceding week that seemed to point to self-destruction. One gentleman swore that Simon had said in his presence that "he was tired of life." His landlord affirmed that Simon, when paying him his last month's rent, remarked that "he should not pay him rent much longer." All the other evidence corresponded—the door locked inside, the position of the corpse, the burned papers. As I anticipated, no one knew of the possession of the diamond by Simon, so that no motive was suggested for his murder. The jury, after a prolonged examination, brought in the usual verdict, and the neighborhood once more settled down to its accustomed quiet.

v

THE THREE MONTHS succeeding Simon's catastrophe I devoted night and day to my diamond lens. I had constructed a vast galvanic battery, composed of nearly two thousand pairs of plates: a higher power I dared not use, lest the diamond should be calcined. By means of this enormous engine I was enabled to send a powerful current of electricity continually through my great diamond, which it seemed to me gained in lustre every day. At the expiration of a month I commenced the grinding and polishing of the lens, a work of intense toil and exquisite delicacy. The great density of the stone, and the care required to be taken with the curvatures of the surfaces of the lens, rendered the labor the severest and most harassing that I had yet undergone.

At last the eventful moment came; the lens was completed. I stood trembling on the threshold of new worlds. I had the realization of Alexander's

famous wish before me. The lens lay on the table, ready to be placed upon its platform. My hand fairly shook as I enveloped a drop of water with a thin coating of oil of turpentine, preparatory to its examination, a process necessary in order to prevent the rapid evaporation of the water. I now placed the drop on a thin slip of glass under the lens, and throwing upon it, by the combined aid of a prism and a mirror, a powerful stream of light, I approached my eye to the minute hole drilled through the axis of the lens. For an instant I saw nothing save what seemed to be an illuminated chaos, a vast, luminous abyss. A pure white light, cloudless and serene, and seemingly limitless as space itself, was my first impression. Gently, and with the greatest care, I depressed the lens a few hairbreadths. The wondrous illumination still continued, but as the lens approached the object a scene of indescribable beauty was unfolded to my view.

I seemed to gaze upon a vast space, the limits of which extended far beyond my vision. An atmosphere of magical luminousness permeated the entire field of view. I was amazed to see no trace of animalculous life. Not a living thing, apparently, inhabited that dazzling expanse. I comprehended instantly that, by the wondrous power of my lens, I had penetrated beyond the grosser particles of aqueous matter, beyond the realms of infusoria and protozoa, down to the original gaseous globule, into whose luminous interior I was gazing as into an almost boundless dome filled with a supernatural radiance.

It was, however, no brilliant void into which I looked. On every side I beheld beautiful inorganic forms, of unknown texture, and colored with the most enchanting hues. These forms presented the appearance of what might be called, for want of a more specific definition, foliated clouds of the highest rarity—that is, they undulated and broke into vegetable formations, and were tinged with splendors compared with which the gilding of our autumn woodlands is as dross compared with gold. Far away into the illimitable distance stretched long avenues of these gaseous forests, dimly transparent, and painted with prismatic hues of unimaginable brilliancy. The pendent branches waved along the fluid glades until every vista seemed to break through half-lucent ranks of many-colored drooping silken pennons. What seemed to be either fruits or flowers, pied with a thousand hues, lustrous and ever-varying, bubbled from the crowns of this fairy foliage. No hills, no lakes, no rivers, no forms animate or inanimate, were to be seen, save those vast auroral copses that floated serenely in the luminous stillness, with leaves and fruits and flowers gleaming with unknown fires, unrealizable by mere imagination.

How strange, I thought, that this sphere should be thus condemned to solitude! I had hoped, at least, to discover some new form of animal life, perhaps of a lower class than any with which we are at present acquainted, but

still some living organism. I found my newly discovered world, if I may so speak, a beautiful chromatic desert.

While I was speculating on the singular arrangements of the internal economy of Nature, with which she so frequently splinters into atoms our most compact theories, I thought I beheld a form moving slowly through the glades of one of the prismatic forests. I looked more attentively, and found that I was not mistaken. Words can not depict the anxiety with which I awaited the nearer approach of this mysterious object. Was it merely some inanimate substance, held in suspense in the attenuated atmosphere of the globule, or was it an animal endowed with vitality and motion? It approached, flitting behind the gauzy, colored veils of cloud-foliage, for seconds dimly revealed, then vanishing. At last the violet pennons that trailed nearest to me vibrated; they were gently pushed aside, and the form floated out into the broad light.

It was a female human shape. When I say human, I mean it possessed the outlines of humanity; but there the analogy ends. Its adorable beauty lifted it illimitable heights beyond the loveliest daughter of Adam.

I can not, I dare not, attempt to inventory the charms of this divine revelation of perfect beauty. Those eyes of mystic violet, dewy and serene, evade my words. Her long, lustrous hair following her glorious head in a golden wake, like the track sown in heaven by a falling star, seems to quench my most burning phrases with its splendors. If all the bees of Hybla nestled upon my lips, they would still sing but hoarsely the wondrous harmonies of outline that inclosed her form.

She swept out from between the rainbow-curtains of the cloud-trees into the broad sea of light that lay beyond. Her motions were those of some graceful naiad, cleaving, by a mere effort of her will, the clear, unruffled waters that fill the chambers of the sea. She floated forth with the serene grace of a frail bubble ascending through the still atmosphere of a June day. The perfect roundness of her limbs formed suave and enchanting curves. It was like listening to the most spiritual symphony of Beethoven the divine, to watch the harmonious flow of lines. This, indeed was a pleasure cheaply purchased at any price. What cared I if I had waded to the portal of this wonder through another's blood. I would have given my own to enjoy one such moment of intoxication and delight.

Breathless with gazing on this lovely wonder, and forgetful for an instant of everything save her presence, I withdrew my eye from the microscope eagerly. Alas! as my gaze fell on the thin slide that lay beneath my instrument, the bright light from mirror and from prism sparkled on a colorless drop of water! There, in that tiny bead of dew, this beautiful being was forever imprisoned. The planet Neptune was not more distant from me than she. I hastened once more to apply my eye to the microscope.

Animula (let me now call her by that dear name which I subsequently bestowed on her) had changed her position. She had again approached the wondrous forest, and was gazing earnestly upward. Presently one of the trees—as I must call them—unfolded a long ciliary process, with which it seized one of the gleaming fruits that glittered on its summit, and, sweeping slowly down, held it within reach of Animula. The sylph took it in her delicate hand and began to eat. My attention was so entirely absorbed by her that I could not apply myself to the task of determining whether this singular plant was or was not instinct with volition.

I watched her, as she made her repast, with the most profound attention. The suppleness of her motions sent a thrill of delight through my frame; my heart beat madly as she turned her beautiful eyes in the direction of the spot in which I stood. What would I not have given to have had the power to precipitate myself into that luminous ocean and float with her through those grooves of purple and gold! While I was thus breathlessly following her every movement, she suddenly started, seemed to listen for a moment, and then cleaving the brilliant ether in which she was floating, like a flash of light, pierced through the opaline forest and disappeared.

Instantly a series of the most singular sensations attacked me. It seemed as if I had suddenly gone blind. The luminous sphere was still before me, but my daylight had vanished. What caused this sudden disappearance? Had she a lover or a husband? Yes, that was the solution! Some signal from a happy fellow-being had vibrated through the avenues of the forest, and she had obeyed the summons.

The agony of my sensations, as I arrived at this conclusion, startled me. I tried to reject the conviction that my reason forced upon me. I battled against the fatal conclusion—but in vain. It was so. I had no escape from it. I loved an animalcule.

It is true that, thanks to the marvelous power of my microscope, she appeared of human proportions. Instead of presenting the revolting aspect of the coarser creatures, that live and struggle and die, in the more easily resolvable portions of the water-drop, she was fair and delicate and of surpassing beauty. But of what account was all that? Every time that my eye was withdrawn from the instrument it fell on a miserable drop of water, within which, I must be content to know, dwelt all that could make my life lovely.

Could she but see me once! Could I for one moment pierce the mystical walls that so inexorably rose to separate us, and whisper all that filled my soul, I might consent to be satisfied for the rest of my life with the knowledge of her remote sympathy.

It would be something to have established even the faintest personal link to bind us together—to know that at times, when roaming through these

enchanted glades, she might think of the wonderful stranger who had broken the monotony of her life with his presence and left a gentle memory in her heart!

But it could not be. No invention of which human intellect was capable could break down the barriers that nature had erected. I might feast my soul upon her wondrous beauty, yet she must always remain ignorant of the adoring eyes that day and night gazed upon her, and, even when closed, beheld her in dreams. With a bitter cry of anguish I fled from the room, and flinging myself on my bed, sobbed myself to sleep like a child.

vi

I AROSE the next morning almost at daybreak, and rushed to my microscope, I trembled as I sought the luminous world in miniature that contained my all. Animula was there. I had left the gas-lamp, surrounded by its moderators, burning when I went to bed the night before. I found the sylph bathing, as it were, with an expression of pleasure animating her features, in the brilliant light which surrounded her. She tossed her lustrous golden hair over her shoulders with innocent coquetry. She lay at full length in the transparent medium, in which she supported herself with ease, and gamboled with the enchanting grace that the nymph Salmacis might have exhibited when she sought to conquer the modest Hermaphroditus. I tried an experiment to satisfy myself if her powers of reflection were developed. I lessened the lamplight considerably. By the dim light that remained, I could see an expression of pain flit across her face. She looked upward suddenly, and her brows contracted. I flooded the stage of the microscope again with a full stream of light, and her whole expression changed. She sprang forward like some some substance deprived of all weight. Her eyes sparkled and her lips moved. Ah! if science had only the means of conducting and reduplicating sounds, as it does rays of light, what carols of happiness would then have entranced my ears! what jubilant hymns to Adonais would have thrilled the illumined air!

I now comprehended how it was that the Count de Cabalis peopled his mystic world with sylphs—beautiful beings whose breath of life was lambent fire, and who sported forever in regions of purest ether and purest light. The Rosicrucian had anticipated the wonder that I had practically realized.

How long this worship of my strange divinity went on thus I scarcely know. I lost all note of time. All day from early dawn, and far into the night, I was to be found peering through that wonderful lens. I saw no one, went nowhere, and scarce allowed myself sufficient time for my meals. My whole life was absorbed in contemplation as rapt as that of any of the Romish saints. Every hour that I gazed upon the divine form strengthened my passion—a passion that was

always overshadowed by the maddening conviction that, although I could gaze on her at will, she never, never could behold me!

At length I grew so pale and emaciated, from want of rest and continual brooding over my insane love and its cruel conditions, that I determined to make some effort to wean myself from it. "Come," I said, "this is at best but a fantasy. Your imagination has bestowed on Animula charms which in reality she does not possess. Seclusion from female society has produced this morbid condition of mind. Compare her with the beautiful women of your own world, and this false enchantment will vanish."

I looked over the newspapers by chance. There I beheld the advertisement of a celebrated danseuse who appeared nightly at Niblo's. The Signorina Caradolce had the reputation of being the most beautiful as well as the most graceful woman in the world. I instantly dressed and went to the theatre.

The curtain drew up. The usual semicircle of fairies in white muslin were standing on the right toe around the enameled flower-bank of green canvas, on which the belated prince was sleeping. Suddenly a flute is heard. The fairies start. The trees open, the fairies all stand on the left toe, and the queen enters. It was the Signorina. She bounded forward amid thunders of applause, and, lighting on one foot, remained poised in the air. Heavens! was this the great enchantress that had drawn monarchs at her chariot-wheels? Those heavy, muscular limbs, those thick ankles, those cavernous eyes, that stereotyped smile, those crudely painted cheeks! Where were the vermeil blooms, the liquid, expressive eyes, the harmonious limbs of Animula?

The Signorina danced. What gross, discordant movements! The play of her limbs was all false and artificial. Her bounds were painful athletic efforts; her poses were angular and distressed the eye. I could bear it no longer; with an exclamation of disgust that drew every eye upon me, I rose from my seat in the very middle of the Signorina's pas-de-fascination and abruptly quitted the house.

I hastened home to feast my eyes once more on the lovely form of my sylph. I felt that henceforth to combat this passion would be impossible. I applied my eyes to the lens. Animula was there—but what could have happened? Some terrible change seemed to have taken place during my absence. Some secret grief seemed to cloud the lovely features of her I gazed upon. Her face had grown thin and haggard; her limbs trailed heavily; the wondrous lustre of her golden hair had faded. She was ill—ill, and I could not assist her! I believe at that moment I would have forfeited all claims to my human birthright if I could only have been dwarfed to the size of an animalcule, and permitted to console her from whom fate had forever divided me.

I racked my brain for the solution of this mystery. What was it that afflicted the sylph? She seemed to suffer intense pain. Her features contracted, and she

even writhed, as if with some internal agony. The wondrous forests appeared also to have lost half their beauty. Their hues were dim and in some places faded away altogether. I watched Animula for hours with a breaking heart, and she seemed absolutely to wither away under my very eye. Suddenly I remembered that I had not looked at the water-drop for several days. In fact, I hated to see it; for it reminded me of the natural barrier between Animula and myself. I hurriedly looked down on the stage of the microscope. The slide was still there—but, great heavens, the water drop had vanished! The awful truth burst upon me; it had evaporated, until it had become so minute as to be invisible to the naked eye; I had been gazing on its last atom, the one that contained Animula—and she was dying!

I rushed again to the front of the lens and looked through. Alas! the last agony had seized her. The rainbow-hued forests had all melted away, and Animula lay struggling feebly in what seemed to be a spot of dim light. Ah! the sight was horrible: the limbs once so round and lovely shriveling up into nothings; the eyes—those eyes that shone like heaven—being quenched into black dust; the lustrous golden hair now lank and discolored. The last throe came. I beheld that final struggle of the blackening form—and I fainted.

When I awoke out of a trance of many hours, I found myself lying amid the wreck of my instrument, myself as shattered in mind and body as it. I crawled feebly to my bed, from which I did not rise for many months.

They say now that I am mad; but they are mistaken. I am poor, for I have neither the heart nor the will to work; all my money is spent, and I live on charity. Young men's associations that love a joke invite me to lecture on optics before them, for which they pay me, and laugh at me while I lecture. "Linley, the mad microscopist," is the name I go by. I suppose that I talk incoherently while I lecture. Who could talk sense when his brain is haunted by such ghastly memories, while ever and anon among the shapes of death I behold the radiant form of my lost Animula!

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10: Shorty Gets the Gun

D. H. Souter

1862-1935

The Bulletin, 11 Dec 1915

FROM somewhere in the low range of hills on our right front a gun had been troubling a corner of our trench for days. Our flier couldn't spot it, and our battery hadn't knocked it out. At sun-up, mid-day and sundown it fired its single round, and so far had always got its man.

We joked about it, called it "Three-a-day"; but we didn't like it, and the Colonel was hopping mad and said it just had to be stopped.

"By the Piper o' Hell," swore Shorty, "I'll never rest in my grave till I get it."

That night Shorty and his mate, a cove he'd been drovin' with in Queensland, went out unbeknown to get the gun. None of us ever believed they had a hope.

At streak o' day the Queenslander showed up without Shorty. He was blood from head to foot. His tunic was torn to ribbons, and as he was zig-zagging along, about twenty paces on the far side of the parapet, Three-a-day said "Good mornin'."

We buried the bloke, what there was of him, just where he fell.

During the day the Big Pots come up and looked the place over. All the damage had been done on a front of less than a hundred yards. It fired a shell that burst in a cloud of stinking smoke which seemed to claw into the ground rather than go off in the air. We never got no bits of the projectile bigger than a peanut, but what we did get one of the coves who used to work at Lithgow said was a sort of bronze. And we always got scraps of silver. I've got a bit stowed in my pack now— half an inch wide and thicker 'n half a dollar, and we worked it out that the shell was about a three-incher, and bound with silver.

High-grade ammunition. What do you think?

Our Battery-Commander, he'd knocked about a bit, and he said the gun was an old-time hoaryental weapon. He'd seen some of them in the back country when he was building the Balkan railway, but he'd never seen none of 'em fired, and he wouldn't have fired one himself for a thousand quid.

"What it is or isn't don't interest me none," snapped the Colonel. "What I want to get at is where it is."

"Judging by the apparent angles of the lines of fire," said the Adjutant, who used to be in the Lands Department, and had been monkeying with a theodolite all the morning— "judging by the apparent angles of the lines of fire and the length of trench contained in the danger zone, I would assume that the gun is practically in a fixed position." Here he walked back ten yards and had another squint through his jigger, pointing to the hills as it were over there.

"I should say that the gun was—"

He never said it.

Three-a-day spoke first, and we were short of an adjutant and a theodolite just out of the box. It was a bit over the odds.

We were still funny about it, but we were funky— don't you forget it. Some of us had read "The Arabian Nights," and most of us had heard an' seen queer things in Egypt. There'd been corpses dead about four thousand years grinning at us out of painted boxes. We'd run races up the Pyramids for five-piastre bets, and seen niggers at the street corners in Cairo do the Aaron's-rod act time and again, just as you read it in the Bible. Yes, and we'd smacked the Sphinx on the flank as if she was a slow milker. But you can bet your boots a whole lot of it was kiddum. Anyhow, Three-a-day had got us guessing. And the Colonel too.

"Why," said he, "having got our range, should they fire only one round?"

It was a sensible question, but our Battery-Commander was waiting for him and remarked that if it was one of them hoary-ental weps. they'd probably have some hanky-panky connected with it.

The Colonel was nonplushed.

"Anyhow," he come at him again, "is there any truth m this report that they... they attack only three times a day?"

This got me narked and I snapped me wristlet watch open and held it under his nose. The hands pointed to 12.25, and the fatigue party was just flattening down the last spadefuls of earth on top of our late adjutant.

"Dammit," he said, "something's *got* to be done."

Of course it was up to him, which he knew as well as we did. But what could he do? Most of his field experience he'd picked up in Birthday reviews, and none of 'em's a bit like Gallipoli.

The Sergeant-Major of C platoon was an old Imperial man and had been through the Chitral. He give the captain the whisper, and both of them stepped over to the old man's dugout. Late in the afternoon they squinted at the hills through their field-glasses for the best part of an hour, and at sundown we buried the captain's orderly, a chap from Gundagai named Briggs.

The Turkies' trench was about a hundred and fifty yards from ours, and its left rested on the edge of a deep watercourse which we'd found by observation come from the hills where we reckoned they'd got the gun posted. At dark, the Sergeant-Major, me and a bloke named Arkins from Surry Hills slid down a goat-track leading to the creek. We were equipped proper. We each had two dry rations, fifty rounds, a plug of dynamite. a length of fuse and a small heliographing mirror, me being in the signallers and Arkins and the S.-M. knowing something of the game; the idea being to run the creek up into the hills, make for separate observation points on the ridge, try and spot the gun, if it took us all day, and tip off our birdman, who was to be handy, to either drop a bomb or direct the fire of the battery. If we were lucky enough to get close up to

the thing we were to blow it to Hell; but if there was nothing doing we were to pinch back to the lines after dark.

When we got to the creek we bustled along, as there was a hit of a moon in a couple of hours, and we wanted to be well past the Turkies' trenches before it rose. It was heavy going. Boulders and stretches of sand and every now and then the waterfall act over a shelf of greasy rock. By the time the moon was due we thought it time to strike uphill, but the bank was as steep as the side of a house. It w as as black as the Earl of 'Ell's waistcoat down where we were, though up top we could, see the stars and toward the east distinguish the trees agin the skv. It was the moon coming up. The S.-M. was in the lead and Arkins behind me, but for all that I don't mind telling you it took me all my time to crack hardy. I had the feeling that there was more than just us three on the job, but nothing certain. I could have swore there was somebody marching parallel with us, but a bit higher up the bank. Once I thought I spotted him, or his shadow, duck between two trees. I stopped dead and covered the place where I thought he was, and Arkins bumped into me and nearly knocked me tip-over-Charley. There was no use getting on to Arkins; he used to be a dealer and the only bush he knew was Moore Park. But I was right. Next minute I seen who it was— Shorty! Walking alongside the Sergeant-Major and showing him the track.

I didn't try to show him to Arkins, cause he's as blind as a bat. God knows how he ever passed his eyesight!

I could see him right enough. Being a man of sense I argued that Shorty had found the gun and sent his mate the Queenslander back for help, them not being equipped proper, and the poor blighter got blown out before he could make his chat. Shorty had had a rough time, too. The top part of his tunic was all over blood, and he was gripping his pants like his belt had give way.

All of a sudden we broke into a little clearing and flopped in the thin scrub on the edge. In front and maybe a chain away was an outcrop of rock, and— at about twice the height of a man up it— a cleft, and out of it poking the nose of a long, slim gun all carved and modelled like the cast-iron post of a terrace-house verandah. Shorty and the Sergeant wriggled off to the right, and in about half an hour, though it might have been lpss, back comes the S.-M., grinning all over his dial, and collected, the dynamite. He knew all about explosives, having been a miner at Hill End when he enlisted.

"Ain't there no Turkies?" I asked him.

"We'll have to chance that," he whispered. "You fill your magazines and be ready to hop it when I give the office." And he ducked off.

In another while he was back, and we were going L-for-leather down the hill, Shorty and Arkins in front and the Sergeant-Major two paces in the rear. Presently, when I was cracking my ears to hear the gun go up in the air, Arkins

comes a devil of a cropper, and when we picks him up, hanged if he hadn't tripped over poor old Shorty!

Yes— dead as a door-nail and as stiff as a poker: his throat cut from ear to there, his belly ripped open and the ants crawling all over him.

Just behind us a red flame shot a mile in the air with a roar like thunder.

It was the gun. Shorty had got it.

So far as I know, he is resting quiet where we planted him that night on the hillside in Gallipoli.

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11: The Expulsion

Randolph Bedford

1868-1941

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A Christmas "strange" story

ABOUT 6,000 years ago I was walking one day near the Euphrates. It was as near the beginning of the world as matters, seeing that man had had a coherent memory of events for only 20 years, and nothing begins until it is recorded. Abram was still far off waiting to be born. Noah had yet to arrive. Cain had still to kill Abel for talking too much.

At that point the Euphrates is a fairly good stream. The soil is sandy loam; but there is little rainfall, and the hungry plain was like a beggar, with the wealthy Euphrates passing by him without word or dole. Easterly, but still on that great plateau which fills the distance between the Mediterranean and the Indus, were places yet unfounded but yet to be famous —Bagdad, Persepolis, Ispahan and Shiraz. Westerly— Babylon had still to wait 2000 years to get itself builded.

The river ran away to uselessness; and the sea and the soil, that would grow anything if but water were given it, desiccated to the typhoon from the north-east and the simoon that pulverised the desert of Arabia and covered fecund soil with sterile sand. It was therefore the more cheering in the late afternoon to suddenly raise a green and gracious garden in that mordant sand; for here a real man had harnessed a little of the river volume to his needs, and the open sluices had made the desert open in plenty.

I could see, broken by a glossy perfumed grove of magnolias and a rampart of rhododendron, the date-palm and the olive, and grape-vines looping themselves from trees of fig and tamarind. There were the three forms of coffee— bud, bloom and berry— on the same bush. Poppies broke in scarlet among the wheat. The big red-stalked leaf or the rhubarb showed by a riffled sluice. The damask rose and the aster and the clubbed bosses of hydrangea rose behind it. Beyond, a pink stain and a purple blur, which were the bud of apricot and peach, and a half-mile of iris at their feet.

I saw the hump of a dromedary moving through the trees, and then the head of the beast lifted flat to ease the pain at his nose-peg, and below the flat, held head I saw a turban and the forehead of the Man. A tree hid him for a moment, and then he came fully into view, leading the dromedary with all the plough trappings still around its shoulders and over its withers and before its hump.

He was a big, fair-bearded, yellow-haired man. He had a fine brow and very direct and honest eyes. He was straight-nosed, and ruddy of face, broad-shouldered and big of leg and arm— the ideal strong man, tapering from shoulder to hip, a wedge of muscle. He wore a sleeveless tunic of some vegetable material, which a residence in the Pacific 6,000 years later would have taught me was the fibre of the cocoa nut palm. His legs below the knee were bare to the leathern greaves that covered his shins and tended in sandals. He had an air of sadness and disillusionment which yet could not contradict the evidence of energy which surrounded him like a rarer and brilliant atmosphere. He stopped and bowed courteously, and we understood each other; for people of rudimentary vocabularies had not yet made differentiations of speech for the world.

"Good day," said I. "My name is George."

"And mine Adam— the first man."

"The first man! But I have met thousands of men, and almost all were older than you!"

"Not the first man born; but the first man to think clearly, to remember definitely— the first man to find out."

"To find out? What things?"

"Come with me and you shall see."

He began to lead his camel along a track to the west. Then he stopped suspiciously, and motioned me to precedence.

"Go first, please."

At the next turn I saw the house— a rambling structure on an elevation sentried by cypresses and partly hidden in a riot of great Persian roses and a tangle of jasmine. A woman ran into the house as we approached. I had only time to see that she was clothed from ankle to elbow, that she was fair, and that ropes of yellow hair hung to her waistline —when, not as if in fear of the stranger, but for respect of the master, she ran from sight.

Adam looked at me to anticipate inquiry, sighed, and said: "Madam Eve."

As he stripped the dromedary of his harness in the meadow I heard her calling: "Cain! Abel!— Come!"

Adam sighed again, and led the way to a grove with a runnel from a high limestone rock, and there we washed, and went thence to supper as the west lost its fire and paled to amethyst before darkening to the blue and velvet-soft night of the region.

Madam Eve waited on us. I had never until then seen a woman so dressed— not for comfort or warmth as more primitive people, but as if to cover shame. There were roasted birds, fish, wine and fruit, and her work was to serve the table and be silent. Abel, a bright-eyed, yellow-haired boy, sat at the left of his father, and only to him did Adam seem to soften, giving him meat from his plate

and sops of wine. He rarely spoke to Cain, the dark, meagre youth at the side of the table— lank-haired and alien; and when Adam looked at him it was with the eyes of a doubting bulldog summing up a stranger. The full-dressed yellow-haired woman moved about the table with the soft footfalls of a cat. There was something furtive even in her removal of dishes, something feline in her final exit at the curt nod of Adam.

He led the way to the garden. Abel brought the wine to a rough bench in a half-circle of magnolias, and Adam and I sat alone in the starlit, perfumed night. Out of silence and wine comes sympathy. I touched his hand accidentally, and he gripped mine.

"You are miserable, Adam?"

"God knows."

"Why don't you leave her?"

"I am wretched with her. I would be more wretched alone. I love her and hate her. I know her, yet I love her. I cannot bear speech or touch of her, and I cannot bear not to see her. Listen! There is as yet no man on earth but you who understands."

And in that soft Persian night —in the garden by Euphrates, 2000 years before Babylon's chimneys were hot— l heard the story of Adam, called the First Man because he was the first man who could express himself.

THE GROVES OF PARADISE were on an island of the Indian Ocean— but such an island! Eden made itself there with the perfection of the temperate zones and the tropics all in one. It was a great garden with four little rivers through it; gold in the central boss of mountain, almost always hidden in co»l

cloud; and pearls in the deep sea.

Adam awoke to himself one day in such a setting. He knew that the procession of its beauty had marched before him from the beginning of his memory ; but, whereas until this day he had existed by instinct, he now began conscious life. Instinctively he had selected the purple iris and the white rose from the rattle of plants, and made a garden of them. Magnolia and marvel of Peru filled the scented hours. Bloom of peach and apricot, apple and pear and quince splashed the light blue air. He had planted them for beauty and improved them into use.

He lay under the palm trees, whose fronds threshed susurrantly, and saw the gleaning sickle of the beach dip into seven fathoms; a green turtle sinking in the green water; a great, glossy, green-leaved tree leaning to the sea almost at right angles to its roots, its rimose trunk hidden by orchids. His eye missed nothing— the raffle of yam growth in the teeming soil; the screaming flashes of crimson and emerald, which were painted lories; the gorgeous bird of Paradise

dancing in his tree to captivate the hen; and every papaya tree with its colony of shrieking, starlings, glossy and vulgar as black

satin: —and its gourd-shaped, rotten-ripe fruit, and a starling eating it to a shell from inside as rats eat an uncut cheese.

With the eyes of his memory he could see the pigs and snakes and wild beasts he had mastheaded, on the central boss of the island, by the strength of a ring fence wrought with labor that was sweet when effort crowned it— for even Paradise in the making includes all the venomous errors of Nature and all her friends. He turned on an elbow and saw the little porcelain-shelled spa spiders take in their legs and roll to safety in the sea, and the baby pearlshell. As big as thumbnails, sink to the protection of their self-spun cable.

The frangipanni made the air heavy with perfume. Adam looked at a frigate bird wheeling slowly above the jewel of his island and saw that everything was good. His beardless face was golden in the light, his yellow hair a golden flame; his quick muscles moved under a hairless skin of silk; his prone figure was all beauty, grace and cleanliness.

"The chief things of life are water, bread and sunlight." said Adam, who had been alone from infancy, and knew not that solitude is a weary pleasure taken alone. "Water, bread and sunlight." he said and slept.

Around the western horn of the sickled bay floated a raft— chance-made of a dead and drifting tree, and, the necessity of the gil l who straddled it, momently drawing up her legs from the water in swift and fleeting horror of a shark. The raft drifted with the current across the chord of the arc as if it would follow to the other horn of the crescent and turn again to the sea.

The girl felt the danger, and when the tree was abreast of the sleeping Adam, she stood upon it and spurned it seawards, and with that initial force swam quietly towards the beach. Standing breast deep, she watched the tree with swifter motion enter the current, turn from the point and so to sea again; and shuddered. Then she waded ashore; went almost double, so that her yellow mane touched the ground; and wrung the water from her hair. Then she stood up with the salt shining on her face, a fairly tall, dazzlingly fair girl— a honey blonde, blue-eyed, red-lipped, golden-haired, with such another halo of youth about her head as Adam wore.

She moved away to the shade on her right hand, startled a colony of starlings, tasted a partly-eaten papaya and found it good, saw a runnel from the spring trickling to the beach, and went on all fours and drank from it, and then admired herself in a still pool. A rustling in the leaves, and fear dominated her. She waited wide-eyed; a sigh; and silence and curiosity led her to the left. And there lay a youth as beautiful as herself; and except for the boarskin sandals and for the leathern greaves from ankle to knee, and a band of palm cloth, as naked.

She had never seen before supreme beauty. She worshipped it with breath half suppressed, and Adam awoke as the sun went to its setting.

SHE COULD tell only by signs that she came from the sea, and Adam immediately believed that beauty is ocean born. She could tell him little more even when he had laboriously taught her a language. She was, except for her beautiful body, trivial, indolent. Life was vocal to her only in sensation.

"Why do you call me Eve?"

"Because you came to me in the evening."

"But why do you call sunset 'evening' instead of something else?"

"Because. I know that it is the only word."

Then she laughed and threw a mango at him.

He garlanded her with flowers, and so gave tongue to her vanity. He made a skirt of palm cloth, and she threw it away when she found it interfered with the effect of the garland. He made cane bracelets for her, and she forced them to the upper arm and impeded her circulation so that she might wear spikes of frangipanni in the bracelets. Once in a dead pearl oyster she found a pearl and screamed in her delight.

When Adam told her there were many such in the bay she would not let him rest until he had dived for them in 10-fathom water, bringing up a shell at every dive, but only the pearl in ten shells. So he dived often, resting for a moment with nostrils blown thin in search of air, and diving again with a great stone to find gems for his beloved cruelty.

The cave did not suit her because the wild beasts he had mastheaded in the central island might enter, and the blindly doting youth shouldered another labor of Hercules and builded for her the first house— the building being no labor compared with the thinking of it— until invention led him to imitate the root chambers of a colossal banyan, and tree trunks suggested mounting the house on stilts.

She paid him a thousand-fold with the careless admiration of a moment.

"How do you know so much, Adam, de-ar?" she asked with that concluding rising inflection that sounded like the coo of a pigeon.

"I have eaten of the tree of Knowledge," he said, laughing.

"Where does it grow?"

"It grows out of the tree of Life— it is experience which can only come of living."

While he worked she decked herself with new garlands, as the old withered quickly. It was enough for him to look at her occasionally and see her added beauty in that setting of Paradise without one warring note of hue or form; and then back to work with all his wages paid.

So they had the new house, which was a toy for a month and might have been her salvation for ever had Adam, the poet-lover, made a helpmate, a partner and subordinate laborer of her. But he had placed her on a pedestal, and she, having some knowledge of the goddess he worshipped, subconsciously despised his judgment sufficiently to make her play any tune she pleased on his doting madness. For, like most of her sex, she was a child mentally— and these, given a little, take all.

It was when the toy house had become common that she found the half of cocoanut shell with a heavy brilliant black sand in it, and a glistening yellow metallic and coarser sand, and certain rough white and blue stones that were almost brilliant in sunlight.

"What are they?" she asked.

"I put that black sand in the fire, and it gives a white metal, but when I melt that yellow sand it doesn't change color. The stones are pretty, but too hard to rub even."

"I like them, de-ar."

So another labor of Hercules; a perilous journey into the 'wild beasts' cage in the centre boss of the island, walled from the fertile shell-shaped plain about it by a great rift in the earth for nigh seven-eighths of the circle— the other eighth being closed by the stockade made by his hands.

He did not wish to go, but he had made himself a slave, and he departed at sunrise on his effort for nothing worth, closing the pierced stockade behind him and beginning a day of not finding, but being pursued. When that night he told her of his dangers, she said "De-ar," and told him that he must try again to-morrow.

He washed a little of the black and yellow sand and the small hard stones from a creek, but was pursued, and came back to the shore in the dusk, weary and disheartened— to be again fed with new courage for the morning. An odor of roasting, such as he had never known before, struck his perfect sense of smell, and she brought him a savory dish of flesh.

"What is it?" he asked.

"O-o-o-h— that little animal we saw at the stockade one day."

"A pig— but who taught you to put it to fire?"

"O-o-o-h! *No*body—I just thought!"

He had eaten and enjoyed, but old habit came back and found a conscience.

"It's wrong to take life, except to keep your own. Fruit and cocoa nuts and oysters and turtle eggs are all right, but—"

"But they're all alive, silly boy!"

"Well— yes! Beloved, you're always right."

"And you know those birds that dance?"

"The birds of the Island— the birds of Paradise?"

"Yes. Get one for me. I want to wear its wings in my hair."

"Take the life of beauty? No."

"Oh, you must. How beautiful I'd look then."

"But who gave jou such frightful thoughts?"

"O-o-oh. I just thought, that's all."

"I can't do it.

"De-ar!"

And next day, with a sling-stone, Adam killed a gorgeous raggiana as he danced in splendor for his hen. She made him save the skin, and not knowing why he did he dried it with wood ashes, and she donned a wing either side of her head and hurried him off to find the black and yellow sands.

Returning in the dusk to the crescent bay weary but glad because successful, he stopped at where the cliff ended and the flat sickle of the shore began— stopped with the first real fear he had ever known, and waited in a silence unbroken but by the sound of his own thudding pulses. A face dark and handsome in the way of a hawk— black hair escaping from tho scarlet cloth wound about it— looked at him from the jungle on the sea face. But for a moment Adam closed his eyes as if sickened; then he ran forward and found— nothing. The darkness swooped on the island as a frigate bird upon a fish, and Adam went back wondering.

He mentioned his illusion to Eve that night. She laughed nervously, then shivered and drew closer to him.

Two days later he found an unknown furrow in the beach, as if someone had drawn a heavy tree from dry sand to waterline. He mentioned that, and Eve laughed at him, not nervously but confidently. And next day he found a footprint on the sand— large, and flat from heel to toe— not Eve's high-arched foot, nor yet his own. He would not tell her because she might be afraid. He nursed his anxiety and fear all night, and when he saw the beach swept clean next day he forgot the tides, and was glad to believe the experience an hallucination. He went to his new work of washing alluvium with a good mind; but anxiety tugged his heartstrings homeward, and he approached the hut an hour before sunset.

Voices! Voices where none should be but the chattering of Eve herself— eking out want of thought with speech. He wondered only. No suspicion of the truth, no doubting of her entered his clean mind— sure of itself, and therefore accepting all trustingly.

There is no slower accuser than honesty; no more stupid discoverer of crime than the true. The sense of hearing would prove nothing to him. Even when he rounded the house and saw that man whose dark, hawk-like, handsome face had been an hallucination, standing in the Sacred Home with the Goddess of that Sacred Home held willingly in his arms, the sense of sight did not convince

Adam. It was only at Eve's cry of terror and the flight seawards of the dark man that the passion of revenge was born in a moment; and he pursued.

The dark man saw that he was cut off from the place where Eve had made landfall, and where his boat was beached. He ran northward away from the boat, as a bird from her nest, as if to conceal it. Adam, with a new-born lust to kill setting his blood aflame, saw with joy that he could run faster than the enemy. The man turned, sobbing his exhaustion at where the beach ended and the cliffs began, and Adam, scarcely flushed by the pursuit, fell upon him and joyfully strangled the dark man with his hands. He looked at his kill, and laughed like to a devil laughing at his own pain: but the laugh ended in a sob as he saw that the man had a bird of Paradise plume fastened in the scarlet turban about his head. It was no sudden betrayal and yielding then, but the deliberate deception of a mature woman going cold-bloodedly to deception. He tore the plume and turban from the dark hair, and threw it on the sand; lifted the body, and striding out to the limit of the rocky cape, threw it into the deep water.

Phosphorescent shapes tore the blue as the body disappeared, and Adam laughed again. She had preferred the mature and crafty man to the honesty of youth, and youth had killed craft with strength.

He secured the turban and the plume, and walked back along the beach where the stranger's dugout lifted to the making tide. It was victualled for a voyage. He smelled again the roasted flesh that Eve said she had discovered. He made the boat fast by a forest vine to-the tree of orchids, and smiled bitterly at his own invention. And then he returned to the hut and found her there upon the earth— the withered garlands about her neck, the bird of Paradise plume in her hair; and she weeping the remorse which is sorrow for detection.

"Stand up!"

She struggled to him and clasped his knees.

"Forgive!"

"What is that?"

"Don't kill me!"

"Is that what 'forgive' means? You brought the word into the world with the necessity for it."

He tore the plumes from her hair, the garlands from her shoulders, the flowered bracelets from her arms, and the rough chain of beaten gold and uncut sapphires from her neck. Then he threw her from the bed-place a roll of palm cloth which was their covering, and said:

"Wrap it round you! Cover yourself!"

"Why? Oh, why?"

"I killed him. You shall tempt no more— or as little as your owner permits. These are the plumes the other thief wore."

She shuddered at the plumes and turban, and said again: "Don't kill me!"

"I'll think. Stay here! Don't move from the hut to-night!"

He left her and walked into the half-darkness, and in a grove within earshot of the sea he sat him down to think, and to be accuser, defender and justice and punishment in one.

A nightingale sang out of the verdurous gloom, but beauty had gone from sound. In his veins there seemed to beat the heavy pulses of the sea. The dark plume shape of a cypress rose definitely on one side of the wood, and seemed to tell him to bear it and forgive, while yet it looked like a sword ready for his hand. Turtle landed at the beach, and a new cruelty came to the waiting man. He turned two on their backs, laughed at their struggles, and returned to the grove to his own.

"The chief things of life are water, bread and sunlight. So I thought, and now I know that the chief things of life are water and bread, clothing, and a house to cover shame. Shame which was not in my world until two days ago. Which shall it be? Justice and a dull unhappiness; or forgiveness and long agony? Which!"

Star after star looked palely in his face and faltered down the sky, and then came the sun, reprieving the world for another day.

The spring pansy, the daffodil and rose grew to the palm-tree boles, too perfect for a dirtied world: the clover and the early bee had lost their charm. His poisoned thoughts leached the beauty from the jasmine and the wood.

He arose decided, went to the boat still held by its restraining vine, and saw that it was afloat upon the morning tide. Then to the hut, where a tear-stained and dishevelled woman, drab in the palm cloth as in widow's weeds, waited for the verdict.

"Collect all the food there is!" he said roughly.

He waited while she silently obeyed, loading her shoulders with a great weight of cocoanuts and fruit. Then he motioned her to the boat. She obeyed, staggering down the slope, looking at him appealingly to know where all his chivalry had gone. But he made no sign of her presence, he took long lines of sinnet and put them aboard the dugout. Then he lifted the turtles in; and as he laughed she wondered when the old, gentle, kindly Adam had been replaced by this quietly fierce man who rejoiced at the pain of innocent creatures.

He motioned her to the boat, and then she understood and knelt on the sand in supplication.

"Not to leave my island— our beautiful island, Adam?"

"Yes; it is too clean for us."

"To leave Paradise?"

"Yes; for pain. You brought shame to the place I loved, and exile is our punishment."

She looked at him and saw that nothing could move him. She stepped into the dug-out and crouched in the after part, asking only one question :

"Where do we go?"

"Anywhere— to try and sow the happy past again and fail: but glad only that I have found the truth."

"What is that?"

"That all things human are lies."

"I won't go— I won't go!"

"Sit down! We are afloat— I was your worshipper, and now you are my slave until death finds you."

She collapsed whimpering. Adam had found the way to use the grass sail that depended from a mast of bamboo, he set it and the island went astern. Clouds came up behind them suddenly and blackened the sky, but from the sun poured a shaft of light which played upon the island with the changing of the clouds. It was the flaming sword that warned them that none once leaving it re-enter Paradise.

I saw her next day, a drab woman with splendid hair —cold misery in her eyes, and a bitter smile upon her lips. Also I saw why Adam loved Abel and doubted Cain. In that dark, hawk-like face the dark man of the island lived again. I saw Eve, too. discover that look of doubt, and her own eyes flashed menace. The injured never forgive.

"WAKE UP," said the captain of the sweating little Red Sea steamer. "We'll be in Mocha in half an hour."

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12: The Bee-Man of Orn

Frank R. Stockton

1834-1902

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IN THE ANCIENT COUNTRY of Orn there lived an old man who was called the Bee-man, because his whole time was spent in the company of bees. He lived in a small hut, which was nothing more than an immense bee-hive, for these little creatures had built their honeycombs in every corner of the one room it contained, on the shelves, under the little table, all about the rough bench on which the old man sat, and even about the head-board and along the sides of his low bed.

All day the air of the room was thick with buzzing insects, but this did not interfere in any way with the old Bee-man, who walked in among them, ate his meals, and went to sleep, without the slightest fear of being stung.

He had lived with the bees so long, they had become so accustomed to him, and his skin was so tough and hard, that the bees no more thought of stinging him than they would of stinging a tree or a stone. A swarm of bees had made their hive in a pocket of his old leathern doublet; and when he put on this coat to take one of his long walks in the forest in search of wild bees' nests, he was very glad to have this hive with him, for, if he did not find any wild honey, he would put his hand in his pocket and take out a piece of a comb for a luncheon. The bees in his pocket worked very industriously, and he was always certain of having something to eat with him wherever he went. He lived principally upon honey; and when he needed bread or meat, he carried some fine combs to a village not far away and bartered them for other food. He was ugly, untidy, shrivelled, and brown. He was poor, and the bees seemed to be his only friends. But, for all that, he was happy and contented; he had all the honey he wanted, and his bees, whom he considered the best company in the world, were as friendly and sociable as they could be, and seemed to increase in number every day.

One day there stopped at the hut of the Bee man a Junior Sorcerer. This young person, who was a student of magic, was much interested in the Bee-man, whom he had often noticed in his wanderings, and he considered him an admirable subject for study. He had got a great deal of useful practice by trying to find out, by the various rules and laws of sorcery, exactly why the old Bee-man did not happen to be something that he was not, and why he was what he happened to be. He had studied a long time at this matter, and had found out something.

"Do you know," he said, when the Bee-man came out of his hut," that you have been trans formed?"

"What do you mean by that?" said the other, much surprised.

"You have surely heard of animals and human beings who have been magically transformed into different kinds of creatures?"

"Yes, I have heard of these things," said the Bee-man; "but what have I been transformed from?"

"That is more than I know," said the Junior Sorcerer. "But one thing is certain: you ought to be changed back. If you will find out what you have been transformed from, I will see that you are made all right again. Nothing would please me better than to attend to such a case."

And, having a great many things to study and investigate, the Junior Sorcerer went his way. This information greatly disturbed the mind of the Bee-man. If he had been changed from something else, he ought to be that other thing, whatever it was. He ran after the young man, and overtook him.

"If you know, kind sir," he said, "that I have been transformed, you surely are able to tell me what it is that I was."

"No," said the Junior Sorcerer, "my studies have not proceeded far enough for that. When I become a senior I can tell you all about it. But, in the meantime, it will be well for you to try to find out for yourself your original form; and when you have done that, I will get some of the learned masters of my art to restore you to it. It will be easy enough to do that, but you could not expect them to take the time and trouble to find out what it was."

And, with these words, he hurried away, and was soon lost to view.

Greatly disturbed, the Bee-man retraced his steps, and went to his hut. Never before had he heard anything which had so troubled him.

"I wonder what I was transformed from?" he thought, seating himself on his rough bench. "Could it have been a giant, or a powerful prince, or some gorgeous being whom the magicians or the fairies wished to punish? It may be that I was a dog or a horse, or perhaps a fiery dragon or a horrid snake. I hope it was not one of these. But whatever it was, everyone has certainly a right to his original form, and I am resolved to find out mine. I will start early tomorrow morning; and I am sorry now that I have not more pockets to my old doublet, so that I might carry more bees and more honey for my journey."

He spent the rest of the day in making a hive of twigs and straw; and, having transferred to this a number of honey-combs and a colony of bees which had just swarmed, he rose before sunrise the next day, and having put on his leathern doublet, and having bound his new hive to his back, he set forth on his quest, the bees who were to accompany him buzzing around him like a cloud.

As the Bee-man pressed through the little village the people greatly wondered at his queer appearance, with the hive upon his back.

"The Bee-man is going on a long journey this time," they said; but no one imagined the strange business on which he was bent.

About noon he sat down under a tree, near a beautiful meadow covered with blossoms, and ate a little honey. Then he untied his hive and stretched himself out on the grass to rest. As he gazed upon his bees hovering about him, some going out to the blossoms in the sunshine, and some returning laden with the sweet pollen, he said to himself, "They know just what they have to do, and they do it; but alas for me! I know not what I may have to do. And yet, whatever it may be, I am determined to do it. In some way or other I will find out what was my original form, and then I will have myself changed back to it."

And now the thought came to him that perhaps his original form might have been some thing very disagreeable, or even horrid. "But it does not matter," he said sturdily. "Whatever I was that shall I be again. It is not right for anyone to keep a form which does not properly belong to him. I have no doubt I shall discover my original form in the same way that I find the trees in which the wild bees hive. When I first catch sight of a bee tree I am drawn toward it, I know not how. Some thing says to me: 'That is what you are looking for.' In the same way I believe that I shall find my original form. When I see it, I shall be drawn toward it. Something will say to me: ' That is it.' "

When the Bee-man was rested he started off again, and in about an hour he entered a fair domain. Around him were beautiful lawns, grand trees, and lovely gardens; while at a little distance stood the stately palace of the Lord of the Domain. Richly dressed people were walking about or sitting in the shade f the trees and arbors; splendidly equipped horses were waiting for their riders; and every where were seen signs of wealth and gayety.

"I think," said the Bee-man to himself, "that I should like to stop here for a time. If it should happen that I was originally like any of these happy creatures it would please me much."

He untied his hive, and hid it behind some bushes, and, taking off his old doublet, laid that beside it. It would not do to have his bees flying about him if he wished to go among the inhabitants of this fair domain.

For two days the Bee-man wandered about the palace and its grounds, avoiding notice as much as possible, but looking at everything. He saw handsome men and lovely ladies; the finest horses, dogs, and cattle that were ever known; beautiful birds in cages, and fishes in crystal globes: and it seemed to him that the best of all living things were here collected.

At the close of the second day the Bee-man said to himself: "There is one being here toward whom I feel very much drawn, and that is the Lord of the Domain. I cannot feel certain that I was once like him, but it would be a very fine thing if it were so; and it seems impossible for me to be drawn toward any other being in the domain when I look upon him, so handsome, rich, and powerful.

But I must observe him more closely, and feel more sure of the matter, before applying to the sorcerers to change me back into a lord of a fair domain."

The next morning the Bee-man saw the Lord of the Domain walking in his gardens. He slipped along the shady paths, and followed him so as to observe him closely, and find out if he were really drawn toward this noble and handsome being.

The Lord of the Domain walked on for some time, not noticing that the Bee-man was behind him. But suddenly turning, he saw the little old man.

"What are you doing here, you vile beggar?" he cried, and he gave him a kick that sent him into some bushes that grew by the side of the path. The Bee-man scrambled to his feet, and ran as fast as he could to the place where he had hidden his hive and his old doublet.

"If I am certain of anything," he thought, "it is that I was never a person who would kick a poor old man. I will leave this place. I was transformed from nothing that I see here."

He now travelled for a day or two longer, and then he came to a great black mountain, near the bottom of which was an opening like the mouth of a cave. This mountain he had heard was filled with caverns and underground passages, which were the abodes of dragons, evil spirits, horrid creatures of all kinds.

"Ah me!" said the Bee-man with a sigh, "I suppose I ought to visit this place. If I am going to do this thing properly, I should look on all sides of the subject, and I may have been one of those horrid creatures myself."

Thereupon he went to the mountain, and, as he approached the opening of the passage which led into its inmost recesses, he saw, sitting upon the ground, and leaning his back against a tree, a Languid Youth.

"Good-day," said this individual when he saw the Bee-man. "Are you going inside?"

"Yes," said the Bee-man, "that is what I in tend to do."

" Then," said the Languid Youth, slowly rising to his feet, "I think I will go with you. I was told that if I went in there I should get my energies toned up, and they need it very much; but I did not feel equal to entering by myself, and I thought I would wait until some one came along. I am very glad to see you, and we will go in together."

So the two went into the cave, and they had proceeded but a short distance when they met a very little creature, whom it was easy to recognize as a Very Imp. He was about two feet high, and resembled in color a freshly polished pair of boots. He was extremely lively and active, and came bounding toward them.

"What did you two people come here for?" he asked.

"I came," said the Languid Youth, "to have my energies toned up."

"You have come to the right place," said the Very Imp. "We will tone you up. And what does that old Bee-man want?"

"He has been transformed from something, and wants to find out what it is. He thinks he may have been one of the things in here."

"I should not wonder if that were so,'' said the Very Imp, rolling his head on one side, and eying the Bee-man with a critical gaze.

"All right," said the Very Imp; "he can go around, and pick out his previous existence. We have here all sorts of vile creepers, crawlers, hissers, and snorters. I suppose he thinks anything will be better than a Bee-man."

"It is not because I want to be better than I am," said the Bee-man, "that I started out on this search. I have simply an honest desire to become what I originally was."

"Oh! that is it, is it?" said the other. "There is an idiotic moon-calf here with a clam head, which must be just like what you used to be."

"Nonsense," said the Bee-man. "You have not the least idea what an honest purpose is. I shall go about and see for myself."

"Go ahead," said the Very Imp, "and I will attend to this fellow who wants to be toned up."

So saying he joined the Languid Youth.

"Look here," said the Youth, "do you black and shine yourself every morning? "

"No," said the other, "it is water-proof varnish. You want to be invigorated, don't you? Well, I will tell you a splendid way to begin. You see that Bee-man has put down his hive and his coat with the bees in it. Just wait till he gets out of sight, and then catch a lot of those bees, and squeeze them flat. If you spread them on a sticky rag, and make a plaster, and put it on the small of your back, it will invigorate you like everything, especially if some of the bees are not quite dead."

"Yes," said the Languid Youth, looking at him with his mild eyes, "but if I had energy enough to catch a bee I would be satisfied. Suppose you catch a lot for me."

"The subject is changed," said the Very Imp. "We are now about to visit the spacious chamber of the King of the Snap-dragons."

"That is a flower," said the Languid Youth.

"You will find him a gay old blossom," said the other. "When he has chased you round his room, and has blown sparks at you, and has snorted and howled, and cracked his tail, and snapped his jaws like a pair of anvils, your energies will be toned up higher than ever before in your life."

"No doubt of it," said the Languid Youth; "but I think I will begin with something a little milder."

"Well, then," said the other, "there is a flat-tailed Demon of the Gorge in here. He is generally asleep, and, if you say so, you can slip into the farthest corner of his cave, and I'll solder his tail to the opposite wall. Then he will rage

and roar, but he can't get at you, for he doesn't reach all the way across his cave; I have measured him. It will tone you up wonderfully to sit there and watch."

"Very Likely," said the Languid Youth; "but I would rather stay outside and let you go up in the corner. The performance in that way will be more interesting to me."

"You are dreadfully hard to please," said the Very Imp. "I have offered them to you loose, and I have offered them fastened to a wall, and now the best thing I can do is to give you a chance at one of them that can't move at all. It is the Ghastly Griffin, and is enchanted. He can't stir so much as the tip of his whiskers for a thousand years. You can go to his cave and examine him just as if he were stuffed, and then you can sit on his back and think how it would be if you should live to be a thousand years old, and he should wake up while you are sitting there. It would be easy to imagine a lot of horrible things he would do to you when you look at his open mouth with its awful fangs, his dreadful claws, and his horrible wings all covered with spikes."

"I think that might suit me," said the Languid Youth. "I would much rather imagine the exercises of these monsters than to see them really going on."

"Come on, then," said the Very Imp, and he led the way to the cave of the Ghastly Griffin.

The Bee-man went by himself through a great part of the mountain, and looked into many of its gloomy caves and recesses, recoiling in horror from most of the dreadful monsters who met his eyes. While he was wandering about, an awful roar was heard resounding through the passages of the mountain, and soon there came flapping along an enormous dragon, with body black as night, and wings and tail of fiery red. In his great fore-claws he bore a little baby.

"Horrible!" exclaimed the Bee-man. "He is taking that little creature to his cave to devour it."

He saw the dragon enter a cave not far away, and, following, looked in. The dragon was crouched upon the ground with the little baby lying before him. It did not seem to be hurt, but was frightened and crying. The monster was looking upon it with delight, as if he intended to make a dainty meal of it as soon as his appetite should be a little stronger.

"It is too bad!" thought the Bee-man. "Somebody ought to do something."

And turning around, he ran away as fast as he could. He ran through various passages until he came to the spot where he had left his bee-hive. Picking it up, he hurried back, carrying the hive in his two hands before him. When he reached the cave of the dragon, he looked in and saw the monster still crouched over the weeping child. Without a moment's hesitation, the Bee-man rushed into the cave and threw his hive straight into the face of the drag The bees, enraged by the shock, rushed out in an angry crowd and immediately fell upon

the head, mouth, eyes, and nose of the dragon. The great monster, astounded by this sudden attack, and driven almost wild by the numberless stings of the bees, sprang back to the farthest corner of his cave, still followed by the bees, at whom he flapped wildly with his great wings and struck with his paws.

While the dragon was thus engaged with the bees, the Bee-man rushed forward, and, seizing the child, he hurried away. He did not stop to pick up his doublet, but kept on until he reached the entrance of the cave. There he saw the Very Imp hopping along on one legs and rubbing his back and shoulders with his hands, and stopped to inquire what was the matter, and what had become of the Languid Youth.

"He is no kind of a fellow," said the Very Imp. "He disappointed me dreadfully. I took him up to the Ghastly Griffin, and told him the thing was enchanted, and that he might sit on its back and think about what it could do if it was awake; and when he came near it the wretched creature opened its eyes, and raised its head, and then you ought to have seen how mad that simpleton was. He made a dash at me and seized me by the cars; he kicked and beat me till I can scarcely move."

"His energies must have been toned up a good deal," said the Bee-man.

"Toned up! I should say so!" cried the other. "I raised a howl, and a Scissor-jawed Clipper came out of his hole, and got after him; but that lazy fool ran so fast that he could not be caught."

The Bee-man now ran on and soon overtook the Languid Youth.

"You need not be in a hurry now," said the latter, "for the rules of this institution don't allow the creatures inside to come out of this opening, or to hang around it. If they did, they would frighten away visitors. They go in and out of holes in the upper part of the mountain."

The two proceeded on their way.

"What are you going to do with that baby?" said the Languid Youth.

"I shall carry it along with me," said the Bee-man, "as I go on with my search, and perhaps I may find its mother. If I do not, I shall give it to somebody in that little village yonder. Anything would be better than leaving it to be devoured by that horrid dragon."

"Let me carry it. I feel quite strong enough now to carry a baby."

"Thank you," said the Bee-man; "but I can take it myself. I like to carry something, and I have now neither my hive nor my doublet."

"It is very well that you had to leave them behind," said the Youth, "for the bees would have stung the baby."

"My bees never sting babies," said the other.

"They probably never had a chance," remarked his companion. They soon entered the village, and after walking a short distance the Youth exclaimed:

"Do you see that woman over there sitting at the door of her house? She has beautiful hair and she is tearing it all to pieces. She should not be allowed to do that."

"No," said the Bee-man. " Her friends should tie her hands."

"Perhaps she is the mother of this child," said the Youth," and if you give it to her she will no longer think of tearing her hair."

"But," said the Bee-man, "you don't really think this is her child?"

"Suppose you go over and see," said the other.

The Bee-man hesitated a moment, and then he walked toward the woman. Hearing him coming, she raised her head, and when she saw the child she rushed toward it, snatched it into her arms, and screaming with joy she covered it with kisses. Then with happy tears she begged to know the story of the rescue of her child, whom she never expected to see again; and she loaded the Bee-man with thanks and blessings.

The friends and neighbors gathered around, and there was great rejoicing.

The mother urged the Bee-man and the Youth to stay with her, and rest and refresh themselves, which they were glad to do, as they were tired and hungry.

They remained at the cottage all night, and in the afternoon of the next clay the Bee-man said to the Youth:

"It may seem an odd thing to you, but never in all my life have I felt myself drawn toward any living being as I am drawn toward this baby. Therefore I believe that I have been transformed from a baby."

"Good!" cried the Youth. "It is my opinion that you have hit the truth. And now would you like to be changed back to your original form?"

"Indeed I would!" said the Bee-man. "I have the strongest yearning to be what I originally was."

The Youth, who had now lost every trace of languid feeling, took a great interest in the matter, and early the next morning started off to tell the Junior Sorcerer that the Bee-man had discovered what he had been transformed from, and desired to be changed back to it.

The Junior Sorcerer and his learned Masters were filled with delight when they heard this report, and they at once set out for the mother's cottage. And there by magic arts the Bee-man was changed back into a baby. The mother was so grateful for what the Bee-man had done for her that she agreed to take charge of this baby, and to bring it up as her own.

"It will be a grand thing for him," said the Junior Sorcerer, "and I am glad that I studied his case. He will now have a fresh start in life, and will have a chance to become something better than a miserable old man living in a wretched hut with no friends or companions but buzzing bees."

The Junior Sorcerer and his Masters then returned to their homes, happy in the success of their great performance; and the Youth went back to his home anxious to begin a life of activity and energy.

YEARS AND YEARS afterward, when the Junior Sorcerer had become a Senior and was very old indeed, he passed through the country of Orn, and noticed a small hut about which swarms of bees were flying. He approached it, and looking in at the door he saw an old man in a leathern doublet, sitting at a table, eating honey. By his magic art he knew this was the baby which had been transformed from the Bee-man.

"Upon my word!" exclaimed the Sorcerer, "he has grown into the same thing again!"

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13: How The Express Was Saved

Victor L Whitechurch

1868-1933

The Royal Magazine, Aug 1911

In: *Thrilling Stories of the Railway*, 1912

THE STRIKE on the Mid-Northern Railway was not very prominent in the public eye. The daily papers, full of a murder sensation, had devoted only small paragraphs to it— paragraphs which had been relentlessly slaughtered with blue pencil before they left the sub-editors' room. Passengers on the railway noticed nothing at all. Trains still ran fairly up to the scheduled time, guards and porters took tips as usual. Nothing seemed amiss to the casual eye.

The reason was that only one section of the great army of workers of the Mid-Northern Railway had laid down their arms, or rather their tools, and these particular tools were shovels and pickaxes, and crowbars and spanners. It was a platelayers' strike— based on a shilling a week extra and an obdurate board of directors.

In this particular instance the officials considered the strike was unjustified, a breach of certain contracts made in a recent conciliation, and they had taken the strong line of not only refusing to discuss the men's demands, but also of giving it out that certain of the ringleaders need not trouble to return to work at all. The strike was by no means general; a certain proportion of employees remained on duty, and no trouble had been encountered in obtaining the services of a few hundreds of "out of works."

A dozen men were gathered together in the stuffy little bar of the "Red Lion" at Hillingdon. At all times you would have expected the railway element to predominate in that particular bar, for Hillingdon was a big junction on the Mid-Northern and the "Red Lion" stood in the very centre of a district, nine-tenths of the inhabitants of which were employed in the Company's service.

The subject of discussion was, naturally, the platelayers' strike.

"Well, there ain't much wrong with the road," remarked the fireman of a goods engine. "Everything up to time. You wouldn't know anything was up at all."

"It's those blacklegs that are upsetting things," replied a thickset man with a scowling face who lounged in a corner. "If it wasn't for them takin' on our job you wouldn't ha' had such an easy run down."

The fireman laughed. He was young and cheeky.

"They'll want someone to take on your job for good and all, Yates," he said, "from what I hear."

Joe Yates darted an angry look at him and replied with an oath. He was one of the men whom the Company had refused to take back, he and another named Ford being the ringleaders of discontent at Hillingdon.

"Steady on, Tom," growled one of the men to the fireman, "your tongue's too loose, my lad."

"Got many chaps at work up the line?" asked another platelayer.

The fireman nodded.

"Yes— a lot. You haven't even stopped 'em putting down the new rails 't'other side o' Cranbury. There's a good forty of 'em there— hard at it."

"Ought to be shot," muttered Joe Yates, "what business have they to take the bread out o' the mouths o' us, eh?"

The fireman drained his glass, and replaced it on the counter.

"Might as well ask what business have you chaps to take the bread out o' the mouths o' your wives and children," he answered as he went to the door.

With another oath Joe Yates sprang forward. A few hands were stretched out to stop him, but he had almost gained the door when a newcomer entered and barred the way— a tall, sinewy man in corduroys.

"Chuck it, Joe," he exclaimed. "If it's that young fool of a Stimson you're after he ain't worth wastin' muscle on. Come and have a drink with me."

It was Harry Ford himself. By mutual consent the others dropped the subject of the strike while the two men drank sullenly and in silence. Presently Ford said to the other:

"Coming out?"

"Don't mind if I do."

"Come on then. Good-night, all."

It was raining steadily, and very dark. The two men walked slowly along the street, and then Ford led the way to a waste, unfrequented bit of ground.

"Look here," he remarked suddenly, "it's not much of a lookout for you and me, is it Joe?"

"That it ain't— curse 'em!" replied the other.

"Curse 'em by all means, but that won't do 'em no harm. Ain't you game for something more?"

"What d'ye mean, Harry?"

"I heard a bit o' news just now. The General Manager's coming down to Hillingdon to-night— by the express that gets here at 11.53."

"Well, what o' that?"

Ford's voice sank to a low whisper.

"Well, supposing that train was to run off the metals just afore it got to Buckley Bridge."

"Eh?"

"I say, supposing a length o' rail was taken out just t'other side o' the bridge— chance for the whole train and the G.M. in it to pitch into the river, eh?"

"What are you driving at, Harry?" asked Joe Yates, sinking his voice to a whisper.

"A spanner and a hammer 'ud soon do it," replied the other, "and the night's made for it."

"But— if we were seen?"

"Look here, Joe. How far off is Buckley Bridge?"

"Matter o' four miles up the line."

"Then if we were seen here in Hillingdon at a quarter to eleven no one 'ud even suspect us o' the job, eh?"

"But how would we get there in time?"

"The 10.55 goods to Wharnton. Leaves No. 5 siding. We could easily get into a truck. And she has to slow down at Buckley signal box to get the staff for the Wharnton branch. We could drop off there and be right on the job. Are you game for it?"

"Done!"

"Right. You show yourself in the 'Red Lion' later on; I'll go to some other pub. Meet me alongside the goods just before 10.55. She'll be marshalled ready for starting. And bring a spanner. I'll get hold of a crow-bar."

BUCKLEY BRIDGE, or "Bridge No. 74," as it was technically called, was an iron bridge, of some fifty yards in length, spanning the river, some four miles away from Hillingdon on the up line. It was used for the service of trains only, and was guarded by a light iron railing on either side.

A little way on the Hillingdon side of the bridge stood a signal box. This box guarded the junction where the single branch line to Wharnton struck off from the main line. The customary signals were placed to protect this junction, of which two only need be described in the present narrative. These were the "distant" and the "home" signals which warned approaching trains on the down main line, and they were both on the side of the bridge farthest away from the signal box.

The "distant" signal was half-a-mile up the line, the "home" signal about a hundred yards before the bridge. There was, therefore, ample protection for the down trains, as if the junction or the block beyond it on the Hillingdon side were not clear the train would be brought to a stop well before it reached the bridge.

Beyond the bridge, where the main line ran on to the signal box, it curved slightly to the right, so that the man on duty could not actually see the down home signal. But, by means of that wonderful little instrument, the electric repeater, he could tell its position exactly, the miniature semaphore arm in the

little glass case in front of him imitating every movement of the signal itself as he pulled or replaced the lever.

In the signal box were two men, the signalman on duty and a young linesman. It was the duty of the latter to patrol a certain length of the road with a view to inspecting and repairing electric and signalling apparatus. Some trifling defect had been found that evening in the interlocking gear beneath the Buckley box, and Charles Palmer had been working at it overtime. He had now come up from the network of bars and wires below the box, and was smoking his pipe in the cabin.

He was packing up his tools as he smoked. One or two, such as his folding rule and a small pair of wire cutters, he put in his pocket from force of habit. The rest he arranged in his bag.

A ring came at the bell.

"The Wharnton Goods," said the signalman, as he returned the answer and pulled the levers that "took off" the up main home and distant signals.

"You'll be wanting the staff for her," said Palmer.

"That's right."

He went up to the curious-looking electric machine that held the staves for the Wharnton Branch, signalled forward to the block ahead on the single line, obtained, by means of electric release, a long brass staff from the machine, and then threw open his window and peered down the line. Two flickering lights, a green above a white, showed that the goods train was approaching. The engine came to a standstill just beside the box, and the signalman ran down the steps and handed the staff to the driver.

"A rough night, Bill."

"No mistake," replied the driver, as he opened the throttle valve. "Good-night, mate!"

Out of a low truck midway along the goods train Yates and Ford dropped stealthily to the ground on the side farther from the signal box, climbed the fence bordering the line, and, stooping down, hurried along parallel with the track through fields until they came to the bank of the river. Here they turned aside, reclimbed the fence, and passed over the iron bridge.

"Got your spanner, Joe?" asked Ford, in a low voice.

"All right."

"There's not too much time— we shall have to look sharp."

"Can't start till the local's gone by."

"Ah, I forgot that. Hullo— there's the signal for her."

"Crash!" went the arm of the down home signal which stood about a hundred yards beyond them. The two men hid themselves as the local train came by, and then sprang on to the track.

"Here you are," said Ford, "we'll soon have it out. I only helped to put it in three weeks ago," he added, with a grim chuckle. "You take that end, I'll tackle this."

Rails are secured to each other at the ends by flat pieces of metal known as "fish plates," to which they are fixed by bolts. The object of the two men was to remove one of the rails immediately in front of the bridge, rightly calculating that if the engine ran off at that point the train would probably be wrecked in the river.

It was work to which they were well accustomed, and accustomed to do it smartly as well. As a rule old rails are replaced by new ones without in any way interfering with the running of the trains, and over and over again the passenger little dreams as he runs along securely that a new rail was inserted only a few minutes before.

With their stout, curved spanners, they loosened and unscrewed the nuts which fastened the bolts holding the two fish plates to the rails. In a very short time the fish plates themselves were off and lying alongside the line. Then came the knocking out of the wooden "keys" which held the rail in the "chairs" fixed down to the sleepers. They looked round once or twice, for they could not loosen the keys without a slight noise of hammering, but the wind was rising, drowning all sounds. Then the rail lay loose.

Next came the supreme effort. Long rails weighing 106 lb. to the yard take some moving. Both men were strong, but it wanted all their strength put forth before the rail was lifted out of the chairs and fell with a muffled clang at the side of the line.

Then the unexpected happened. Charles Palmer had started for his home, and his home was in a village the further side of the river from the signal box. There was a road bridge two miles away; there was the convenient railway bridge close at hand. And he, naturally, chose the nearer route. The sky was clearing a little, a waning moon had risen and was showing a pale light through the rain-clouds. Half-way over the bridge he fancied he saw something moving; just as he was over there came the clang of the metal, and when Yates and Ford looked up he was there— right upon them— with his fists clenched.

"You scoundrels!" he cried, as he rushed forward.

Ford, however, was perfectly cool. His brawny arm went out straight from the shoulder, and his fist caught Palmer right on the chin. The young man went down like a log.

"Curse him!" cried Ford beneath his breath, "look sharp, Yates. There's no time to lose. Got any cord or anything?"

"Here's a bit o' stout twine."

"Tie his legs together— ah, would you!" he exclaimed as Palmer made an attempt to cry out. "I'll stuff something in his mouth and tie it in with a

handkerchief— we must fix his arms, too. I know— good, he's got leather laces in his boots— that's better than cord."

In five minutes Charles Palmer lay beside the line gagged, his feet tied together and his hands cruelly fastened behind him with his own bootlaces, while Ford and Yates had gained the further side of the river and were hurrying back to Hillingdon along unfrequented by-roads.

They paused once for breath.

"He'll be smashed up," whispered Yates, thinking of Palmer.

"Let him be!" replied the other savagely, "if he isn't we'll have to make tracks— for I believe he recognised us."

CHARLES PALMER lay for a few minutes half dazed. Then he began to realise not only his own terrible position, but the fact of the gaping void between the line of rail. Nothing could save the express from being wrecked. It was, he knew almost due now.

"Twang— crash!" the sounds came simultaneously. The down home signal was pulled off. He glanced at the place where the post should be. Yes— the extinguishing disc had passed over the white "back light," so that green showed on the other side.

"Twang!" That was for the distant signal. The train was on the block now, and the line was signalled "clear."

And then a desperate thought, arising from a pain in his thigh, came into his mind. If only he could do it! Writhing and twisting he wriggled himself slowly away from the metals to the side of the line. His face touched something cold. Good! It was what he was seeking for— the wire that communicated with the home signal.

A great effort, and he lay with his back to the wire. Could he do it? With extreme difficulty and with the laces cutting into his flesh he managed to get a couple of fingers into his hip pocket, felt for the cutters, drew them slowly out, held them in his hand, and groped for the wire behind him.

The weighted safety lever at the base of the home signal, relieved of the tension of the wire, fell, resetting the semaphore arm at "danger," and showing the red light.

A whistle, the grinding of brakes, a shower of sparks along the wheels, and the great express came to a standstill.

What was up? In the signal box the man knew something had given way. The tell-tale repeater stood at "line blocked." The engine whistle clamoured for a clear road. The road was clear. Seizing a lantern he came down from the signal box and ran along the line, past the curve, till he could see the back light.

He waved the lantern for the train to advance slowly, running forward over the bridge as he did so.

Then, with a shout, he turned on the red glass of his lantern and waved it frantically. He had seen the gap in the metals— and the man beside the line. The train was saved!

And to-day Charles Palmer holds a prominent position in the electrical and engineering department of the Mid-Northern.

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14: The Flambeau Bracket

Edward Lucas White

1866-1934

Young's Magazine, Dec 1910

In: *The Song of the Sirens*, 1919

GENTLEMEN, calm yourselves, there is no occasion for an uproar. Be seated again, be seated, all of you, I beg. Honor me with your attention for a moment. Signor Orsacchino has called me a murderer. He need not repeat the epithet. We have all heard it. Some of you gentlemen— I did not recognize the voices— so far forgot yourselves as to suggest that I should cross swords with Signor Orsacchino here and now, or that I should call him out and fight him at once. Gentlemen, I brook no suggestions as to what I should or should not do upon any point of honor. I permit no man to school me as to when or to what extent I should consider myself offended. Still less would I fail to resent any question of the propriety of my ignoring what other men dare not ignore. Signor Orsacchino has shown his courage by applying to me, before so many of you, a term of such serious import. He can incur no dishonor by hearing out in silence what I wish to say before we proceed to a final settlement. As victor in some score of duels I pray your indulgence if for once in my life I depart from my habits, and instead of fighting at once and keeping silence, talk first and fight afterwards, or not at all. You, as my friends, will do me the honor to listen to me. Signor Orsacchino, as my enemy, will do himself the honor to hearken. A young man, and one who has never yet taken part in a serious combat, he has exhibited his conscientious conviction of the justice of his views, and proved his valor and daring by bearding a master of fence who, in fifteen years, has never failed to kill his man. As a skilled swordsman I should feel myself a murderer indeed were I to take upon my soul his blood in haste. The Signor is young; the wine has passed rather freely; we are heated. I say earnestly — let no man interrupt me — that if Signor Orsacchino to-morrow in cool daylight chooses to reiterate his words, I shall take them as a deadly insult and shall challenge, meet, and slay him without compunction. If, on the other hand, after I have told my story, he does not repeat his accusations, I shall regard them, all of them, as not merely withdrawn, but as things never said at all.

Signor Orsacchino has called me a murderer because I killed in a duello his kinsman, General della Rubbalda. That was more than fifteen years ago, and it was my first formal duel. So far from being a seasoned fighter who butchered a feeble and heartbroken old man, I was then a boy, very raw, and to a great extent unpracticed, pitted against a cool, dexterous, and envenomed adversary. In the many encounters through which I have since passed I recall not one which taxed me more severely or in which I ran a greater risk. In fact, the General

would assuredly have killed me had he not chosen to fight with a sword, a perfect mate of my own, which I knew and recognized— a sword the sight of which converted me from an excited lad into a being strung far beyond the reach of any personal or paltry emotions ; a thing all muscle, nerve and will, perfectly co-ordinated; an infallible supernaturally accurate incarnation of unhurried, predestinate vengeance. We met in the meadow outside of the river gate. Our seconds are all alive, men of unimpeachable integrity, nobles of the loftiest traditions, of the most honorable lineage. There were other witnesses of the fight which was scrupulously fair, and which I won by mere force of right and justice. I believe that, when I have had my say, all of you and Signor Orsacchino not least, will admit that I had just cause, more than just cause, for any vengeance upon the General— that to treat him as a man of honor and meet him sword to sword was a condescension upon my part. So far from having forced him to meet me, his challenge to me was simultaneous with mine to him. Signor Orsacchino has insinuated what, if he were ever to put into words — no, Signor, hear me out, you may then say what you please— I should resent far more bitterly than the epithet of murderer. You will all recall the sudden and lamented death of Signora della Rubbalda, more than two years after that of her husband. You will all remember that she, the most beautiful woman of our city, who was mourned by unsuccessful suitors beyond any count, left behind her a reputation for saintliness, such as few women have ever attained to. I had, indeed, seen the Signora before my combat with her husband, but I say solemnly that until the Carnival ball I had never spoken to her, that until the morning after, just before the duel, I had not known whom I so admired. I admit that he challenged me upon her account, but his jealousy was as insensate as the spleen that drove him, whose household had escaped loss, to press an imaginary grievance upon me, whose house was most desolate of all, upon a morning of general sorrow and desolation.

If the story of my grievance— all too weak a word— against him, has never before been told by me, it is not because I have any reason to be ashamed of it, but rather chiefly that I was not willing to smirch the name of della Rubbalda with a tale of villainy so cynical, and, after the custom of our family, I reserve everything involving penitence or repentance for my confessor. You shall judge whether I am right in confessing to you all. I shall detain you but a few moments longer.

Without penitence I cannot speak of my brother Ettore, at the thought of him I am convicted of ingratitude, that most universal, most unforgivable of the sins of youth. I failed to appreciate my brother Ettore. He was to me not merely a beloved comrade, he not only more than filled for me the place of the father I had lost, but also of the mother I had never known. His tenderness was as exquisite as his precepts were wise, his concern universal, his care constant. I

loved him, loved him with the ardent adoration of an unproved boy for a young, handsome, accomplished cavalier who is and does all that the boy longs to be and do. Yet, although he stinted me in nothing, fulfilled for me all my reasonable desires, granted most of my wishes, humored my whims and bore with my moods, some malignant fiber of my heart drove me into perpetual opposition to him. His solicitude irked me; for, with a boy's folly I mistook stubbornness for resolution, recklessness for valor, and self-assertion for independence. I misconstrued supervision as espionage. Resenting it I began by evading perfectly natural questions as to my whereabouts and doings. From that I grew into a contemptible habit of petty and unnecessary concealment as to my outgoings, incomings, and occupations. He bore this patiently, not showing any change of his affectionate and kindly bearing. Presently my perversity drove me to run counter to his wishes in first one thing and then another. Because he had advised me to cultivate certain of my associates I drew off from them; because he had warned me against others I made cronies of them, although I liked them little or not at all. I felt myself manlier for this sort of folly. I consorted with persons of dubious character or manifestly beneath me, resorted to quarters of the town I should have avoided. When I should have been diverting and improving myself in the best company possible for a young cavalier of our part of the world, I was roistering— by no means enjoying it— with fellows I heartily despised. I lost much money gaming, yet Ettore refilled my purse without chiding me in words, his manner conveying the just disapprobation I would not heed. I came home many times so late or so early that I found our porter difficult to wake, and more than once was nearly compelled to find shelter elsewhere. Sometimes I returned so disordered that I shrank from ascending the grand staircase and slunk around the courtyard under the galleries to the servitors' stair. I became habituated to low taverns across the river, where I naturally became involved in wine-room quarrels and street brawls. I flattered myself that I comported myself well in these senseless melees. I dealt some shrewd wounds and came off unscathed. I felt all the man, the man of pleasure.

Then one night I was entrapped, I never realized how, in a street fight with several rufflers. One of my comrades fell and the rest fled, and I was left alone, my back to a barred door, facing several blades which I barely kept off, when a tall man appeared behind my assailants, fell upon them without warning and promptly beat them off. After the sound of their fleeing feet had died away in the alleys I found myself face to face with Ettore, wearing a cap without a feather, and a plain brown cloak. He asked only:

"You are not wounded?"

"Not a scratch," I replied.

"We will walk together, if you do not object," he said. "Which way are you going?"

"Home," I answered.

As we traversed the crooked streets, crossed the bridge and made our way home, he kept silence at first and then led me into some light gossipy talk, making no remark upon my silly foolhardiness, nor saying anything relative to his sudden appearance or my rescue.

I should have been touched by his solicitude, but with a boy's folly, instead of being overwhelmed with gratitude to him for having saved my life, I was merely indignant at his having followed me and watched over me, and furious at the thought that he had felt that I, who aspired to be redoubtable, might be— as I was too headstrong to confess I had been— in need of assistance.

After this adventure my perversity was aggravated. I took the most sedulous precautions for my own hurt, doing all I could to preclude the possibility of Ettore's ever again being able to protect me from any possible consequences of the dangers into which I needlessly thrust myself.

Throughout the carnival time I fairly lived away from home, mostly, and this, with Ettore's full knowledge, at the Palazzo Forticello with wild Gianbattista and his wilder brother Lorenzo. I took perverse care that Ettore should not be able to recognize me, changing my dress often and wearing a variety of masks. Throughout the carnival I had been hoping to encounter a lady whom I had first seen the previous autumn, whom I had caught sight of but twice during winter, whom I had watched for in vain at the Cathedral, and in the search for whom I had fruitlessly haunted every church in the city. It had so happened that on each of the three times I had seen her I was alone. My descriptions had been unrecognizable to those of my friends whom I asked to enlighten me. When I had described her to Ettore he had maddened me by saying that he knew well who the lady was, but declined to tell me, advising me to think no more of her, as her husband was devoted to her and a spleenful, dangerous man. I spurned his advice, but my fevered efforts won me no success. I had no clue to her, and even during the delirium of the carnival time I had sighted no one whom I could take for her. This failure diminished my enjoyment of the week of revelry, but I had at least the satisfaction that I had not seen Ettore. No sense of his presence, of his hovering influence, dimmed the glow of my delight in feeling myself my own master and perfectly able to take care of myself, in getting into scrapes, as I did, and getting out of them as I might, untrammeled.

On the night of the great ball I was dressed as a troubadour and was very proud of my becoming costume. No sooner had Lorenzo and I entered the theater than I saw the lady of my dreams. She wore a very narrow mask, no more than an excuse for a mask, and was dressed in fanciful garb, the significance of which I did not try to guess, but with the effect of which I was enraptured. She was with a very young man, and after a word with Lorenzo, using the freedom of the festal time, we accosted them. Lorenzo engaged the

attention of her escort, while I gained possession of the lady. I may say that we spent the evening together, dancing countless dances, partaking of refreshments, strolling about, or seated on one or another of the benches in the corridors or loggias. So engrossed was I that it was only occasionally that I remembered to look about for Ettore. I never saw him, nor any figure at all suggesting his. But each time I looked among the crowd, the parti-colored brightness of which was accentuated by a liberal sprinkling of cavaliers in black dominoes, all alike slender, youthful, and tall, I saw somewhere one figure that, as it were, stood out among the rest— a tallish spare man of erect carriage, stiff bearing, and moving in a way not at all suggestive of youth, most absurdly and unbecomingly habited as a buffoon, not after the manner of our theater, but in the French fashion, all in white, with a tight-fitting cap and a full false face whitened with flour, a loose, white blouse, with huge, white buttons big as biscuits, loose, wide, white trousers, and white slippers with white rosettes. This costume, odd enough on a young and plump figure, had an uncanny effect preposterously hung about the leanness of an elderly and frigid form. It was so unpleasantly weird that more than once my gaze dwelt on it for an instant before it returned to peering through my dear comrade's mask at the half-revealed wonders of her dazzling eyes. Our conversation was very innocent, witty we thought, delightful we felt. It was near the unmasking time when, as we gave ourselves to the intoxication of one of the last dances, I heard Ettore's voice whisper in my ear.

"Take care. Do not go home alone. You have been three hours with the wife of the most jealous man alive."

I turned my head, and as well as I could in whirling through the whirling crowd, I looked about for Ettore. I did not catch sight of him, nor of any costume such as he might be likely to wear. I saw only the everlasting parti-colored whirl, the iterated black dominoes, the inevitable misfit zany.

At the end of the dance the youth, whom Lorenzo had removed for me, claimed my partner so peremptorily that I could not but resign her— and she, addressing him as cousin, went off with him. They had scarcely more than disappeared when, as I stood leaning against a pilaster gazing across the press of dancers who thronged the floor at the dazzling parties which crowded every box of the seven tiers, a woman's shriek filled the hall. The next instant came the cry of "Fire," and almost before the boxes opposite me emptied the blaze ran across the ceiling. I took no part in the mad panic which ensued. I stood petrified, as did a few others, and recovered my senses only when the billows of smoke rolled to the floor. Then, from under dropping masses of blazing decorations, through doors empty save for the trampled shapes of dead or insensible victims of the rush, I made my way from the auditorium. How I so made my way out, and by which door I do not know, the spectacle of the trampled women so

sickened me that I marvel I ever escaped at all. For, at the sight of a corpse not of my own making, I have always turned, I confess, utterly a coward. To gaze at a man dead by my sword does not disturb me. I see in it only the evidence that heaven's justice has made use of my hand to give a scoundrel his deserts. But a glimpse of a dead body, that of one not slain by me, makes my head swim, my eyes dazzle, my sinews loosen, my knees knock together. Before such a corpse I am— I may apply to myself what no other man would venture to hint— no better than a craven.

Therefore, I shall never know how I came out of that furnace. I was delirious with horror— a mere animal driven by the primitive instinct of the dread of fire.

The corridors and passageways were almost as full of smoke as the theater itself, and, it seemed to me, more aflame. I dare not venture to say how many stairways I seemed to find ablaze. The rush of the fire drove me in frantic flight hither and thither through several narrow doors and— for down every stair I saw climbing flames— up more than one stair. I realized that I was quite out of the theater and on an upper floor of one or the other of the long-disused, deserted palazzos which flanked it. I could not guess which, and whichever it might be, it was certainly as much on fire as the theater. I recall rushing through room after room all filled with smoke, often turning back, finding no outlet and no way down. Several times I scrambled over heaps of what seemed to be old stage scenery. Once I stumbled and fell, jammed in a forest of broken laths and scantlings. I do not know how I reached the window at which I finally found myself, nor where I was joined by that sinister figure, in the white clown's dress, which I had remarked so often during the dancing. I was first aware of him beside me when I pushed vainly against the shut lattices of the window, and it was his strength, not mine, before which they gave way— not opening on their hinges, but carrying with them their crazy rotten frames, wrenched loose from the stone work of the window and falling altogether with a splintering smash upon the pavement below.

The noise of their crash struck our ears, while our eyesight was yet stunned by the impact of the hot brilliance with which, as the dislodged woodwork left the window aperture clear, we were flooded, diving upward, as it were, from the smoky obscurity of the interior into an intense ruby glare. We both scrambled upon the sill. There was no balcony outside. We were looking into a courtyard so filled with crimson radiance that not only were the walls opposite us bathed in an intense light, but the dark corners were penetrated by a weird carmine-tinted glow even in the deepest shadows. There was not a human being in sight— the court was deserted. It was of considerable size, paved with big square blocks of black-and-white stone. I could make out on the side opposite us the opening of a wagon archway, yawning like a black throat. No arcades flanked the courtyard, and every window I could see was shuttered fast. There

were six stories of windows, and we were at one of the fifth story. The roof cornice beetled above us, the roofs above the court were silhouetted against the inflamed sky, and overhead poured the vast inverted cataract of sparks which streamed up from the holocaust we had not yet escaped. We spoke no word. He stood upon the left side of the window, I upon the right. My lute I had, of course, thrown away, my mask I had on no longer. I had lost both sword and poignard, my whole belt was gone. I had nothing in my hands, which were torn and bleeding. The buffoon had a naked dagger in his right hand, a piece of rope in his left. He leaned over and scrutinized the outlook, as I did. We were a frightful distance above the pavement, and even had we been lower, dropping to the pavement would have been certain destruction, for precisely beneath us was a long narrow area, about a yard wide, and how deep I could not guess, constructed to let light into some cellar. The coping along its edge, where the pavement ceased, showed as a line of dull light in the appalling illumination. There were no balconies to the windows below us, or to any of those immediately on the right or left of them. About halfway down the face of the wall, from just below the left of the window in which we were to the corner of the courtyard on that side, ran a broad stone cornice, wide enough for a lean man once standing upon it to walk along it without holding to anything. About halfway to the corner of the court a metal rain-spout ran down, making a conspicuous elbow over the jutting stone shelf. Once set on his feet upon this cornice, either of us was sure of escape. The end of it was not precisely below the left side of our window, but a little to the left.

All this I took in in a moment, so, apparently, did the other man. There were many flambeau brackets projecting from the walls of the courtyard. There was one beside each lower corner of our window. The buffoon took his dagger in his teeth, kneeled down, reached over and fastened one end of his rope to the flambeau socket. He did not hurry, but made sure of his knots. Then he dropped the rope and, holding to the bracket with his left hand, shook the rope into undulations with his right, peering down to descry its end. Its end was all of ten feet above the level of the cornice, too far for a man holding the extreme end of it to set his feet on the cornice top. To jump for that cornice, or to drop upon it from even a yard above, it would have meant the certainty of going down to be dashed to pieces on the cruel flagstones below. The buffoon pulled up the rope and stood up, his dagger still between his teeth, projecting from under the false face which it thrust away from his own, and through the eyeholes of which I seemed to feel his eyes fixed upon me. We could hear, above the roar of the fire, the confused hubbub of shouts from the crowds which thronged the square and the streets round about. I had called for help when first I reached the sill, but my bawling, lost in the steady deep, rumbling note of the fire and in the confusion of voices beyond, won no response. Now I yelled again, screamed,

shrieked, but no one heard. The buffoon echoed my outcries, but not as if assisting them, not as if hoping against hope for rescue, not as if, like myself, merely giving way to terror and despair, but rather with derisive mockery in his rallying halloos. I felt totally helpless. If I were to escape at all it would be through him, yet I felt him as an inimical presence and feared him almost more than the fire behind us. He stood with the rope bunched inside his fingers, it seemed to me nervously knotting and unknotting it, then he let most of it go slack, a coil of a loop or two swinging back and forth in his left hand, his face toward me and his eyes I felt steadily on me. The tiny threads of lazy smoke that had been faltering out of the window under the lintel increased from a thin trickle to a continuous stream. Through the door of the room behind us was visible a faint blush of blurred brownish light. As I looked at it I saw the door darken suddenly. A man rushed through it, incredibly alive out of the throttling reek, crossed the room in a bound, and leaped upon the sill between us. He was all in black — black cap, black mask, black domino, black hose, and his sword in a black scabbard. So swift was his rush, so impetuously did he leap, that I wondered whether he had meant to set foot on the window sill or had expected to land on a balcony outside. As it was, he planted his feet fairly on the sill, but just missed pitching forward into space. He toppled, bent double, and saved himself only by touching the outer sill with the outstretched fingers of his tense arm.

At this instant, as the masked, black domino rocked unsteadily, head and shoulders into the outer air, the zany flung the noose— for it was by no means a snarl of rope, but a cunningly knotted slip-noose, which he had held inside his closed left hand— over the newcomer's head, and, with one lightning movement, half dragged, half hurled him from the sill. In the air the victim spread out arms, legs, and cloak, like a huge bat. His hands windmilled wildly, searching for the rope, and failed to touch it. For a horrid instant, as the rope checked its headlong dive, the inverted body gave a jolted bob upward before it turned, then it lurched over, the hands making one last clutch for the rope, and again missing. The cord drew up straight as a rapier blade and held. The body was violently and convulsively agitated once or twice, and its sword, tossed out of the upturned scabbard, struck the corner of the cornice with a sharp clang, bounded up, flashing in the red glare, and shot down a long line of light to the pavement. Its owner's corpse writhed sinuously and then merely gyrated limply at the end of the rope. Its feet were not much more than a man's height above the cornice. My abomination of the sight unnerved me so that my impulse to hurl myself upon the murderer was swallowed up in a physical sickness in which I nearly fell from the sill. As I clung to the stone jamb the malignant white shape, dagger in hand, addressed me:

"Sir, I know who you are. I was about to piece my rope with your carcass. Since this intruding stranger has spared me the necessity, and since the rope is now long enough to be useful, I offer you the' courtesy of the first opportunity to descend."

Speechless with horror and loathing I tottered, a helpless jelly, against the jamb. He stood, his long dagger in his right hand, eyeing me through his whitened mask.

"Ah," he went on. "You hesitate. You can pass me easily, descend by the bracket, the rope the cornice, and the rain-spout. You will not? Then you will pardon me if I leave you. You will find it warm here before long. Nevertheless, if this place is more to your liking than the street, I do not dispute your right of choice. A good night to you. I am tempted indeed to put this dagger into you before I go. But I reflect that, though you do not look it, you might have the strength and sleight to avoid my thrust, and perhaps even throw me down. I shall not risk it. If you overcome your panic and are not burned here or killed by falling, if, in short, you get down alive and get home, you shall hear from me in the morning."

He leaned over, tore off and threw away his false face and revealed to me a countenance I did not then recognize. Next, his dagger in his teeth, he dived for the bracket, caught it with both hands, swung himself off into space, gripped the rope, first with one hand, then with both, went down it, stood on the dead man's shoulders, let himself down the rope till he clasped the corpse, wriggled down it, embracing it close, dislodging the cloak which sailed down the air like some huge bird and settled upon the pavement far out into the court near the sword.

The escaping villain finally gripped one ankle of the corpse with each hand, swung himself and all above him gently sideways until his feet found the cornice, steadied himself by the feet of the corpse, let go and stood up, edged gingerly along the cornice to the rain-spout, and slid down it smoothly. Once on the pavement he leaped into the air, clapping his hands and crowing, scampered briskly across the court, stopped to pick up his victim's cloak and sword, turned to glance up at me, waved me a derisive farewell, and, after a hideous caper of joy, vanished into the black throat of the wagon archway, running like a fiend.

My eyes came back to the dangling body, revolving slowly now. Its mask hung beside the neck and the back of the head was toward me. I felt myself doomed. I knew I could never summon up resolution to escape by that road. In fact, I am sure that from losing my hold, as I actually later descended, and being dashed to pieces on the pitiless stones, nothing saved me but the set fixed purpose of vengeance, which made me not a man, but an automaton.

I looked behind me. The glare of the fire was bright through the smoke, dense volumes of which poured out of the window above my head, and the heat of which I could feel.

At that instant came a terrific dragging crash, a brief darkness, and an agonized wail of groaning shouts. The roof of the theater had fallen in. The smoke sucked back through the window above me, and momentarily I felt cool air on my face. The next instant the volume and intensity of the light redoubled as the overarching stream of sparks became a firmament of fire. The court grew bright to the deepest, darkest corner, eddies of air swept past me, the corpse swung round, its mask blew away wholly. Hideously bowed the head was, the chin driven into the bosom. But I knew the face of my brother Ettore.

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15: A Tryst with Ghosts

Edgar Wallace

1875-1932

McClure's Magazine, Jan 1924

ONCE UPON a time, in the far-away days of war, there was a mythical or semi-mythical individuality whom the British Tommies named "Quiff." He was credited with a prescience which was quite inhuman. He knew when the divisions were mustering for attack; he warned commanders of impending raids; at his word battalion chiefs were superseded… for he had an uncanny instinct for weakness. He was the guardian angel of five hundred miles of trench line, and was visualized as a white-bearded gentleman, with a halo. When the enemy put a price on his head of 50,000 marks (in those days marks were real money), thus proving his tangibility, the line was immensely startled.

Nigel Porter was sitting in the shade of his porch one warm day in early December, reading a Vancouver newspaper. It was the anniversary of a battle in which the Canadians had been heavily engaged, and the writer of the reminiscences which he was reading recalled the fact that "Quiff" had warned the British higher command of the coming attack. This interested Nigel considerably. Later he saw a brief reference to himself, and the mention of his having been blown up by a land mine… The paper dropped from his hands, and he jumped with an exclamation. He picked the paper up and looked at the date. Then he went into his house—too big for a well-to-do bachelor—and began routing out cablegrams. In four days he was speeding eastward with two suit-cases and a sense of guilt.

If anybody had asked him why he was taking that cold and very comfortless journey, he would have been ashamed to say. A man who owns farmlands in British Columbia views the barrier of the Rockies, which keeps in check the shrivelling winds that roar down from the frozen north, with the same satisfaction that a man, snuggled by a log fire, a pipe between his teeth and a book on his knee, might regard the frosted windows and the stout walls of the house that keeps from him the howling gale without.

And here he was, a lover of comfort, and a man who grudged every second of the cold months that took him from sight of the Pacific and smell of cedar pine, tossing and pitching in the gray, wintry seas of the Atlantic, in the teeth of a nor'westerly gale. The ship was not a large one, the accommodation was fairly poor, his fellow-passengers… but there was a Compensation.

The Compensation was amazing in many respects, for Nigel was not a woman's man, and was almost, if not wholly, unromantic. If you forgot the extraordinary mission which was bringing him across the December sea, you might have said that romance had no place in his equipment. The Compensation

came aboard at New York, and their eyes met for the fraction of a second before she stumbled upon the slippery deck (it had been snowing) and was caught in his strong arms. There was a murmured apology, an embarrassed second of incoherence on his part, and then she had vanished. He did not see her till the second day out, and then, literally, he fell against her. He was on his way to the smoke-room, a journey which involved alternate climbing and sliding along the rubber-tiled alleyways, as bow and stern of the Beranic went up and down like delicately poised scales. Again she was in his arms for just as long a time as it might take to count three, quickly.

On the fifth day he found her on deck, stretched in a chair, inadequately covered by a rug. A little self-consciously, he arranged the covering without invitation and they talked.

Her name was Elsie Steyne, and she was traveling alone. She gave no explanation, such as fellow-passengers in the first moments of their confidence give to one another, for her solitary journey. When, after another day's acquaintance, he offered her the opportunity of telling him why she was coming to Europe in Christmas week, she hesitated.

"… It is a queer season for holiday-making in Europe," she confessed, after a long and thoughtful pause, and then immediately; "but I am going to see my brother. He went over last week; it was arranged that I should spend Christmas with my mother in Ohio. But somehow… I am a little worried about him. And you, Mr. Porter? I suppose you are traveling on business?"

Nigel's blue eyes twinkled for a second.

"No, not exactly," he said, and she looked up at him in surprise.

"The fact is," he said humorously, "I have a tryst with a ghost!"

To Nigel's astonishment he saw the color fade from her face. She struggled up into a sitting position and stared at him.

"A tryst with a ghost?" she repeated, and her voice shook.

For a moment he was dumbfounded by the effect that his words had produced on the girl, and he cursed himself for his grim jest. Probably she was nervous; there were people in the world in whom the word "ghost" produced a shiver.

"I am very sorry, Miss Steyne," he said apologetically. "I am afraid I startled you."

Her eyes did not leave his.

"What do you mean?" she asked huskily. "A tryst with a ghost? Where did you hear…"

She stopped suddenly and, seeing the quick rise and fall of her breast, the pallor of her face, the queer, hunted look in her blue eyes, Nigel Porter became almost incoherent in his efforts to undo the mischief which his ill-timed remark had produced.

"The fact is," he began, and then, realizing how fantastical and absurd the explanation that he was on the point of making would sound, he laughed. "It was a startling thing to say, wasn't it? I am afraid I have a latent streak of melodrama in my composition. Won't you please forgive me?"

She settled back in her chair, and for a while she gazed blankly out over the tumbling gray seas.

"It was stupid of me," she said, "but my nerves aren't in very good order. Would you ask the steward to bring a cup of tea?"

No further reference to his unfortunate *faux pas* was made. He saw her the next morning, when the ship was rolling through the English Channel and Devonshire was a gray blur on the northern horizon; and she was apparently so absorbed in the book she was reading that she only gave him a nod before she returned to a steadfast scrutiny of the printed page.

The morning on which they reached Cherbourg, Nigel made an unpleasant discovery. He had been out of his cabin all the morning, walking the deck, in the hope of seeing the girl. She did not put in an appearance, however, and he went down to his cabin to prepare for lunch, with an unsatisfactory feeling that the morning had been wasted. It was then that he had his shock. Somebody had been in his cabin. A trunk which was under the bed had been pulled out, and a brief examination of its contents told him that it had been subjected to a hurried but thorough search. His passport, which he kept with other confidential papers under his pillow, was lying open on the bed. He rang the bell, and presently the steward came.

"No, sir," said the man in surprise, "I've seen nobody in your cabin. I've been on this deck all morning. Are you sure?"

"Of course I'm sure," said Nigel irritably. "Look at this trunk. And that— I haven't opened that passport since I left New York."

The steward looked round inadequately.

"There's nobody been in your cabin, sir, as far as I know," he said. "Of course, I haven't been watching it all the time, because I've been in the other cabins, tidying up."

"Have you seen any of the passengers near the cabin?"

"No, sir—yes, I have," he corrected himself. "I saw that young lady in 87, Miss Steyne. She came down this alleyway by mistake. Her cabin is two alleyways farther along."

Nigel scratched his chin in perplexity. "Of course, it couldn't have been Miss Steyne," he said, and the steward, who was happy to agree that it could not have been anybody at all, nodded.

"It has been a clean trip," he said. "There are none of the gangs on board that usually work the line, and yours is the first complaint we've had— would you like me to report this to the purser?"

Nigel shook his head.

"It doesn't matter," he said.

When the steward had gone, he made a search of his belongings to find if anything had been stolen; but although the intruder had evidently made a systematic search of his cabin, nothing was missing. With his passport had been a letter of credit, and this apparently had not been taken from its envelope. He was a fool, anyway, to leave important papers lying around, he thought, and congratulated himself that he had not suffered any important loss.

For some reason he could not escape the conviction that the search of his cabin had been conducted with no other object than the examination of his passport. The intruder had been searching for a document. What that document was, Nigel could not guess, though he racked his brains for some plausible explanation.

He saw the girl on the tender at Cherbourg, and to his surprise she was not only friendly but communicative.

"I am going to Paris," she said. "You are going too, of course? Where are you staying?"

"I am not going to Paris," said Nigel, with a little smile.

Again that look of suspicion and doubt appeared in her eyes, but she made no further inquiries. He saw her through the Customs, and then made his way in a crazy taxi-cab to the town, where, if his cabled instructions had been carried out, the car would be waiting. He found it— an ancient French machine, but suitable for his purpose. His temptation was to stay the night in Cherbourg, but the time at his disposal was short. He had landed at the French port on the 24th, and he had less than twenty-four hours to reach his destination.

As the car bumped and jolted along the pavé road that makes at long last for Calais, he could only wonder at himself. It did not seem real, and yet it was true that, a little more than a fortnight ago, he had been sitting in the sunlight of British Columbia, when there had come to him, in the nature of a shock, the realization that he was fast approaching the Christmas of 1921. Once he remembered the date, there was no other course for him to follow, being the man he was. He did not regret his lost comfort; he did not feel sorry for himself; he did not even regret that he was in a car of uncertain age, rattling through a driving blizzard that obscured all view, that made the pavé so slippery that the car skidded every five minutes. And even when, tired and hungry, with the dawn just showing in a gray sky, he came into the station square at Ypres, he did not regard his adventure as being outside the limitations of common sense.

Ypres was changed, he noticed silently. Handsome red villas were going up in all directions. The Cloth Hall still pointed its maimed tower to the sky, and here and there, half covered with snow, he recognized a gaunt shell of a house

that had been as familiar to him in those painful days of war as the Eros in Piccadilly Circus, or the Statue of Liberty in New York Harbor.

Early as was the hour, there were workers abroad. A goods train was shunting noisily in a station which had been shelled out of existence in his days. Facing the station was a brand-new hotel, and he got down, gave an instruction to the weary-eyed French driver, and carried his bag into the dimly lit hallway. A sleepy man was sweeping the floor.

"Yes, monsieur, Major Burns is here, but he is leaving by the early train for England. He has twice been down to look for you. I will tell him you have come."

Nigel made his way to the big, bare dining-room, redolent of new paint, and lighted by one yellow carbon lamp. A table had been laid near the window for two. This he noted with satisfaction. Burns had evidently received his cable and the wire he had sent from Cherbourg.

There was a quick step in the hall, and the Major, wearing his long military overcoat and (as usual) his cap perched rakishly on the side of his head, hurried in and offered a gloved hand.

"I've been over to the station to fix my trunks. I'm going on a month's leave," he said. "So you've come back to the salient? They all do. Had some fellows here last week who knew you. We were talking of old 'Quiff.' Do you remember him? Wonder what happened to the old devil… never heard about him— hasn't even written a book! Do you remember that night when he tipped us off about the gas attack…?"

The Major rattled on reminiscently. He was a red-faced man, with a bright, twinkling eye, and he was obviously amused. Men who are amused at seven o'clock on a raw, wintry morning, amidst the sorrowful shades of Ypres, may be written down as possessing a strong sense of humor.

"I suppose you think I'm mad?" asked Nigel, when the other stopped.

Major Burns pursed his lips.

"I don't think so," he said at last. "No, I really don't think so. I suppose that, having lived in the midst of so much madness these past years, one takes a generous view of human sanity. 'Joseph'"—he beckoned the waiter—"'coffee.' I can give you half an hour," he said to his vis-à-vis. "And by the way, here is the plan so far as I can reconstruct it from the old operation plans of 1917."

He lugged out from his inside pocket a thin sheet of paper and spread it on the table.

"There's Kelners Farm, there's Dead Horse Lane, and that's Windy Corner. You'll recognize Windy Corner; it's one of the few bits of the old battlefield that have been left. I had to get this, by the way, from the Belgians, because it was on their front, I think, that this happened. I must tell you that Houthulst Forest has entirely disappeared; you won't find any trace of it, except a few straggling trees… it's a perfect beast of a place, Nigel."

Nigel was examining the plan, and now looked up as he folded the paper.

"Do you think I'm mad?" he said again.

"I don't, probably because my knowledge of the circumstances is more or less shaky. If I had a larger understanding of what occurred, perhaps I would be less charitable. I only know that you cabled me from British Columbia that you wanted me to discover the exact place where you had been blown up, because you wished to spend Christmas Day in the hole. Which reminds me that I had a Belgian officer in here yesterday— Colonel de Villiers— who said that the mine craters still exist."

Again Nigel nodded.

"It was lucky your being here. Luckier still that I remembered you were here, Burns," he said, and then: "I'll tell you the story. It happened on Christmas Eve of 1917. As a matter of fact, it happened on the twenty-third of December. I was attached to the French corps that was holding the southeastern edge of Houthulst Forest. I was working in connection with the Canadian Intelligence, and my instructions were to go over to discover the exact composition of the force that was holding the Belgian front. The G.O.C. wasn't at all satisfied with the intelligence he got from the Belgian staff, who were supposed to be au fait with these particulars, and of course the French had only recently come up, and were not in a position to give any accurate information."

He paused and looked out of the window, and it came to him sadly that this was not the Ypres he knew, that smouldering furnace of a town, bombarded daily, hourly, every minute; rocked and shaken by high explosive shells, a town that rumbled and thundered night and day, year in and year out; a gray, dusty town, where long files of men crept cautiously under such walls as existed, on their way to the muddy inferno which lay along the ridges of the north. Sadly, for he was thinking of all the brave hearts that were stilled and the bright, boyish faces that had gone and were no more seen.

"The curious thing was that, at the identical moment I went over into No Man's Land, a young German officer was sent to discover the exact composition of the French force that was holding this sector. We met half-way. To be exact, I stumbled over wire in the dark and slid down the edge of the crater—"

"Crater No. 17," murmured Major Burns. "The hole is about twenty metres away."

The other nodded.

"I was on the Hun before he knew what had happened. We both pulled our guns, and by the most extraordinary coincidence we both missed fire. It looked like being a real caveman's scrap, when the German chuckled and threw down his pistol.

"'I think, my friend,' he said, 'we had better both go home again. It would be stupid for us to batter one another with our fists, for that would probably mean

that we should both be killed in attempting to get back to our lines in a condition of exhaustion.'

"The logic of it struck me, and we just sat down and talked. We not only talked, but we exchanged confidences of a highly compromising character. He told me that the 18th Bavarian Division was on our front, and I responded politely with the information that the 43rd French Division was on his front. He didn't seem as interested as he might have been. He produced a packet of sandwiches, I had a flask of whisky, and we sat and talked, until—

"'It will be daylight soon,' he said. 'I think we'd better go home.'

"So we shook hands, and we were half-way up the crumbling slope of the crater, when there broke out the most infernal fire that I had ever heard before or since. The air seemed to be so thick with traveling bullets and shells that you couldn't have put up a fishing-line without getting it cut in three places simultaneously!

"'I think we'd better wait,' shouted the German.

"So we retired again to the shell-hole, and prayed fervently— at least I did— that 'shorts' on either side would be few, and in other directions than ours. Dawn broke, and the fury of the fire did not abate. And then I found myself talking about things I never thought I would ever discuss with a German. He didn't tell me a great deal about himself, except that he was an officer in a Bavarian regiment. His English was perfect. I could have sworn, when I first saw him, that he was an American. Well, to cut a long story short, there we sat throughout the day. Christmas Eve came, and there was no slackening of the fire. Every gun, big and little, on both sides was in action, and we spent the night counting Verey lights and speculating upon what was the cause of this unseemly disturbance. Christmas Day came, but still there was practically no reduction of fire. I afterwards discovered that this was the preliminary bombardment to an attack which the French commander had planned, and which he hoped would bring the Forest into his hands. Poor soul! He never lived to know what a hell-trap that forest was! Later in the morning the fire seemed to die down just a little, and I crawled to the edge of the shell-hole to take observation. What happened I don't know. I woke up to find my head on the German's knee, and he was draining the last dregs of my whisky flask down my throat. My head was wet and aching, my eyes seemed to be filled with sand.

"'Shell fragment,' he said. 'I don't think you're badly hurt. I have two sandwiches and half a bottle of water left. We look like having a peach of a Christmas Day.'"

"What was his name— did you find that out?" asked Burns curiously.

"Karl— that was all he told me," replied Nigel. "That fellow was some prophet! I think both sides must have brought up all their reserves of artillery and trebled their stock of machine-guns. It was when I realized that we had had

no 'Quiff' message from G.H.Q. that I knew the initiative was on our side. It was toward the evening that Karl said:

"'If we get through this, my friend, I should like to have a little dinner with you somewhere.'

"'When and where?' I asked.

"He thought a long time before he answered.

"'Maybe we shan't get through,' he said. 'But I'll tell you what I will do. If I am alive in four years' time, I will come and meet you here; and if you're not here, well, I'll keep a tryst with your ghost.'"

"Why four years?" asked Burns.

"He thought the war would last another three. He made it four to give us a chance of getting a peace. Of course, it was lunatic, it was childish, it was anything you like to call it, but there and then we made our agreement. It was the sort of thing that schoolgirls do, and… anyway, there's something peculiarly simple and infantile about the full-grown soldier.

"It was eleven o'clock that night that the French fired the mine. My own impression was that it was just underneath where I was sitting, but my recollections of the circumstances are necessarily hazy. I just remember saying to Karl that I had a passion for marrons glacés, when I felt somebody slapping my face, and looked up into the eyes of an English surgeon who was in his shirt-sleeves. I just remember hearing him say 'He's all right,' and then I sort of dozed myself out of Belgium and woke up in an English hospital. The body of Karl was found and buried on the very edge of the crater. We took the ground and lost it, took it again and lost it again, but I know he was found, because the officer who picked me up after the mine was exploded was in the next bed to me in hospital, and he told me all about it, how they found this poor chap quite dead and buried him."

"Hum!" said Major Burns, gulping down his coffee. "I think you're a fool, but it's the sort of fool thing I should have done myself."

He scrutinized the lowering skies through the window.

"You're going to have a cold Christmas Day, my lad," he said.

"I never expected any other."

Just before noon Nigel came out of the hotel with a basket, a bottle of wine, and a box of cigars, which he stowed away in one of the car's pockets. He himself went to the wheel, and in a few minutes was passing slowly westward. The car sped down a perfectly gravelled road, and passed cemetery upon cemetery crowded with white crosses, whiter for the rim of snow which lay upon their edges, and presently, turning abruptly from the main road, he came almost instantly into a region of desolation. The new red buildings were behind him. The road was no longer a road, it was a succession of deep holes and ruts. Sharp-cornered paving-blocks jagged up from the sodden earth, stark walls that

had once been houses loomed through the sleet on either side. Broken and jagged barbed wire, red with rust, trailed its tangled lengths by the roadside, and here and there he saw the drunken outlines of block-houses where men had lived horribly and had died in fear. Presently the car was lurching between flat heaps of rubble that the rains of the years had washed and pounded into little unrecognizable plateaux. A village had been here once. Rotting weeds showed where love and life had been, and holes gaped in the roadway before a medley of black, wrought-iron crosses which marked a graveyard that had been set around a church. There was no church.

These sights were too familiar to sadden him, though now it seemed, in the years of peace, that the ugliness of war was emphasized more strongly. He came at last, by the aid of his map, and after constant backings and changing of direction, and guided at the very last by a miserable-looking man who lived with his family in a deserted dug-out, to the edge of what was once a forest but was now nothing. For all that was left of the trees were blackened stumps and dead white stems that stood starkly against the cold sky.

He stopped his car, got out and took his bearings, and instinctively he went straight to the place he sought. The hole was deep: it was half filled with yellow water. To the right was a smaller hole, also water-logged, and he smiled faintly, contrasting the calm of that winter day with no other sound in his ear but the sough and sigh of the wind that swept down from the dunes, and the tawny sea beyond, with the deafening fury of the storm that swept this spot four years before. There was the grave: he saw it at once, a small black cross above a slab of concrete that the Government had laid down to prevent farmers ploughing ground hallowed by sacrifice.

Bending down, he read: "Allemand." Karl was "Allemand." In small letters was the word "officer." It was not usual to distinguish the rank of the dead. That was all. It stood for life and humor and courage, and God knows what hope. It stood also for an enemy, but that was incidental and meant nothing to Nigel Porter, sitting there on the edge of the crater, with his fur collar pulled up about his ears.

His eyes roved around the starved landscape. It was such a foul setting for the rare jewel of a soul.

"Well, my friend," he said— his tone was one of heavy jocularity; insensibly he had recalled, and was reproducing, the very tone of the man whom he apostrophised— "here am I, after four years! I owe you an apology, because I nearly forgot my promise. If I hadn't read in a Vancouver newspaper some highly flattering references to my services during the war, I should certainly have broken my promise."

There was such quiet dignity in that black cross, such serenity in the truncated pyramid of concrete that marked the abiding-place of this "Allemand,

officer," that his voice died down. The dead are so immensely superior to the living that he felt abashed.

He sat for a long time, his gloved hands crossed on his knees, his head bent forward in thought, and then he got up with a sigh and dusted his coat.

"Well—" he began, and his jaw dropped.

Standing on the farther rim of the crater was a tall figure, draped from neck to feet in a long, dark cloak. It was bareheaded, and the wind had blown a lock of fair hair across the forehead of the man. Nigel stared open-mouthed, speechless, and then:

"Karl!" he croaked.

The voiceless figure stirred.

"Thank God! I thought you were a ghost."

In a dozen strides Nigel had flown round the edge of the crater and gripped the outstretched hand.

"What are you doing here!" he asked huskily… "Stupid question to ask, but you are—"

The other laughed.

"I'm keeping a tryst with a ghost," he said, with a twinkle in his eyes. "You see, I thought you were… dead. When our people took the ground they found a grave here."

Suddenly he gripped the other by the arm.

"Let's get out of this beastliness," he said. "My God! How hideous war is!"

They had nearly reached the sunken road where the stranger's car was waiting, when Nigel remembered that he had some responsibility in the matter of transportation.

"You can go back for it. I want to introduce you to my sister. By the way, my name is Steyne."

And there Nigel found the girl.

IT WAS after dinner in the barrack-like dining-room of the Hotel d'Ypres that Nigel Porter heard and understood.

"No, I'm not a German," said Mr. Charles Steyne, pulling gently at his cigar, "I am an American. I was in the war from the very first month."

"On the German side?"

"Oh yes, I was on the German side. That is to say, I wore the German uniform and served in the German Intelligence Department. There were five of us originally, and we were employed by the most effective secret service that the world has ever known. I speak respectfully of Great Britain. Of the five only one is left alive. Taylor was shot in Hanover after being tried by court-martial for running the secret wireless by which the British were informed of the movement of German ships. Jack Holtz suffered a like fate on the Russian

frontier, when he was trying to get through to the Russian headquarters the news of the German concentration— he owed his death to the treachery of the Russian General Staff, by the way; and Micky Thomas was killed by a night watchman at the German Foreign Office after he had got away with some very important documents which were necessary to your Whitehall. Long Bill Fenner was accidentally killed by an aeroplane bomb dropped by an American airman. And I was almost, but not quite, destroyed by the explosion of a mine… Well, you know that story. If Elsie had only told me that she had met you on the ship, and had given me a hint about your keeping a tryst with ghosts— a phrase of mine, by the way, which, coming from you, so startled her that she nearly jumped out of her skin—"

Nigel was looking at the girl, and under his eyes the color came to her face, for she had anticipated the question which was coming.

"Why did you want to see my passport, Miss Steyne?" he asked.

"I think I can answer that," replied Charles Steyne. "My sister doesn't realize that war ever ends, and that the price the Germans put on the head of their pet enemy is no longer offered. She pictured you a member of the Government, tracking down the shy and elusive Quiff—"

"Quiff!" gasped Nigel. "Then you were—?"

The other nodded.

"I was on my way to the French lines to tell the General not to attack. If I had told you I was 'Quiff' you would not have believed me."

"Phew!" Nigel sat back in his chair and stared at the girl, but she averted her eyes.

"I'm glad… you're not exactly German," he said, a little gauchely. "I don't believe in mixed marriages… I mean…"

The ghost smiled wisely.

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16: Sir Dominick's Bargain: A Legend of Dunoran

Sheridan Le Fanu

1814-1873

All the Year Round, 6 July 1872

(A revised version of "The Fortunes of Sir Robert Ardagh,
Dublin University Magazine Mar 1838)

IN THE EARLY autumn of the year 1838, business called me to the south of Ireland. The weather was delightful, the scenery and people were new to me, and sending my luggage on by the mail-coach route in charge of a servant, I hired a serviceable nag at a posting-house, and, full of the curiosity of an explorer, I commenced a leisurely journey of five-and-twenty miles on horseback, by sequestered cross-roads, to my place of destination. By bog and hill, by plain and ruined castle, and many a winding stream, my picturesque road led me.

I had started late, and having made little more than half my journey, I was thinking of making a short halt at the next convenient place, and letting my horse have a rest and a feed, and making some provision also for the comforts of his rider.

It was about four o'clock when the road, ascending a gradual steep, found a passage through a rocky gorge between the abrupt termination of a range of mountain to my left and a rocky hill, that rose dark and sudden at my right. Below me lay a little thatched village, under a long line of gigantic beech-trees, through the boughs of which the lowly chimneys sent up their thin turf-smoke. To my left, stretched away for miles, ascending the mountain range I have mentioned, a wild park, through whose sward and ferns the rock broke, time-worn and lichen-stained. This park was studded with straggling wood, which thickened to something like a forest, behind and beyond the little village I was approaching, clothing the irregular ascent of the hillsides with beautiful, and in some places discoloured foliage.

As you descend, the road winds slightly, with the grey park-wall, built of loose stone, and mantled here and there with ivy, at its left, and crosses a shallow ford; and as I approached the village, through breaks in the woodlands, I caught glimpses of the long front of an old ruined house, placed among the trees, about half-way up the picturesque mountain-side.

The solitude and melancholy of this ruin piqued my curiosity, and when I had reached the rude thatched public-house, with the sign of St. Columbkill, with robes, mitre, and crozier displayed over its lintel, having seen to my horse and made a good meal myself on a rasher and eggs, I began to think again of the wooded park and the ruinous house, and resolved on a ramble of half an hour among its sylvan solitudes.

The name of the place, I found, was Dunoran; and beside the gate a stile admitted to the grounds, through which, with a pensive enjoyment, I began to saunter towards the dilapidated mansion.

A long grass-grown road, with many turns and windings, led up to the old house, under the shadow of the wood.

The road, as it approached the house skirted the edge of a precipitous glen, clothed with hazel, dwarf-oak, and thorn, and the silent house stood with its wide-open hall-door facing this dark ravine, the further edge of which was crowned with towering forest; and great trees stood about the house and its deserted courtyard and stables.

I walked in and looked about me, through passages overgrown with nettles and weeds; from room to room with ceilings rotted, and here and there a great beam dark and worn, with tendrils of ivy trailing over it. The tall walls with rotten plaster were stained and mouldy, and in some rooms the remains of decayed wainscoting crazily swung to and fro. The almost sashless windows were darkened also with ivy, and about the tall chimneys the jackdaws were wheeling, while from the huge trees that overhung the glen in sombre masses at the other side, the rooks kept up a ceaseless cawing.

As I walked through these melancholy passages— peeping only into some of the rooms, for the flooring was quite gone in the middle, and bowed down toward the centre, and the house was very nearly un-roofed, a state of things which made the exploration a little critical— I began to wonder why so grand a house, in the midst of scenery so picturesque, had been permitted to go to decay; I dreamed of the hospitalities of which it had long ago been the rallying place, and I thought what a scene of Redgauntlet revelries it might disclose at midnight.

The great staircase was of oak, which had stood the weather wonderfully, and I sat down upon its steps, musing vaguely on the transitoriness of all things under the sun.

Except for the hoarse and distant clamour of the rooks, hardly audible where I sat, no sound broke the profound stillness of the spot. Such a sense of solitude I have seldom experienced before. The air was stirless, there was not even the rustle of a withered leaf along the passage. It was oppressive. The tall trees that stood close about the building darkened it, and added something of awe to the melancholy of the scene.

In this mood I heard, with an unpleasant surprise, close to me, a voice that was drawling, and, I fancied, sneering, repeat the words: "Food for worms, dead and rotten; God over all."

There was a small window in the wall, here very thick, which had been built up, and in the dark recess of this, deep in the shadow, I now saw a sharp-featured man, sitting with his feet dangling. His keen eyes were fixed on me, and

he was smiling cynically, and before I had well recovered my surprise, he repeated the distich:

"If death was a thing that money could buy,
The rich they would live, and the poor they would die.

"It was a grand house in its day, sir," he continued, "Dunoran House, and the Sarsfields. Sir Dominick Sarsfield was the last of the old stock. He lost his life not six foot away from where you are sitting."

As he thus spoke he let himself down, with a little jump, on to the ground.

He was a dark-faced, sharp-featured, little hunchback, and had a walking-stick in his hand, with the end of which he pointed to a rusty stain in the plaster of the wall.

"Do you mind that mark, sir?" he asked.

"Yes," I said, standing up, and looking at it, with a curious anticipation of something worth hearing.

"That's about seven or eight feet from the ground, sir, and you'll not guess what it is."

"I dare say not," said I, "unless it is a stain from the weather."

"'Tis nothing so lucky, sir," he answered, with the same cynical smile and a wag of his head, still pointing at the mark with his stick. "That's a splash of brains and blood. It's there this hundhred years; and it will never leave it while the wall stands."

"He was murdered, then?"

"Worse than that, sir," he answered.

"He killed himself, perhaps?"

"Worse than that, itself, this cross between us and harm! I'm oulder than I look, sir; you wouldn't guess my years."

He became silent, and looked at me, evidently inviting a guess.

"Well, I should guess you to be about five-and-fifty."

He laughed, and took a pinch of snuff, and said:

"I'm that, your honour, and something to the back of it. I was seventy last Candlemas. You would not a' thought that, to look at me."

"Upon my word I should not; I can hardly believe it even now. Still, you don't remember Sir Dominick Sarsfield's death?" I said, glancing up at the ominous stain on the wall.

"No, sir, that was a long while before I was born. But my grandfather was butler here long ago, and many a time I heard tell how Sir Dominick came by his death. There was no masther in the great house ever sinst that happened. But there was two sarvants in care of it, and my aunt was one o' them; and she kep' me here wid her till I was nine year old, and she was lavin' the place to go to Dublin; and from that time it was let to go down. The wind sthript the roof, and the rain rotted the timber, and little by little, in sixty years' time, it kem to what

you see. But I have a likin' for it still, for the sake of ould times; and I never come this way but I take a look in. I don't think it's many more times I'll be turnin' to see the ould place, for I'll be undher the sod myself before long."

"You'll outlive younger people," I said.

And, quitting that trite subject, I ran on:

"I don't wonder that you like this old place; it is a beautiful spot, such noble trees."

"I wish ye seen the glin when the nuts is ripe; they're the sweetest nuts in all Ireland, I think," he rejoined, with a practical sense of the picturesque. "You'd fill your pockets while you'd be lookin' about you."

"These are very fine old woods," I remarked. "I have not seen any in Ireland I thought so beautiful."

"Eiah! your honour, the woods about here is nothing to what they wor. Al the mountains along here was wood when my father was a gossoon, and Murroa Wood was the grandest of them all. All oak mostly, and all cut down as bare as the road. Not one left here that's fit to compare with them. Which way did your honour come hither— from Limerick?"

"No. Killaloe."

"Well, then, you passed the ground where Murroa Wood was in former times. You kem undher Lisnavourra, the steep knob of a hill about a mile above the village here. 'Twas near that Murroa Wood was, and 'twas there Sir Dominick Sarsfield first met the devil, the Lord between us and harm, and a bad meeting it was for him and his."

I had become interested in the adventure which had occurred in the very scenery which had so greatly attracted me, and my new acquaintance, the little hunchback, was easily entreated to tell me the story, and spoke thus, so soon as we had each resumed his seat:

"It was a fine estate when Sir Dominick came into it; and grand doings there was entirely, feasting and fiddling, free quarters for all the pipers in the counthry round, and a welcome for every one that liked to come. There was wine, by the hogshead, for the quality; and potteen enough to set a town a-fire, and beer and cidher enough to float a navy, for the boys and girls, and the likes o' me. It was kep' up the best part of a month, till the weather broke, and the rain spoilt the sod for the moneen jigs, and the fair of Allybally Killudeen comin' on they wor obliged to give over their divarsion, and attind to the pigs.

But Sir Dominick was only beginnin' when they wor lavin' off. There was no way of gettin' rid of his money and estates he did not try— what with drinkin', dicin', racin', cards, and all soarts, it was not many years before the estates wor in debt, and Sir Dominick a distressed man. He showed a bold front to the world as long as he could; and then he sould off his dogs, and most of his horses, and gev out he was going to thravel in France, and the like; and so off with him for

awhile; and no one in these parts heard tale or tidings of him for two or three years. Till at last quite unexpected, one night there comes a rapping at the big kitchen window. It was past ten o'clock, and old Connor Hanlon, the butler, my grandfather, was sittin' by the fire alone, warming his shins over it. There was keen east wind blowing along the mountains that night, and whistling cowld enough, through the tops of the trees, and soundin' lonesome through the long chimneys.

(And the story-teller glanced up at the nearest stack visible from his seat.)

So he wasn't quite sure of the knockin' at the window, and up he gets, and sees his master's face.

My grandfather was glad to see him safe, for it was a long time since there was any news of him; but he was sorry, too, for it was a changed place and only himself and old Juggy Broadrick in charge of the house, and a man in the stables, and it was a poor thing to see him comin' back to his own like that.

He shook Con by the hand, and says he:

"I came here to say a word to you. I left my horse with Dick in the stable; I may want him again before morning, or I may never want him."

And with that he turns into the big kitchen, and draws a stool, and sits down to take an air of the fire.

"Sit down, Connor, opposite me, and listen to what I tell you, and don't be afeard to say what you think."

He spoke all the time lookin' into the fire, with his hands stretched over it, and a tired man he looked.

"An' why should I be afeard, Masther Dominick?" says my grandfather. "Yourself was a good masther to me, and so was your father, rest his sould, before you, and I'll say the truth, and dar' the devil, and more than that, for any Sarsfield of Dunoran, much less yourself, and a good right I'd have."

"It's all over with me, Con," says Sir Dominick.

"Heaven forbid!" says my grandfather.

"'Tis past praying for," says Sir Dominick. "The last guinea's gone; the ould place will follow it. It must be sold, and I'm come here, I don't know why, like a ghost to have a last look round me, and go off in the dark again."

And with that he tould him to be sure, in case he should hear of his death, to give the oak box, in the closet off his room, to his cousin, Pat Sarsfield, in Dublin, and the sword and pistols his grandfather carried in Aughrim, and two or three thrifling things of the kind.

And says he, "Con, they say if the divil gives you money overnight, you'll find nothing but a bagful of pebbles, and chips, and nutshells, in the morning. If I thought he played fair, I'm in the humour to make a bargain with him to-night."

"Lord forbid!" says my grandfather, standing up, with a start and crossing himself.

"They say the country's full of men, listin' sogers for the King o' France. If I light on one o' them, I'll not refuse his offer. How contrary things goes! How long is it since me an Captain Waller fought the jewel at New Castle?"

"Six years, Masther Dominick, and ye broke his thigh with the bullet the first shot."

"I did, Con," says he, "and I wish, instead, he had shot me through the heart. Have you any whisky?"

My grandfather took it out of the buffet, and the masther pours out some into a bowl, and drank it off.

"I'll go out and have a look at my horse," says he, standing up. There was sort of a stare in his eyes, as he pulled his riding-cloak about him, as if there was something bad in his thoughts.

"Sure, I won't be a minute running out myself to the stable, and looking after the horse for you myself," says my grandfather.

"I'm not goin' to the stable," says Sir Dominick; "I may as well tell you, for I see you found it out already— I'm goin' across the deer-park; if I come back you'll see me in an hour's time. But, anyhow, you'd better not follow me, for if you do I'll shoot you, and that 'id be a bad ending to our friendship."

And with that he walks down this passage here, and turns the key in the side door at that end of it, and out wid him on the sod into the moonlight and the cowld wind; and my grandfather seen him walkin' hard towards the park-wall, and then he comes in and closes the door with a heavy heart.

Sir Dominick stopped to think when he got to the middle of the deer-park, for he had not made up his mind, when he left the house, and the whisky did not clear his head, only it gev him courage.

He did not feel the cowld wind now, nor fear death, nor think much of anything but the shame and fall of the old family.

And he made up his mind, if no better thought came to him between that and there, so soon as he came to Murroa Wood, he'd hang himself from one of the oak branches with his cravat.

It was a bright moonlight night, there was just a bit of a cloud driving across the moon now and then, but, only for that, as light a'most as day.

Down he goes, right for the wood of Murroa. It seemed to him every step he took was as long as three, and it was no time till he was among the big oak-trees with their roots spreading from one to another, and their branches stretching overhead like the timbers of a naked roof, and the moon shining down through them, and casting their shadows thick and twist abroad on the ground as black as my shoe.

He was sobering a bit by this time, and he slacked his pace, and he thought 'twould be better to list in the French king's army, and thry what that might do

for him, for he knew a man might take his own life any time, but it would puzzle him to take it back again when he liked.

Just as he made up his mind not to make away with himself, what should he hear but a step clinkin' along the dry ground under the trees, and soon he sees a grand gentleman right before him comin' up to meet him.

He was a handsome young man like himself, and he wore a cocked-hat with gold-lace round it, such as officers wears on their coats, and he had on a dress the same as French officers wore in them times.

He stopped opposite Sir Dominick, and he cum to a standstill also.

The two gentlemen took off their hats to one another, and says the stranger:

"I am recruiting, sir," says he, "for my sovereign, and you'll find my money won't turn into pebbles, chips, and nutshells, by to-morrow."

At the same time he pulls out a big purse full of gold.

The minute he set eyes on that gentleman, Sir Dominick had his own opinion of him; and at those words he felt the very hair standing up on his head.

"Don't be afraid," says he, "the money won't burn you. If it proves honest gold, and if it prospers with you, I'm willing to make a bargain. This is the last day of February," says he; "I'll serve you seven years, and at the end of that time you shall serve me, and I'll come for you when the seven years is over, when the clock turns the minute between February and March; and the first of March ye'll come away with me, or never. You'll not find me a bad master, any more than a bad servant. I love my own; and I command all the pleasures and the glory of the world. The bargain dates from this day, and the lease is out at midnight on the last day I told you; and in the year"— he told him the year, it was easy reckoned, but I forget it— "and if you'd rather wait," he says, "for eight months and twenty eight days, before you sign the writin', you may, if you meet me here. But I can't do a great deal for you in the mean time; and if you don't sign then, all you get from me, up to that time, will vanish away, and you'll be just as you are to-night, and ready to hang yourself on the first tree you meet."

Well, the end of it was, Sir Dominick chose to wait, and he came back to the house with a big bag full of money, as round as your hat a'most.

My grandfather was glad enough, you may be sure, to see the master safe and sound again so soon. Into the kitchen he bangs again, and swings the bag o' money on the table; and he stands up straight, and heaves up his shoulders like a man that has just got shut of a load; and he looks at the bag, and my grandfather looks at him, and from him to it, and back again. Sir Dominick looked as white as a sheet, and says he:

"I don't know, Con, what's in it; it's the heaviest load I ever carried."

He seemed shy of openin' the bag; and he made my grandfather heap up a roaring fire of turf and wood, and then, at last, he opens it, and, sure enough,

'twas stuffed full o' golden guineas, bright and new, as if they were only that minute out o' the Mint.

Sir Dominick made my grandfather sit at his elbow while he counted every guinea in the bag.

When he was done countin', and it wasn't far from daylight when that time came, Sir Dominick made my grandfather swear not to tell a word about it. And a close secret it was for many a day after.

When the eight months and twenty-eight days were pretty near spent and ended, Sir Dominick returned to the house here with a troubled mind, in doubt what was best to be done, and no one alive but my grandfather knew anything about the matter, and he not half what had happened.

As the day drew near, towards the end of October, Sir Dominick grew only more and more troubled in mind.

One time he made up his mind to have no more to say to such things, nor to speak again with the like of them he met with in the wood of Murroa. Then, again, his heart failed him when he thought of his debts, and he not knowing where to turn. Then, only a week before the day, everything began to go wrong with him. One man wrote from London to say that Sir Dominick paid three thousand pounds to the wrong man, and must pay it over again; another demanded a debt he never heard of before; and another, in Dublin, denied the payment of a thundherin' big bill, and Sir Dominick could nowhere find the receipt, and so on, wid fifty other things as bad.

Well, by the time the night of the 28th of October came round, he was a'most ready to lose his senses with all the demands that was risin' up again him on all sides, and nothing to meet them but the help of the one dhreadful friend he had to depind on at night in the oak-wood down there below.

So there was nothing for it but to go through with the business that was begun already, and about the same hour as he went last, he takes off the little crucifix he wore round his neck, for he was a Catholic, and his gospel, and his bit o' the thrue cross that he had in a locket, for since he took the money from the Evil One he was growin' frightful in himself, and got all he could to guard him from the power of the devil. But to-night, for his life, he daren't take them with him. So he gives them into my grandfather's hands without a word, only he looked as white as a sheet o' paper; and he takes his hat and sword, and telling my grandfather to watch for him, away he goes, to try what would come of it.

It was a fine still night, and the moon— not so bright, though, now as the first time— was shinin' over heath and rock, and down on the lonesome oak-wood below him.

His heart beat thick as he drew near it. There was not a sound, not even the distant bark of a dog from the village behind him. There was not a lonesomer spot in the country round, and if it wasn't for his debts and losses that was

drivin' him on half mad, in spite of his fears for his soul and his hopes of paradise, and all his good angel was whisperin' in his ear, he would a' turned back, and sent for his clargy, and made his confession and his penance, and changed his ways, and led a good life, for he was frightened enough to have done a great dale.

Softer and slower he stept as he got, once more, in undher the big branches of the oak-threes; and when he got in a bit, near where he met with the bad spirit before, he stopped and looked round him, and felt himself, every bit, turning as cowld as a dead man, and you may be sure he did not feel much betther when he seen the same man steppin' from behind the big tree that was touchin' his elbow a'most.

"You found the money good," says he, "but it was not enough. No matter, you shall have enough and to spare. I'll see after your luck, and I'll give you a hint whenever it can serve you; and any time you want to see me you have only to come down here, and call my face to mind, and wish me present. You shan't owe a shilling by the end of the year, and you shall never miss the right card, the best throw, and the winning horse. Are you willing?"

The young gentleman's voice almost stuck in his throat, and his hair was rising on his head, but he did get out a word or two to signify that he consented; and with that the Evil One handed him a needle, and bid him give him three drops of blood from his arm; and he took them in the cup of an acorn, and gave him a pen, and bid him write some words that he repeated, and that Sir Dominick did not understand, on two thin slips of parchment. He took one himself and the other he sunk in Sir Dominick's arm at the place where he drew the blood, and he closed the flesh over it. And that's as true as you're sittin' there!

Well, Sir Dominick went home. He was a frightened man, and well he might be. But in a little time he began to grow aisier in his mind. Anyhow, he got out of debt very quick, and money came tumbling in to make him richer, and everything he took in hand prospered, and he never made a wager, or played a game, but he won; and for all that, there was not a poor man on the estate that was not happier than Sir Dominick.

So he took again to his old ways; for, when the money came back, all came back, and there were hounds and horses, and wine galore, and no end of company, and grand doin's, and divarsion, up here at the great house. And some said Sir Dominick was thinkin' of gettin' married; and more said he wasn't. But, anyhow, there was somethin' troublin' him more than common, and so one night, unknownst to all, away he goes to the lonesome oak-wood. It was something, maybe, my grandfather thought was troublin' him about a beautiful young lady he was jealous of, and mad in love with her. But that was only guess.

Well, when Sir Dominick got into the wood this time, he grew more in dread than ever; and he was on the point of turnin' and lavin' the place, when who should he see, close beside him, but my gentleman, seated on a big stone undher one of the trees. In place of looking the fine young gentleman in goold lace and grand clothes he appeared before, he was now in rags, he looked twice the size he had been, and his face smutted with soot, and he had a murtherin' big steel hammer, as heavy as a halfhundred, with a handle a yard long, across his knees. It was so dark under the tree, he did not see him quite clear for some time.

He stood up, and he looked awful tall entirely. And what passed between them in that discourse my grandfather never heered. But Sir Dominick was as black as night afterwards, and hadn't a laugh for anything nor a word a'most for any one, and he only grew worse and worse, and darker and darker. And now this thing, whatever it was, used to come to him of its own accord, whether he wanted it or no; sometimes in one shape, and sometimes in another, in lonesome places, and sometimes at his side by night when he'd be ridin' home alone, until at last he lost heart altogether and sent for the priest.

The priest was with him a long time, and when he heered the whole story, he rode off all the way for the bishop, and the bishop came here to the great house next day, and he gev Sir Dominick a good advice. He toult him he must give over dicin', and swearin', and drinkin', and all bad company, and live a vartuous steady life until the seven years bargain was out, and if the divil didn't come for him the minute afther the stroke of twelve the first morning of the month of March, he was safe out of the bargain. There was not more than eight or ten months to run now before the seven years wor out, and he lived all the time according to the bishop's advice, as strict as if he was "in retreat."

Well, you may guess he felt quare enough when the mornin' of the 28th of February came.

The priest came up by appointment, and Sir Dominick and his raverence wor together in the room you see there, and kep' up their prayers together till the clock struck twelve, and a good hour after, and not a sign of a disturbance, nor nothing came near them, and the priest slep' that night in the house in the room next Sir Dominick's, and all went over as comfortable as could be, and they shook hands and kissed like two comrades after winning a battle.

So, now, Sir Dominick thought he might as well have a pleasant evening, after all his fastin' and praying; and he sent round to half a dozen of the neighbouring gentlemen to come and dine with him, and his raverence stayed and dined also, and a roarin' bowl o' punch they had, and no end o' wine, and the swearin' and dice, and cards and guineas changing hands, and songs and stories, that wouldn't do any one good to hear, and the priest slipped away, when he seen the turn things was takin', and it was not far from the stroke of

twelve when Sir Dominick, sitting at the head of his table, swears, "this is the best first of March I ever sat down with my friends."

"It ain't the first o' March," says Mr. Hiffernan of Ballyvoreen. He was a scholard, and always kep' an almanack.

"What is it, then?" says Sir Dominick, startin' up, and dhroppin' the ladle into the bowl, and starin' at him as if he had two heads.

"'Tis the twenty-ninth of February, leap year," says he. And just as they were talkin', the clock strikes twelve; and my grandfather, who was half asleep in a chair by the fire in the hall, openin' his eyes, sees a short square fellow with a cloak on, and long black hair bushin' out from under his hat, standin' just there where you see the bit o' light shinin' again' the wall.

(My hunchbacked friend pointed with his stick to a little patch of red sunset light that relieved the deepening shadow of the passage.)

"Tell your master," says he, in an awful voice, like the growl of a baist, "that I'm here by appointment, and expect him down-stairs this minute."

Up goes my grandfather, by these very steps you are sittin' on.

"Tell him I can't come down yet," says Sir Dominick, and he turns to the company in the room, and says he with a cold sweat shinin' on his face, "for God's sake, gentlemen, will any of you jump from the window and bring the priest here?" One looked at another and no one knew what to make of it, and in the mean time, up comes my grandfather again, and says he, tremblin', "He says, sir, unless you go down to him, he'll come up to you."

"I don't understand this, gentlemen, I'll see what it means," says Sir Dominick, trying to put a face on it, and walkin' out o' the room like a man through the press-room, with the hangman waitin' for him outside. Down the stairs he comes, and two or three of the gentlemen peeping over the banisters, to see. My grandfather was walking six or eight steps behind him, and he seen the stranger take a stride out to meet Sir Dominick, and catch him up in his arms, and whirl his head against the wall, and wi' that the hall-doore flies open, and out goes the candles, and the turf and wood-ashes flyin' with the wind out o' the hall-fire, ran in a drift o' sparks along the floore by his feet.

Down runs the gintlemen. Bang goes the hall-doore. Some comes runnin' up, and more runnin' down, with lights. It was all over with Sir Dominick. They lifted up the corpse, and put its shoulders again' the wall; but there was not a gasp left in him. He was cowld and stiffenin' already.

Pat Donovan was comin' up to the great house late that night and after he passed the little brook, that the carriage track up to the house crosses, and about fifty steps to this side of it, his dog, that was by his side, makes a sudden wheel, and springs over the wall, and sets up a yowlin' inside you'd hear a mile away; and that minute two men passed him by in silence, goin' down from the house, one of them short and square, and the other like Sir Dominick in shape,

but there was little light under the trees where he was, and they looked only like shadows; and as they passed him by he could not hear the sound of their feet and he drew back to the wall frightened; and when he got up to the great house, he found all in confusion, and the master's body, with the head smashed to pieces, lying just on *that spot*.

The narrator stood up and indicated with the point of his stick the exact site of the body, and, as I looked, the shadow deepened, the red stain of sunlight vanished from the wall, and the sun had gone down behind the distant hill of New Castle, leaving the haunted scene in the deep grey of darkening twilight.

So I and the story-teller parted, not without good wishes on both sides, and a little "tip," which seemed not unwelcome, from me.

It was dusk and the moon up by the time I reached the village, remounted my nag, and looked my last on the scene of the terrible legend of Dunoran.

17: Red Fingers

Beatrice Grimshaw

1870-1953

Blue Book, March 1950

AFTER the War, it seemed to me that there was little change in Papua, in that part of it, at least, that I had chosen to call mine. I had gone away and come back, and there was the mangrove wall, a hundred feet high, severing land from sea, and west from east, where the big troubles had been. And the endless wind-beaten black-sand beaches. And my store, empty of goods, but with its iron roof and sago walls unbroken. Have little, and you can face a world war calmly.

I was stacking on the shelves the goods that I had brought up from Cairns— native trade goods, tins and calicoes and tobacco and hurricane lamps— and whistling to myself as I savored the quiet, the peace of this outback spot; hearing the slap of little waves on the black-sand shore, and the thrash of palmleaves on the roof above me, and nothing else at all.

Thirty years, I thought, and I saw them running past me like telegraph poles past a train, since I was a lad of eighteen; and the end of it was this long dusky shed with a door at each end, and a bunk beneath the counter; naked barefoot buyers of my goods, and peace, peace.

Forthwith the door was darkened, the seaward door with the Gulf of Papua behind it, and a white man came in.

Without greeting or preliminary he said: "There's a grapevine rumor come down the coast from Mararu Station. A white woman's gone bush."

I got to my feet. "The hell she has!" I said. This man was a newcomer; I understood better than he what such a disaster might mean. Death, in a dozen ways, or happenings worse than death. The best one could hope for, silence.

It had been late when I finished my unpacking; into the wide Gulf waters stained by the gloomy Fly, the sun was quickly sinking. The day was almost done, and with it, hour by hour, died one more chance, one slender hope for a woman's life.

I wasted no time. Throwing food and biscuits, quinine and a rolled-up mosquito net, into a bag, I called to my boys to help along with the whale-boat. We got it afloat in a matter of minutes, and out into the tossing unsheltered waters of the Gulf. Not till we had the sail up, and were leaning hard away from the wild nor'west wind, did I take time to speak to my fellow-traveler.

"You're Keenan, aren't you?" I said, shouting against the ugly shriek of the wind. "One of the forestry blokes that's come down from Port Moresby."

He nodded; it was difficult to speak with that hag of a nor'wester tattering at the sail and clawing your face.

"You're Bonnington," he shouted. "I've heard of you: everyone knows you. That's why—" The wind caught him in the jaws.

Ahead of us, in the growing dusk, rose a cape that offered temporary shelter. Jerry Keenan was eager to speak. "They say you know more about the jungle than— whff!" He wiped the splash of spray from his face.

"I've had thirty years of New Guinea, more or less, to learn it," I said. "Who's the woman, and how did she get lost?"

"She didn't get lost," he shouted. "She ran away."

"Into the jungle?"

"Yes."

"What the devil for? Mad?"

"I— I don't think so. She—"

"Who was she?" Unconsciously, I had used the past tense; I saw him wince as if he had been struck.

"Ruth Cullen."

"Miss Cullen— why, she was to have married Bob Leighton day after tomorrow; Bob has gone to Daru to fetch the parson— she wasn't due at the station for another two days."

"The natives seem to know all about it. The boat she was to have come by broke down, and she had the chance of a trading ketch calling in. And something went wrong— no, I don't know what—"

"I reckon I do," was my comment. Dark had come down on the unquiet Gulf; a changed course had given us a favorable slant, nearer to the invisible shores where the Bamu and the Aird poured forth their unclean floods. Nobody there, nobody behind us; before us another fifty miles of desolate sandbank, reef and river bar, to Mararu Station, alone in its tiny clearing, sole oasis in an uninhabited hundred miles of mangrove and black beach.

"You know? What was it?" Keenan eagerly cried. I did not choose to answer. I remembered now that this young fellow not long resident in the country, was said to be a lover, an unsuccessful one, of the girl whose fate we were discussing. He was good-looking, kindly and popular; but against him was Bob Leighton's position as Resident Magistrate, Leighton's personal charm, of which he made unscrupulous capital, and Ruth Cullen's almost crazy passion for her bridegroom-to-be.... Little, fair creature that she was, she had laid her heart at Leighton's feet— and her money with it, though that was not generally discussed.

The wind was with us; dawn had hardly broken, yellow and threatening, before I steered the whaleboat into the little bay that sheltered the Government station. Behind the Magistrate's bungalow, with its scarlet croton hedges, its avenue of scented frangipanni, rose, at the back of a narrow clearing, the blue-black jungle wall, tall mangroves set with their feet in the gloomy marsh water,

leading by who-knew-what dark ways to end in who-knows-where. They do not want us, those unchanging ramparts of the unknown; sinister they are, and evil; yet I have lived within call of them for thirty years; and my grave, I think, will one day be dug in the black-sand beaches beside them.

Sail down, we ran in with the crew hard at the oars; the sun was up now, and showed, at the end of the little jetty, waiting, a figure dressed in white.

"Thank God!" burst from Keenan's lips. "She's safe."

"Way 'nuff!" I ordered, and steered to the tidewashed steps. My sight is keen; I knew that figure; I had not been altogether surprised to find it— and it was not Ruth's.

Keenan, hurrying along the jetty with myself close behind, saw his mistake. "Who is it?" he demanded, not without hope. This girl might know—

I said: "It's the prettiest girl in Papua— Alexa Massey."

Now, I thought, the fat's in the fire. The natives know everything. Down the coast had come to my humble shack, not long before, tales about Leighton and this beautiful girl, tales that might, as people say, have set the place on fire. Certainly Alexa could set on fire whom she liked, and when. Slim, high-breasted as a very Juno, eyes passionate, dark; hair red-gold as sunset, arched small feet in silver sandals, legs slender, rising to white knees curved like shells— Alexa caught and held the eye, so that you could not, for a moment, hold judgment on her for any or all of her defects. (Did I know her well? Well enough, and that's that.)

Keenan, for one, was not impressed by her. The image in his mind must have been different: a little fair gentle creature, with pale angelic curls, and eyes as blue as mint flowers of Port Moresby. To Alexa he threw an eager question or two:

"Where is Ruth? What's happened? Is she safe? Are the police out looking?"

Even as he spoke, he pushed her aside, and ran for the Residency steps. Alexa lit a cigarette and followed him. She drew a puff or two before she answered, addressing herself to me:

"The little fool," she said, "ran away into the jungle day before yesterday."

"Why?"

"Do I know? She hadn't been here half an hour— the ketch was hardly out of sight. Bob would have turned up in a day or two. He took his police; there was some trouble down the coast... The cooky and his wife were here. Maybe Ruth took offense at something."

"And showed it," I said, "by choosing snakes and crocodiles rather than the company she found."

Alexa laughed shortly. "You're nearer than you think. I'd see her in a crocodile's jaws, and not stir a foot. She took Bob from me."

"You overstayed your visit here, so that she found you in possession. And you let her go to her death— probably."

"I didn't know she was going to fly off her nut," the girl said, puffing at her cigarette. "I let the houseboys go looking for her. They haven't come back. I don't care if they never do— or her."

"What you are," I told her, "is a murderess— or next to it."

The strange thing was that she resented that. "I might— do a good deal," she said. "But I've never had anyone's death on my conscience."

"On your what?" I asked, and without waiting for reply, ran up the veranda steps. I met Keenan coming out.

"Not a sign of Ruth," he said despairingly. "Look here. I want to show you something."

It was the double bedroom— the only bedroom furnished in the house. Alexa's goods were all over it.

I said, not quite believing myself: "She may have been using it when he was away."

"Yes, and when he wasn't," came Alexa's voice behind us.

"She's let Ruth know everything, and driven her insane," Keenan cried. "That ketch should have taken Alexa away before ever Ruth came along. Bob may be a villain, but he's not quite a cad."

His face was yellow with the weariness and strain of the long night; there was dangerous fire in his eyes. I got between him and Alexa; I didn't want to see those crisping fingers of his meet round her neck.

"We're wasting time," I warned. "Let's get some food and go." There were some remains of breakfast in the livingroom, but he would not touch it.

"How do you know she hasn't poisoned it?" he asked.

Again Alexa showed resentment. "I'd let anything happen to anyone who stood in my way," she declared. "But kill I never would."

It seemed to me that she was clinging in a manner almost pathetic to the one rag of conscience she possessed. It didn't surprise me; after thirty years of the jungle, nothing could. But Keenan looked at her as if her soul, to his mind, were as black as her face was fair. "Come on," was all he said.

I filled my pockets with what food I could find, and accompanied by the whaleboat crew, started off.

Middle-aged though I am, I beat Keenan in the first hurry through the half-cleared swamp behind the station. The mangrove forest came next; and there we went slowly, helped by the long clearing-knives of the crew. The high bronzed trunks, knitted together by tangles of black basketry, rose toward the invisible sky as closely set as a bed of rushes; dark water and dark mud were underfoot; the shining back of a snake showed up against a fallen log.

"There's no crocodiles," Jerry said, in a low voice, as if he judged loud speaking to be dangerous. "There's plenty, but you don't see them," I told him. Even as I spoke, a prostrate log quietly changed itself into a dripping head with green eyes and long sneering jaw, close upon us. I fired my Navy .45 into the wicked eyes, and the head and the half body that had followed it slid under the mud again.

"The crocodiles aren't the only risk," I told Jerry.

"Natives?" he asked breathlessly. The pace that I was keeping, spurred on by what I knew, had winded him.

The boat-boys cracked ahead of us with their clearing-knives; we splashed knee-deep through the inky, ill-smelling mud. I did not answer at once. Jungle-wise, I had by now good hopes that none of the few inhabitants of the mangrove forest had met with the half-crazed girl. But there were other risks.

"No," I said briefly. We halted for a minute's rest.

Not very far away, a groaning bellow rose, and filled the air, and sank again.

"That what you mean?" Jerry asked, and again I said: "No."

All day we had looked for signs of Ruth, and found none. Now we were coming out where the mangroves grew thinner; here and there an oasis of sago palms appeared— their huge, snakeskin-patterned columns rising far into the green-shaded sky. Now at last there was to be a little hope— a scrap of blue ribbon showed, lying in the mud. Jerry seized upon it, with a cry of relief. "She's been here— she's alive!" he panted.

"Maybe," I said. There were worse things than death in the jungle. And now we were to meet with one.

Dry patches of soil showed up where the sun broke through into a clearing made by a fallen tree. Flowers grew in the light; spider lilies, begonias, frost-white orchids. And bushes— there were a few small bushes, with dark green shining leaves, and bunches of red fruit curiously shaped, like children's fingers dipped in thickened blood.

I am something of a black tracker; I went on my knees, and examined the ground, the fallen tree, the bushes and the fruit. Jerry, a figure almost comic in his mud-soaked, thorn-ripped clothing, watched me eagerly.

"Found anything?" he asked.

My answer, as I rose to my feet, was; "No, thank God!" He looked at me as if he did not understand.

"Back," I said. "Back to where we found the ribbon. We may be in time."

At that point I had blazed the trees; we found it easily. I led the boat-boys and Jerry, as quickly as the ground allowed, in a new direction. It was darker here; there were no more flowers, no bushes. There was at last, thank heaven, the print of a woman's foot— another—

I saw it first, but Jerry cried out quicker. We had found the girl, Ruth Cullen, lying on the ground as one dead.

She was not dead, however. She opened her eyes and feebly tried to speak. I got out my whisky flask, put a spoonful between her lips, and waited till it took effect before allowing Jerry to raise her from the ground. "Are you all right? What happened?" he eagerly asked her.

"Bob," she said feebly. "Where's Bob?"

"Back at the station by now, I reckon," I told her. "He'd have been there at the right time, but your boat was early."

She was weakly crying. "That— that woman," she sobbed. "She told me he belonged to her. She said he'd sent her away, but she came back. I couldn't bear it; I think I was mad. I've nearly died— I wish I had!"

"You're starving," Jerry said, groping in my hag for food.

"I've had nothing to eat," she told him. "There was water— but nothing else all the time."

"Nothing at all?" I asked.

"Why, no," she said, with her teeth in a biscuit. "If there was, I was too frightened. The crocodiles and the snakes— " She broke off, shivering.

WE made a stretcher, and carried her, with the help of the boat's crew. We camped that night, and walked, carrying Ruth, nearly all the next day. Once or twice, only in breaks among the trees, I saw the flash of the red finger-shaped fruit. I do not think anyone else noticed it. The backward journey was easier than the first, by the route that the boys had cleared with their knives. We were nearing the station, in late afternoon, when Ruth, who had almost recovered, suddenly sat up on the stretcher, and cried: "Look, look! It's a ghost!"

Jerry shouted, I stared, the boatboys all but dropped their burden. There was, just there, a small clearing in the jungle, and through it a strange figure was slowly advancing, a figure in white, with arms outstretched and head uplifted. No spirit— a woman, but one who seemed to be either sleepwalking or crazed.

Jerry seized Ruth in his arms as if to protect her. I walked up to the hesitating, stumbling figure of the woman and cried: "Alexa!"

"Who is it?" she asked, stretching out her hands to me.

"Joe Bonnington— don't you know me?" I asked her.

The blood was running cold in my veins, as I realized what had happened.

"Is anyone else there?" she asked, turning her head about. "Isn't it sunup yet?"

I put an arm about her. "Ruth Cullen and Jerry are here," I said. I could not answer the rest of her question, since I knew that sunup, for Alexa, would never dawn again....

We reached the station late that afternoon, after a nightmare journey. Ruth, I thought, was making the most of her troubles; after all, she had not met with the grave harm that had struck Alexa. I lied to Alexa, assuring her that she would be all right in a day or two; but I drew Jerry aside, and told him the truth. Holding her hand, I guided her through the rest of the terrible journey. I thought the border of the swampland never would be reached; but it came at last, and with it Bob Leighton, back again, with his police, starting off to comb the jungle in search of his bride.

There were greetings, exclamations; we hastened to the house. As soon as I could, I spoke to Leighton.

"If you don't set your men, and my men, and any others you can get, clearing out that devilish stuff from the jungle hereabouts, you ought to lose your job," I flatly told him. "Didn't know? It was your business to know that the Queensland finger cherry had got in! It's the devil to spread— they've had it listed as a noxious weed in Queensland. How did it get here? If it wasn't here already— which I doubt birds could easily carry it by Torres Straits. You look to it."

Leighton was hardly listening. He stood there in the sinking sunlight, shadowed by the Government bungalow, his eyes on Alexa.

"What's the matter?" he demanded, rather than asked.

Alexa answered, slowly moving toward him. I had never seen her more beautiful, with her dark eyes wide and strangely bright, her Juno shape scarce hidden by the torn white silks she wore.

"I'm blind," she said. "I ate finger cherries."

Leighton stood staring at her. He did not take the hands that she held out.

"The finger cherry?" he said. "But that's incurable!"

Ruth, slipping off the stretcher to her feet, confronted him now.

"You beast!" she said, and turned to blind Alexa, putting an arm about her. Alexa had turned whiter than even the day in the jungle had made her, but she did not speak.

"What took you off into the jungle? Wasn't one fool enough?" the magistrate asked Alexa. I could see that he was boiling with rage against both of them.

"They didn't come back," she said tonelessly, "and I went to see—" On that word she broke off.

"And you," he said to Ruth, "you must have been insane; I think everyone's insane—"

Jerry moved over to Ruth. "I'm taking her out of this," he stated crisply. "To Daru; there's a missionary there. You and your"— he just suppressed an ugly word— "can work things out for yourselves."

"You're all coming in to be washed and fed," I declared. "I'm sure Mr. Leighton just forgot to ask you."

He grunted assent, and strode away.

"Nasty temper," Jerry commented. "You're well rid of him, Ruthie!"

Alexa, standing alone in the fading sunlight, seemed to have been forgotten by everybody.

I went up to her, and took her hand. "You were sorry and came after to give help," I said. "You had no food, and ate the cherries. You never sent Ruth into the jungle to blind her. That's proved."

"No," she said, "I didn't know. I wouldn't have— "

"I understand," I told her. There was a minute's silence; the others had gone into the house. It was growing darker there on the edge of the jungle; the swift and sinister afterglow of the New Guinea sunset was wrapping us round— me, who knew well that cruel "twilight of the gods;" Alexa, to whom it was already, and always would be, night.

"Alexa," I said, "will you marry me?"

She did not answer directly. "Leave me a little," she said.

I left her, standing motionless in the dusk; it was kindness, I thought, to give her a chance to recover herself, to re-orient her life, or what must be her life from now. I did not go far away, but the voice of Jerry called me, for a minute, to the house.

"We want your boat at once," he said. "Ruth won't stay the night. She's promised me," he added joyfully.

I gave the order and went back. Does no one think of Alexa? I asked myself; and went to find her.

She was not where I had left her. She was not at the house. Now it was almost night on the black-sand beach. I sprung my torch, and looked — and looked— and found. Straight into the dark water that faintly rippled below, went those small footsteps— went, and did not come back.

———————

18: The Deathless Miracle

Jeffery Farnol

1878-1952

Collier's, 21 March 1931

NO ONE, especially a woman, ever troubled to look at John Martin twice, until.... But I have begun this narrative at the wrong place. Let us try again:

John Martin was neither tall nor short, with eyes and hair of no particular color— a very ordinary young man who, having a passionless loathing for office work, did as little as possible in an office all day long. He caught the 8:35 every morning, trudged the too-familiar quarter mile to his place of business, got through the day's dull routine somehow and returned by the 6:15 to a dingy boarding house in a dismal suburb. One of a countless host was John, quite lost in the ruck, a human cipher with no particular ambitions, no dream of nobler future until upon his purview dawned Princess Charming and the Gross Animal.

The Princess was a little too thin, much too pale, and slightly shabby; the Gross Animal rubicund of visage, full-bodied, and loud in every way.

It was on the crowded 8:35 of a bitter morning and John had just shaken open his newspaper when he became aware of her, and for two reasons: first, because she sat in the opposite corner and was looking at him, and, second, because she shivered in the icy blast of the open window. John, not recognizing her (of course) for the Princess, would have begun to scan his paper but he saw a small hand, in its worn glove, reach forth a little diffidently and essay quite vainly to pull up and close the heavy window; therefore, after a momentary hesitation, John touched the brim of his second-best (or business) hat and, seizing the strap, jerked up the window.

The Princess in a soft, shy voice had murmured her thanks and John had turned to his paper when the Gross Animal burst upon the scene— that is to say, the Plethoric Person, leaning across this slim, shrinking and very timid Princess, snatched the strap and let down the window with a crash:

"Sir!" he boomed, glaring round about him truculently. "Nothing like fresh air! Air's life!"

John, about to extinguish himself behind his newspaper, saw that she still watched him, and, moved by sudden adventurous impulse, he spoke:

"Excuse me, but... are you cold?"

"Yes, I... am rather," she answered, in the same shy murmur, "but it... oh, it doesn't matter, please don't trouble."

Actuated by a second strange, wild impulse, John instantly jerked the window up again and in the utmost perturbation awaited the expected outburst.

"Well, of all the confounded insolence!" roared the Gross Animal, and reached for the window strap; but his plump hand in its natty, fur-lined glove was struck aside by a bony fist and his scowling eyes looked into other eyes (of no determinate color) that yet held a gleam not to be disregarded.

"Go on," said John, his commonplace features desperately grim, "touch that window and you get a punch right on the snout!" And John's chin looked as craggy as his fist.

The Gross Animal half rose in terrific wrath, he snorted, blinked and— subsided.... Somebody chuckled, papers rustled and the 8:35 sped on while in this thronged compartment reigned that silence which is, and ever hath been, so typically British.

At Cannon Street, long before the train had reached a standstill, John swung lightly to the platform and thereafter trudged, slow of foot and heavy of soul, to his day's labor and thus had passed the barrier when a soft voice arrested him:

"Please, I... I should like to thank you." John took off his hat, turned from the hurrying throng and pausing beside the bookstall became aware of two large, brown eyes and a drooping, wistful mouth. "I think it was awfully ... brave of you."

"Oh, I don't know," he answered, twiddling his hat.

"But it was, he— that man didn't dare touch the window or say anything— you scared him."

"Scared him? Did I? Me?" said John, forgetting grammar in pleased amazement. "I rather expected he'd bounce me one at any moment."

"He was afraid to, you looked so frightfully fierce. I never saw anyone so terribly determined."

"I say, do you really mean that?" asked John and caught his breath, for these brown eyes were so direct and truthful that they inspired him with a marvelous sense of confidence seldom known till now, so much so that he squared his shoulders and forgot to slouch. "I was certainly ready to try a wallop at the blighter," he nodded, and cocked his chin; then, stirred by something in these gentle, truthful eyes, he became truthful also: "Though I was in a blue funk all the time!" he confessed. "I'm no Dempsey or Gene Tunney!" Here John sighed and his shoulders drooped again.

"That only makes you all the braver!" she murmured.

"Not me!" he answered, shaking his head despondently as they moved slowly onward again. "I never fought anyone or... anything since I was a kid at school."

"You will!" said she, softly, but with such gentle conviction that John pondered this until they were descending the steps into Cannon Street. "I'm wondering just what you mean?" he inquired.

"I mean you will fight difficulties and win. You have the look of success."

"Who? Me?" said John again, staring his amazement. "But I'm only ... I've never done anything worth while."

"Because you've never tried, I think," she answered, shaking her head at him. "A man can do anything if he's determined enough and believes in himself."

"But," said John, gloomily, "I'm the sort that needs someone else to believe in me too— and nobody does, and I don't blame 'em."

"Your own folks?" she questioned.

"Dead!"

"So are mine," said she with a quick sigh.

"That's tough— on a girl!" mused John.

"Yes ... Good-by!" She nodded. "I work over there."

"What, here in Walbrook? So do I," said John. "I say, will you... would you mind... what I mean is— please, what's your name?"

"Mary— Mary Willis."

"Thanks! Mine's John Martin. Perhaps we'll meet again?"

"If you like ... perhaps," she murmured; and was gone.

"Determined! Me! Good Lord!" muttered John. Then, squaring his shoulders, he strode along the crowded pavement until, catching sight of a slim, young fellow, a little shabby yet very blithe and confident of air, he halted suddenly, amazed to see this was his own reflection cast by a mirror in a shop doorway.

ANGIER, the head clerk, greeted him with his usual matutinal scowl and the question:

"Well, what are you so dashed spry about this morning?"

"Old lad," answered John, setting his hat on its customary peg, "I'm thinking it's about time the boss gave me a raise."

"Have another think, then, my poor fish!" moaned Angier, climbing wearily upon his lofty stool.

John pulled down his cuffs, moistened and smoothed their rough edges, and two minutes later was gazing down upon that awesome object, to wit: the pink cranium of the Olympian— George Dale, Esquire, of Dale, Peek and Dale— just now spread-eagled above his morning correspondence.

"Wassmatter?" hissed this demigod, eyes cocked and a-glare beneath shaggy, white eyebrows.

"Sir, it's about a— " John swallowed violently, squared his shoulders again and continued in voice a little louder, "a raise in my salary, sir."

"Eh— eh?" barked the Olympian. "Ha, damme, a raise? How long have you been with us?"

"Five years, sir."

"How many raises have you had?"

"None, sir."

"See me later! Tell cashier! G'tout!"

So came John's first step, and he in such fever to tell Mary that daily in his luncheon hour he haunted Walbrook and the vicinity until he espied her at last, and felt himself the more elated because of the glow in her brown eyes and murmurous commendation.

Within this narrow and busy thoroughfare is, or was, a small sedate tea-shop wherein moves a sedate and elderly waitress answering to the name of Sibyl; and here daily it became the custom for this ordinary young man to break bread with the Princess, who, though she filled the place with the magic of her gentle, inspiring presence, was for him only Mary Willis, especially when of a Saturday afternoon (and the time their own) she would pour his tea and listen with such glad sympathy, her wise brown eyes upon his preoccupied, commonplace features, while he told her of his failures or successes and discussed his problems, relying upon her quick judgment.

So time sped, bringing its changes as time must. John was greatly changed, his shoulders seemed broader, his eye bright and purposeful, his slouching step quick and firm; his clothes were no longer shabby, his small bedroom had burgeoned into a cozy flat, for John was climbing apace.

Though pressure of business kept him prisoned all the week or sent him traveling far and wide, yet every Saturday afternoon brought him to the humble little teashop and mere Mary. On this particular Saturday he was so obsessed with momentous affairs that he was less aware than ever of the Princess and blind to the trouble in her gentle eyes.

"I'm glad you've succeeded, John. I knew you would!"

"But I haven't told you half yet.... Mary, they want me to go abroad.... Africa! To open a new branch!"

"Abroad, John! When?"

"At once! They're offering me... fifteen hundred a year!"

"Oh!" said she, very softly, but the teapot clattered as she set it down.

"Fifteen hundred isn't so bad to begin with, eh, Mary?"

"It's... wonderful!" she murmured.

"But Africa's a long way off and I don't like leaving old London... and you, of course. Besides, I hate change."

"It's good for us... sometimes," said she breathlessly. "And... you've changed... very much since we... first met."

"Well, I should hope so!" snorted John, glancing down at his immaculate person. "But about this offer? I've a good mind to let it go. What do you say, Mary?" Dumbly she turned to glance across the little shop, empty now save for themselves and Sibyl crocheting demurely in her corner, and with head thus averted she whispered:

"Oh, why ask me?"

"Because you will advise me for the best. You always do, you always have." Then, being the Princess, she answered, though with face still averted:

"You must go ... of course! This is the chance you've worked for.... And now... I'll go home."

"Why so early today, Mary?"

"My head aches and I'm... rather tired."

"I wonder," said John as they stepped into the street, "why you are so different from other girls? Lord, Mary, I shall hate to leave London and—"

"You'll get used to it, John. Africa must be wonderful ... and you'll be ... settling down... getting married—"

"Too busy, Mary! Besides I've never met— her yet. I mean the only woman, the dream girl."

"No, I thought you hadn't, John. But you'll find her ... in Africa perhaps. I wonder what she'll be like? Beautiful, of course."

"Well, naturally! Someone with yellow hair and blue eyes. And yet— I fancy I'm not the marrying sort—"

"And there's my bus, John ... Good-by! No, don't come any farther... I'd rather be alone, my head's cracking! You'll try to see me before... you leave?"

"Good Lord, Mary, of course!" And when she and the bus had vanished, John hurried to his cozy flat, there to lay plans for his ever-brightening future, while Mary, locked within the solitude of her bare little room, wept long and bitterly because her eyes were brown.

ENSUED a harassing week for John. Nevertheless on Saturday afternoon he entered the teashop, bright-eyed and eager, to find it a wilderness holding no more than an aged man who champed a muffin and Sibyl busied with her never-ending crocheting; crossing this howling desolation, John questioned her in tone aggrieved:

"Where is she, Sibyl? Has she gone? Couldn't she wait?"

Sibyl sniffed.

"Sir," she answered, "if you mean Miss Mary, she ain't been here since Monday, she ain't well—"

"Eh, d'you mean she's ill?"

"And, what's more, she's lost her job! Ah, lost it three weeks ago, she did—"

"Three... weeks!" gasped John. "But... why didn't she tell me?"

"P'r'aps because you never asked her. You never do. And now she's ill, pining away! Ain't been herself for a long time, but you never noticed— not you."

"No, I didn't, Sibyl, I didn't... damn it, I never even guessed—"

"No, you ain't much of a guesser, Mr. John! Some folks may think you're smart, and others, that's me, thinks you're a chump and— what's more— " Sibyl stopped, head cocked in romantic speculation for, with a sort of leap, John was off and away. He hailed a taxi and therein was whirled to a grim street of gloomy houses, into one of which he sped and, climbing many stairs, knocked upon a door, which had barely opened when:

"Mary!" said he.

"John!" she gasped.

"Why, Mary, how pale you look! May I come in? Are you ill? I never knew, never guessed—"

"Oh, I'm all right now," she answered breathlessly. "Do you mind sitting on the bed? And you ... you've come to say good-by, of course—"

"Yes, Mary. But you see I didn't want to leave London and you, so I stuck the firm for another two hundred pounds and they agreed! So I simply must go, now."

"Yes ... yes, of course you must."

"But I can't leave you like this... I mean out of a job. So I want you please to let me help you... I mean to say I'm going to lend you a hundred pounds—"

"That's sweet of you, John, but there's no need. I found a situation yesterday. I'm going to begin on Monday."

"Fine!" cried he, clasping her nerveless hand. "I'm frightfully glad. Still, I'm going to lend you that hundred— "

"No, John— please, I'd rather not! Tell me, when do you sail?"

"Next Tuesday... I say, Mary, will you— I thought perhaps you'd let me take you out to dinner and a theater—"

"No— no, oh, I couldn't! I mean... I'm not quite up to it, John dear... but thank you all the same. And, John, I... always hate saying good-by— let's say it and have done." So John clasped her slim, cold hands, felt an impulse to kiss her, checked it, muttered, "Good-by!" and heard the door close behind him.

Having descended the many stairs he paused and stood irresolute, but this time, obeying impulses, went hurrying back for a last word. Receiving no answer to his knock he ventured to open the door.... She was kneeling by the open window, her slim body shaken by great sobs, her pale face agonized with bitter grief. Now as he stood, dumb-struck and aghast, he suddenly beheld this forlorn and woeful figure through a glitter of tears that burned and stung; and these tears being manly because they were so utterly unselfish wrought such magic that he visioned her truly at last, seeing not the grief-wrung features of poor, desolate Mary but the Princess radiant with a beauty imperishable, the very woman, his ideal and inspiration.

"Mary!" he cried; and, looking up, she saw commonplace John quite transfigured by the new-born adoration of his eyes, the half-fearful entreaty of his eager, outstretched arms.

"My dear!" she whispered, "oh, my dear!"

Thus the Princess in her mercy went to him.

———————

19: The Fit-Up

Gilbert Frankau

1884-1952

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THE BUSINESS of the drama being to create illusion for the public, it follows as a consequence that the dramatist must rid himself of all private illusions— learning to survey his dramas, and more especially the actors and actresses who portray them to the public, from a standpoint of the coldest, most critical, most businesslike detachment. This, the most heartbreaking of all the heartbreaking lessons to be acquired by those whose literary star guides them to "the boards," is not learned lightly; because, in the theatrical profession, truth hides at the bottom of a very deep well, and he who drags truth up to the light of day reaps the usual reward of the prophet— stoning. Which may or may not be the reason why no novelist has so far succeeded in writing a true story of the stage!

AS HIS ARTISTIC FINGERS steered the two-seater carefully, out of London, John Hapgood, author of five reputedly successful comedies— in three of which he had himself taken a financial share— damned, under his big moustache, the entire British stage, and more particularly that shining light thereof, Miss Helene Dalby. For Miss Helene Dalby, and Miss Helene Dalby's husband, the egregious Hugh Leesthorpe, had persuaded John Hapgood to write a play for them— and now the play was within three weeks of production. That morning, in fact, had seen its fourth rehearsal.

"Hopeless!" muttered John Hapgood, nipping between a tram and a lamp-post.

"Hopeless! The woman can't act, never could act, and never will be able to act."

He visualized Helene Dalby, not as "the public" might possibly be brought to see her, but as she actually was: a woman of three-and-thirty, with the pretty, peaky face, the mean bust, and the thin arms which still enabled her to masquerade in "girl-parts"; visualized the huge in-turned feet, which not even the most expert shoemaker could camouflage, the ungainly hips, the little tricks with which Helene (and Helene's husband) had temporarily succeeded in duping the easily-pleased wartime audiences of London that Helene Dalby was an actress.

"Saxby must have been crazy," thought John Hapgood. For the business had been arranged by Monty Saxby, Hapgood's agent, during the dramatist's absence in America.

"I showed your scenario to Leesthorpe," wrote Saxby, "and he feels that, with certain alterations, the leading part would be ideal for his wife. Of course,

they're new to management, but from all I hear she has one or two fairly good people willing to back her." And Hapgood, in a weak moment, yielded.

"My fault," he ruminated, "not Saxby's. The playwright who leaves things to his agent is an ass."

And John Hapgood drove on, his suitcase rattling in the dicky behind, out of London into Chalkshire. Till Tuesday, he would forget Helene Dalby and Helene Dalby's husband, and Saxby and all the inevitable catastrophes of rehearsal-time. Perhaps he misjudged Helene Dalby; perhaps, after all, she could act. If she couldn't, of course, the play, his best play, was doomed.

But somehow the big, brown-eyed, brown-haired man in the dark blue car (except for his artistic fingers you would never have judged John Hapgood an artist; he looked more like a gentleman-farmer than a playwright) could not throw off his annoyances. The Dalby woman could *not* act. He, John Hapgood, had known that the very first moment he saw her tread the boards on his return from the States. He remembered her muffed entrance, her shrill voice; remembered saying to himself, "Saxby's made a bloomer."

She had been playing Marian Delorme in "Marian's Husband." A poor part? Quite! But that was no reason why she should play it poorly; why she should have only two tones, the shrill and the sob, in her voice. The play had been a big success? Admitted! But the success had not been achieved by Helene Dalby. Stephen Bannock, the juvenile, had made that play— though Helene Dalby look the credit for it.

"She would!" thought the dramatist, grimly, and visualized once again the pretty, peaky face, the light eyebrows, the foxy eyes, the chin which even Helene's set smile could not disguise. A prize-fighter's chin! A regular virago's chin. A chin to make one sorry even for Hugh Leesthorpe.

Not that one could be really sorry for Hugh Leesthorpe, for the unsuccessful actor with the yellow-irised shifty eyes, the ginger bread complexion, and the constantly-twitching jowl, who now— under the pretence of being a manager— proposed to live on his wife's earnings or her backer's capital.

"Faugh!" said John Hapgood, dramatist— and pulled his temper suddenly to a standstill. "I'm letting my personal dislike of them get the better of me," he thought. "Mustn't do that. Must stick to the business. What's the use of fretting? If she can't act, we must try and make her act. If the play fails, it fails."

All the same, as he drove under a crimson winter twilight up the long main street of Chalkton to the Chalkshire Arms, John Hapgood knew that if *The Young Lady in Mauve* failed, the failure would break what little of John Hapgood's artistic heart still remained unbroken. In addition to which, Mrs. John Hapgood— But Mrs. John Hapgood does not appear till the last act.

GARAGING his car in the old-time posting-stables of "the Arms," the playwright momentarily forgot his troubles. Already solitude— that desire to be alone which had driven him from an understanding wife into a county other than his own (he was, as the finish of the story shows, no Londoner)— had worked its cure. Dressing for dinner before the wood fire in the dark oak-wainscoted bedroom, Helene Dalby, and all that Helene Dalby stood for, seemed like phantoms out of another life. The "theatre"— thank the Lord!— had not yet invaded Chalkton. Chalkton, with its one long street and its three thousand inhabitants, barely supported one picture-house.

But the illusion of a theatreless Chalkton dispelled itself even before the dramatist, a trifle self-conscious in his evening-kit, sat down to his lonely meal— Dolly, the waitress, informing him, with a knowing movement of her flaxen head: "Great doings since you was last here, sir. Turned the Assembly Rooms into a playhouse, they have. Real live actors and actresses, too. None of your pictures. Not that Chalkton takes to it much, I will say."

And that, needless to add, spoiled the dramatist's dinner. He had intended to eat slowly, to linger over his port, watching the cigar-smoke spiral lazily to the black rafters, quizzing the other diners, quizzing the prints on the red-papered walls. He had intended removing himself to the bar for a final whisky, for a chat with his friend the landlord. Instead, he hurried through his meal, hurried over his wine, hurried— as the old battery horse unable to stray long from the picket-lines— to the Assembly Rooms.

HURRYING, his troubles came back to him. The "theatre" was a curse— a curse! Once a man got bitten with it he could think of nothing else. Damn the "theatre"— the "theatre" was only fit for— Helene Dalbys.

Outside the Assembly Rooms only one light gleamed faintly on one blurred poster. "Marian's Husband," read Hapgood. "The greatest success ever produced in London." He hesitated— thinking once more of the Dalby woman. Then, feeling utterly foolish, he went in.

"They're almost through the first act," grumbled the improvised attendant in the improvised box-office. "Stalls is two shillings."

Hapgood paid his money and walked slowly up the staircase. At the top of it, an undersized fellow in shabby evening-clothes took his ticket.

"Are you running this show?" asked the dramatist.

"Yes— bad luck to it!" groused the manager. "I run all the shows here. And a fat lot of good I'm doing myself!"

"Business not up to much, eh?"

"Business!" The other sniffed. "You can't do business in this dismal place. All that Chalkton wants is sixpennorth of pictures. Ruined myself, that's what I've done— trying to introduce Art into this one-horse village! Art!" The voice rose.

"That's what I've given 'em. Two good shows a week. Best I could get from London. You go in and see."

A tiny rattle of applause, more heartbreaking than the deadest silence, interrupted the monologue; and a minute later John Hapgood passed through the baized door in to the "auditorium."

Once upon a time, way back in the eighteen-sixties, the Chalkton Assembly Rooms had been the smartest dance-hall in Chalkshire. Hunt balls had been given there and "routs"; wedding breakfasts even. Once, wax candles had gleamed from the tarnished sconces, and fiddlers plunked it merrily on the dais while men in gay coats whirled crinolined beauties across the polished floor. Now the place was a "fit-up" theatre—its curtain lowered, its benches almost empty, a tumbledown piano wheezing the *entr'acte* rag-time. The dramatist took a penny programme from the piano-man, and a seat in the second row. Idly he scrutinized the programme: "*Marian Delorme!* Miss Moira Mitchell. *Herbert Delorme!* Mr. Guy Danby."

The rag-time ceased, the two electric "house-lights" were turned off, and the curtain— after a preliminary shiver— rose on "A Drawing-room at the Delormes'."

For the first two minutes (it had been ten in London, but the comedy had suffered excision ere it went "on tour") John Hapgood listened pityingly. It was all so inconceivably bad, so inconceivably pathetic—the poor stage, the poor furniture, the ill-hung back cloth, the two young men in the badly-cut clothes mouthing the badly "cut" lines under the badly manipulated "lime."

"But where *is* Marian?" ejaculated Herbert Delorme's "friend" on the stage.

"She should be here *at any moment*," emphasized Mr. Guy Danby, with a sidelong glance at the wings.

John Hapgood yawned at the obviousness of the cue. Then he forgot to yawn, forgot the poverty and the pathos of the scene in a gasp of sheer amazement. For the girl who entered to Danby's cue was that rarity of rarities, *an actress*.

An actress! No doubt about that.

From the first moment he set eyes on Moira, the dramatist *knew*. Why, even the scant rustic audience seemed aware, vaguely, of the miracle. The poor stage, the poor scenery, the two masculine puppets, were transformed. The illusion became, for ten breathless seconds, reality.

Yet, so far, Moira had not spoken! She had only "entered," as the true actress enters, quietly, holding stage and audience by the magic of a trained personality. Then she began to speak, and Hapgood was struck by the dark hair, the emotional eyes, the expressive hands, the voice, and the presence of her. If only Helene Dalby had that magic, that training, that peculiar power of pouring, not herself but the character she played, in warm emotion across the footlights!

All through that second act, and all through the final one, regretful only that he should have missed the Marian Delorme of Act I, John Hapgood sat enthralled, revelling— every keyed-up sense of him— in illusion made perfect.

OFF THE STAGE—he found her, through the manager's reluctant good offices, putting on an undistinguished hat by the aid of a cracked mirror. Moira was an ordinary, good-looking person of twenty-five, very weary (Hapgood, who knew the game, expected weariness), very much on her guard, very loath in conversation, very anxious about the cheap suitcase she had obviously just finished packing.

"You might have sent in *some* name," she said. "I believe, in the provinces, that a false one is the usual thing."

The dramatist laughed. "You're tired, Miss Mitchell. I don't wonder. Marian Delorme is a tiring part— when it's well played. And you played it, if I may be allowed to say so, perfectly."

"You're in the profession, then?" Her dark eyes grew friendlier.

"Not exactly. I'm a dramatist."

"Oh!" She scrutinized his evening-clothes. "A successful one, I hope?"

"Moderately. Hapgood's the name. You may have heard it."

"John Hapgood!" She named his five plays. "And there's a new one, *The Young Lady in Mauve*. Helene Dalby's doing it, isn't she? I wrote to her about minor parts, but, of course, she didn't answer. Why should she? I've never been on in London."

Again the dramatist laughed. "Did you ever see Helene Dalby play Marian Delorme, Miss Mitchell?"

"No."

"Or any other part?"

"No."

"If you had, you wouldn't have troubled to have written."

"Why not?" She looked at him, puzzled.

"Because," said John Hapgood, "ladies in Helene Dalby's position are not exactly anxious to give other ladies a chance."

"But that's a dreadful thing to say." The artist in Moira winced. "Dreadful. Surely, if people love the theatre, all that they think of—"

"Is keeping their own jobs in it," said John Hapgood, bitterly. And that night, walking the girl back to her lodgings, he opened his heart as he had never before opened it to a soul in that dark, backbiting world which is theatreland.

"All the same," she told him at parting, "I don't believe it. Good work counts in the end."

"Not unless the public gets a chance of seeing it." The man raised his hat. "You're off to-morrow, I suppose. Where to?"

"Nowhere in particular." The girl in the doorway smiled bravely. "London, I suppose. Thank goodness it's a cheap fare!"

"You mean?"

"Oh, the usual thing! No money for salaries."

But Moira Mitchell did not pay her own fare back to London. She went— she and her cheap suitcase, with the cheap manicure-set and the cheap make-up box—in John Hapgood's dark blue two-seater; wondering vaguely whether the man at the wheel could carry out his promise of an "understudy."

TO JOHN HAPGOOD, Tuesday's rehearsal of Helene Dalby's big scene in "The Young Lady in Mauve" was the last word in artistic horror. He sat in the front row of the empty dress-circle— Hugh Leesthorpe at his side. Below them, in the stalls, sat the producer. From the stage sounded Helene's voice— sob and scream, scream and sob.

Listening, the dramatist watched her, as a man might watch his own funeral; watched the meaningless gestures, the unchanging face, the soulless eyes.

"Great, isn't she?" whispered Leesthorpe.

The scene ended; the producer, making his way on stage, began a low-voiced conversation with Helene and the young actor who partnered her emotions. Hapgood's mind wandered, concentrated.

"About your wife's understudy," he began. "Is she better?"

"No. I'm afraid we shall have to get someone else." Leesthorpe lit himself a cigarette. As he did so, Hapgood marked the unsteady fingers, the twitching jowl; and became suddenly aware that the fellow looked queasy. The queasiness grew more apparent as Leesthorpe went on: "By the way, old man, I've been wondering if you could come up to the office for a minute or two. There's a bit of business— er— I'd like to discuss with you."

"Can't Saxby settle it?"

"No. At least, I don't think so. The fact is— er— I'd rather Saxby— You know what I mean. These agents, they don't really understand the theatre. Whereas you—"

As they made their way out of the dress-circle, they passed Moira. She bowed, offering her hand with a shy, "You told me to be here at twelve."

Hapgood introduced Leesthorpe. "Miss Mitchell is a friend of mine. Perhaps you'll see her after we've had our talk."

"Of course," Leesthorpe fidgeted uneasily. "Of course— if Miss Mitchell is a friend of yours. Anything we can do.... Perhaps Miss Mitchell could come back after lunch."

He arranged the appointment: and Moira disappeared. Hapgood, following his man up the uncarpeted stairs to one of the dressing-rooms which Leesthorpe

used as his office, knew perfectly well that— unless the point were pressed home— Moira's appointment would not be kept.

"Well?" he queried, straddling a chair. "What's the trouble, Leesthorpe?"

Helene Dalby's husband hesitated, plunged in.

"This," he managed, fumbling in his breast-pocket, and extracting a sheet of crumpled paper. "You'd better read it for yourself. I'm sure *I* don't know what to do. After all the trouble we've had, too."

John Hapgood took the proffered letter, and read slowly:—

"Dear Leesthorpe. I'm afraid it's off about that two thousand. Fearfully sorry. Unexpected losses. Hope it won't put you in a hole. I thought, up to the last moment, that I could manage it as promised."

Through the dramatist's imaginative mind, as he scrutinized the letter, flashed the unspoken thought, "He wants *me* to put up the money! *Me!* That's why he was praising his wife's acting all through rehearsal." Aloud, he said:

"I suppose you can find the money somewhere else?"

"But we can't." Leesthorpe's voice shook. "We can't. You know how tight things are everywhere."

There intervened an uncomfortable silence, broken by Hapgood's astonished: "But surely it's very unusual to take your theatre *before* you're certain of your syndicate."

Leesthorpe started in to explain. They'd had two thousand five hundred, enough to pay the advance rent, to pay for the dresses, the producer. The missing two thousand had been promised, definitely promised. In writing? Well, no— not exactly in writing. But still, he— Leesthorpe— had never imagined— Who could have imagined?

"That's all very well," interrupted the dramatist, grimly, "but what about my play? You've contracted with me to produce it."

"We've done our best," Leesthorpe's eyes grew sullen. "You've got no claim against us. So long as the curtain goes up on the first night—"

Hapgood lost his temper. "*You* might have thought of that— before you bought the play."

"My dear chap, you don't suggest we did it on purpose?"

"Don't 'dear chap' me, Leesthorpe." All the dramatist's suppressed dislike of the man rose to the surface. "You and your wife are in a hole. A deuce of a hole. You think you can bring pressure on me to help you out of it."

"Pressure!" Leesthorpe, jowl twitching, forced a smile. "Pressure! My dear fellow!" Then, wheedling: "Of course I understand your being vexed. But the play's a winner. You've always thought that. And with Helene's public! Besides,

to a rich man, to a successful playwright like yourself, what's two thousand pounds?"

HAPGOOD kept silence, many ideas passing through his mind. The position was certainly unique, dramatic; the play, properly acted, as near a certain winner as anything can be certain in theatreland. If it "went over," his two thousand might become four, six, eight. But could he find two thousand? At once! The bank would lend it, of course. But that meant pawning securities, investments. And investments were falling. Supposing the play failed! Besides, he had promised Mrs. John—

"You *will* think it over, won't you?" Leesthorpe was still talking. "Remember, Helene's never been in a failure yet."

And at that, abruptly, Hapgood's mental eye saw two visions— a London theatre and a provincial "fit-up"; Marian Delorme as played by Helene Dalby and Marian Delorme as played by Moira Mitchell.

"Leesthorpe," he began, "let's put our cards on the table. It isn't a dramatist's business to finance his own plays. But if he does, he's entitled to speak his mind. Now, I'm going to speak mine. To begin with, I don't think *The Young Lady in Mauve* suits your wife's style of acting."

Hugh Leesthorpe leaned forward from his chair as though the other had struck him in the stomach. "You don't think—" he stammered.

Calmly, John Hapgood repeated his statement; calmly, he went on to state his terms. Stating them, a new sensation came to him— the sensation of power. Always, heretofore, he had needed to go tactfully through that dark jungle which is theatreland. Now, for the first time, he allowed himself the luxury of truth-telling.

"I'm not blaming you, Leesthorpe," he said. "A man naturally overrates his wife's abilities. Your confidence in her is all to your credit. But— take it from me— the part's beyond her. If I'm to put up this money, she'll have to throw it up."

And to that last issue Hapgood stuck. Vainly the other raved, protested, showed his teeth; vainly— for three long days— he wrote, telegraphed, argued in person and over the telephone; vainly he threatened to "put the curtain up for a week and risk it."

"You can't do that," said Hapgood, blandly; "you haven't got enough cash for the preliminary advertising."

Finally, in despair, Leesthorpe went to Saxby. "Hapgood's mad," said Leesthorpe. "Quite mad. If once the public knows that my wife's thrown up the part, it's good-bye to *The Young Lady in Mauve*."

"Old boy," said Saxby, trying, agent-like, to sit on both sides of the fence, "you're absolutely right. Let *me* settle this. I'm sure *I* can bring him to reason."

But Saxby, calling in person at Hapgood's hotel, was met with a quiet, "Please don't interfere. I'm handling this deal on my own."

AFTER her two-minute interview with Leesthorpe— an interview during which the star's husband had seemed even to her unimagining eyes, like a man distraught— Moira Mitchell walked home to the suburban room she occupied when "resting." Leesthorpe had promised to "let her know if he could give her anything."

For a day, the vague promise buoyed her hopes; for a day, she thought glowingly of Hapgood's praise, passed without a word— hope sank.

By the fifth morning she was in despair. The bare lodging-house room seemed like a prison. "If only I could get my chance," she thought. "Just one chance of a really good part." Listlessly she pecked at her inadequate breakfast; listlessly she picked up the morning paper and turned— as is the wont of professionals— to "Theatrical Notes."

"The first night of *The Young Lady in Mauve*," read Moira Mitchell, "has been unavoidably postponed. Miss Helene Dalby, having caught a severe chill, is confined to her bed. It is hoped that she will be sufficiently recovered to produce Mr. John Hapgood's new comedy on the twenty-fourth of this month, instead of the seventeenth as previously arranged."

Somehow, the news consoled Moira. At least it provided sufficient reason for her own non-engagement. She read on— till, suddenly, a knock on the front door disturbed reading. A moment later the landlady entered.

"Telegram for you, Miss," ejaculated the landlady. "And the boy's waiting for an answer."

Opening the wire, Moira read: "Can you call theatre four p.m. to-day? If so, ask for me personally. Reply paid— John Hapgood."

"HALF AN HOUR, please." The call-boy's voice rang on Moira Mitchell's ears like the voice of doom. She heard her dresser answer, "Thank you"; heard the boy go clattering up the stone stairs.

It was the first night of *The Young Lady in Mauve*. The first night! And in thirty minutes she, Moira Mitchell, would have to go on stage and play— the heroine of the comedy. That, of course, couldn't be true. Moira Mitchell didn't get that sort of chance. Moira Mitchell was a failure— a failure.

"Quarter of an hour, please." Now sheer panic had the girl in its grip. Her fingers, as she dabbed the last touch of black on her eyelashes, trembled like fiddle-strings; she could scarcely see her own image in the mirror.

Behind her, deft, unemotional, stood the dresser. "I shouldn't put on any more if I was you, miss."

"Thank you, Mrs. Watkins." The actress's voice quivered. She herself hardly heard it. Her mind whirled like the compass-needle in a typhoon. She tried to think of her opening speech, but the words eluded her. She wanted, suddenly, to cry.

The script lay on her dressing-table. She picked it up, tried to "study." But the words blurred before her eyes; her eyes turned inward, visioning the rehearsals. She heard Hapgood's voice, the producer's: "I don't quite like that movement, Miss Mitchell;" "I think we might cut that line, don't you, Miss Mitchell?"

And "It can't be true," thought the painted girl in the mauve frock; "it simply can't be true that Helene Dalby should have fallen ill— that John Hapgood should have given me the part!"

"Beginners for Act One, please," shrilled the call-boy's voice; and, abruptly, the girl's mind grew steady.

AS WELL ASK the soldier who goes "over the bags" to describe his sensations, as an actress after a first night to remember the incidents thereof. To Moira Mitchell the three hours of her triumph— for triumph it was— passed like a varicoloured nightmare of mental and physical emotion. She was conscious of herself, vaguely, as the "unknown" whom John Hapgood had "discovered"; as Moira Mitchell, playing "all out" for her career; as "the young lady in mauve" who had to speak certain lines on pain of death; as the centre of a thousand faces, the applauded of two thousand palms; as a puppet in the arms of the hero. But most of all she was conscious of two eyes in the auditorium— two middle-aged kindly eyes that watched her and watched.... Somewhere behind those eyes dwelt pity, and understanding, and hope.

Even during those last delirious five minutes when she found herself standing at John Hapgood's side, the company semicircled behind them and the rocking "house" semicircled in front, Moira had been conscious of those eyes. Even now, through the tears and the grease-paint, she could see them.

For now, now that it was all over, Moira had collapsed— as an oarsman collapses after a well-rowed race. She lay— frockless but still grease-painted— on the dressing-room sofa. Her bare shoulders heaved. Her whitened hands were inert among the cushions. She was sobbing to herself, quietly, happily almost.

Mrs. Watkins, wise to the game, had locked the door. "Miss Mitchell can't see *anyone*, yet," she kept calling to the invisible presences in the corridor.

At last Moira's sobs ceased. "I'm all right now, Mrs. Watkins," she said, faintly. The dresser threw a kimono over one arm, and moved towards the sofa. Moira, sitting up, allowed herself to be wrapped. Then, still dazed, she rose to

her feet; walked to the dressing-table, and began dabbing cold cream on the mixture of paint and tear-drops which was her complexion.

Process finished, she asked: "Is there anyone outside, Mrs. Watkins?"

"A few of them, miss." The dresser smiled.

"Must I see them?"

"Not if you don't want to, miss. I'll tell them to go away, if you like."

"Who are they?"

"There's Mr. Hapgood that I know of, miss. And *he's* got a lady with him."

"A lady?"

"Yes. His wife, I expect, miss. I know she was in Box B."

"His wife!" The girl in the emerald kimono smiled surprise. "His wife! Why, I didn't even know Mr. Hapgood was married. Ask them both to come in, please, Mrs. Watkins."

And a moment later there entered— still almost white with emotion— the owner of those kindly middle-aged eyes. Behind her came the dramatist.

"My dear," he began, "this is Miss Mitchell—"

But Mrs. John Hapgood— her face, no longer young, was kind as her eyes had been— disdained introductions. In a flash her bare arms were round Moira's shoulders; in a flash she had kissed her on both cheeks.

"You wonderful, wonderful woman!" stammered Mrs. John. "How did you do it? How did you have the nerve? It just petrified me! Petrified me! To know all that money— our home— all John's future at stake." She hesitated. "But perhaps it was just that knowledge which made you play so divinely."

"Money! Future! Home!" Moira's face blanched. "What money? What future? What home? I don't understand."

"Of course Miss Mitchell doesn't understand." Half in jest, half in earnest, John Hapgood shook a fist at his wife. "And you had no business to tell her."

"Tell me what, Mr. Hapgood?"

The dramatist laughed. "Well, you see, one way and another, there was a good deal at stake this evening. To begin with, Helene Dalby's illness was— shall we say?— diplomatic. As a matter of fact, I bought the whole play back from Leesthorpe."

"He mortgaged our place in the country to do it," interjected Mrs. John.

"So that we stood to lose the best part of five thousand if it had gone down," went on Mrs. John's husband.

"And has it succeeded?" asked Moira. She had to ask some question— or collapse once again.

"Has it succeeded?" Hapgood's big mouth opened in a grin. "Has it succeeded? Why, the ticket agencies couldn't even wait till to-morrow morning. We've sold out the stalls three months ahead— and the dress-circle four. You were quite right, you see, Miss Mitchell— good work does count in the end."

SAID MRS. JOHN to her husband as they drove to their hotel: "Why didn't you tell her before, John?"

Answered John Hapgood, playwright:

"Firstly, my dear, because she'd probably have given a rotten performance if I had; secondly, because it wasn't her business anyway; and lastly, because it never pays to tell *anyone* the truth in theatreland."

"Don't try and be cynical with *me*, darling," retorted Mrs. John. "You know you love the theatre."

And John Hapgood, purveyor of illusion, admitted to his private soul the correctness of her diagnosis.

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20: Sam Small's Tyke

Eric Knight

1897-1943

Story, Sept/Oct 1940

Alas a dirty word,
alas a dirty third, alas...
little dogs resemble little girls.
—Gertrude Stein

OF COURSE, the whole unbelievable affair wouldn't have happened if Sam Small hadn't been left at home alone. There's no doubt whatsoever about that. But Mully had been set and bound to take another trip to America.

"Now Sammywell Small," she snapped, "Ah want no more arguing. At such a time as this our place is reight beside our Vinnie. So we're off for America."

"Not me, Ah ain't," Sam droned belligerently. Then his voice changed to a pleading tone. "Now look here, Mully. Ah were in Yankeeland with thee once— and Ah hevn't forgot what happened to me that time. Now why can't our Vinnie come back home and have her baby here?"

"Because her husband's an American, that's why," Mully snapped.

She clicked her needles furiously on the tiny coat she was knitting, as if that would help settle matters.

"But dash ma soul," Sam cried in an exasperated voice, "that's just it. Thee and Vinnie don't seem to get it through your heads that if she stays there, her baby's off to be born a foreigner. Think o' that."

Mully sighed deeply, signifying despair.

"Did it ever occur to thee, Sam Small," she said, "that foreigners might like to be foreigners— and they might even like their children to be foreigners, too?"

"Don't talk silly," said Sam.

"Oh, aye? Then why do they have so many babies born foreigners?"

" 'Cause they don't have a chance to be born i' Yorkshire, that's why. Why it's simple. If our Vinnie were to come visit us, her bairn'd be Yorkshire when it was born, and if..."

"Aye, and if t'Queen o' Sheba had worn pants she'd ha' been t'King," Mully snapped.

"She did wear pants, the way Ah heard it. Now our Vinnie..."

"Sam Small," interrupted Mully, glaring at him. "Understand this once and for all. Our Lavinia is off to stay i' Calyfornia beside her husband, like a reight lass should— and Ah'm off to be beside her when her first bairn's born, like a reight mother should. Now that's final, so put it i' thy pipe and smoke it."

Sam sulked for several minutes and poked at the fire disconsolately.

"Ah'm not going to foreign lands no more," he said, finally. "And tha can put that in thy pipe and smoke it."

"All reight, lad. Ah'll go alone, then."

"Then tha can go alone," Sam muttered.

And that's the way matters stood. Since they were both Yorkshire— which means the maximum ordinate in stubbornness— neither of them would give in. The days passed, and though secretly both wished they hadn't decided it that way, neither made a sign.

Time and tide, which got its official British government recognition of waiting for no man back in the time of King Canute, brought them to the day of parting.

AT THE RAILWAY station at Hallby, Sam looked up forlornly at the window of the third-class carriage. He was just on the point of telling Mully that he'd changed his mind, when he saw the train was moving.

"Oh, Sam," Mully moaned, as if she, too, had discovered that they had done something foolish. "Sam, lad. Oh, Sam...."

Then the sound of the steam from the engine cut off her words. She was being carried away. Sam stood on the platform, bewildered. He scratched his head. Then, suddenly, he pulled out his red bandana handkerchief. He waved it furiously. And there were a lot of strangers on the station platform, too, who could observe this display of emotion. But Sam felt so desperate he didn't care. He waved his handkerchief until the train was gone.

So off went Mully to America, and off went Sam across the moor back to Polkingthorpe Brig and his home. When he got there, he sat a long time in his chair, facing Mully's empty chair, and tried faithfully to remember all the things she'd told him, like not coming in with his boots muddy and remembering to take the laundry to Mrs. Hellifeather's every week.

And the more Sam thought the more he became convinced that he was a stubborn, irascible old tyke, and Mully was an angel minus wings and plus a few extra pounds at appropriate places.

He got into a deep, sentimental mood, from the milk of which rose the cream of virtuous determination.

"Now look here, Sam lad," he warned himself. "In order to make it up to Mully, tha's off to behave thyself, and show her what sort of a chap tha is. So this time— no monkey business, now. No flying wi'out wings, and no split personalities, and no nowt foolish like tha's forever getting into. This time tha behaves thyself!"

Sam heard the echo of his own words in the cottage, for he was talking out loud.

IN THE DAYS that followed, Sam Small often found himself talking out loud to an empty cottage. And he knew that most dire of all afflictions that can strike a man who has been long married— lonesomeness.

"Come, come, Sam lad," he would say. "Happen tha needs a nice cup o' tea to cheer thee up."

But he soon found out that it wasn't any fun making a pot of tea when there was no one there to say how good it was, and how of all the people in the world there was no one quite had the touch of Sam Small in making a pot of tea— when he put his mind to it— nobody who knew just how to warm the pot, and pour the water right at the very moment it reached the boil— nobody with such a deft finger for putting in exactly the proper amount of tea leaves— nobody with such an unerring instinct for knowing precisely how long it should mash with the tea cozy round the pot— nobody who...

No, it wasn't a cup of tea.

"The thing tha's got to do, Sam lad," he told himself finally, "is to keep busy. That's the ticket."

So he burst out in a flurry of ambition. He whitewashed all the rocks beside the garden path, and he put up bits of shelves all over the kitchen where they'd be handy-like for pots and pans and things. He replaced a cracked pane of glass that he'd been promising to fix for a year, and put in a patch of plaster on the bedroom wall where the doorknob had bumped a hole.

He did all these things— and merely found again that there was neither virtue nor satisfaction in doing odd jobs when there was no one to stand in admiration afterward and say that for neat whitewashing, carpentering, glazing, or plastering and for thoroughness, tidiness, and ingenuity exemplified in their doing, there was never a man born yet to match Sam Small.

Sam began to come to the conclusion that there was no balm left in life. Of course, there was the pub to go to. But the lads only gathered at The Spread Eagle in the evenings. They were busy during the day. An empty pub, with no chums there to give respectful ear to Sam Small's opinions on dogs, football, and international affairs, was a poor place indeed. Sam found that out. He discovered that good ale, no matter how fine, needs the condiment of agreeable company.

As the lonely days went past Sam returned to odd jobs, now seeking them in a kind of desperation. In this sad state of affairs he pulled out every pair of boots in the house. He ripped off all the soles, and then, with the last between his knees, he began cobbling them up, working with wooden pegs, awl, and waxed string, stitching on soles of stout oak-tanned leather. But his work only brought him to the awful day when the last pair was done. There were no more boots to cobble!

Then indeed did loneliness come creeping over Sam Small, creeping like a great snake, slowly wrapping coil after coil around him. By force of lifetime's habit he woke long before dawn. The blank day stretched before him, bleak, unbearable.

He felt it couldn't go on much longer. Something would have to happen. Of course, it did.

IAN CAWPER, who is the biggest and strongest lad in all Yorkshire— which, without any doubt, means in all the world— was lumbering on his way home from work when he saw the gypsy-looking chap arguing at Sam's garden gate. Now Sam Small is a little, stubby man, and since the gypsy was quite a likely-looking build (and a stranger to boot) what was more natural than that Ian should stroll over to see what might happily arise.

"Is there owt up, Sam?" Ian asked, keeping his eye on the gypsy and wondering whether he weighed nearer to 240 than 230 pounds.

"Now, lad, Ian," greeted Sam, happily. "Why, this here lad has had the terrible bad luck to lose a tyke, and he has the funny idea, though heavens knows why, that it might have wandered into ma home. Ah've been just assuring him it ain't here."

"Ah see," said Ian, putting his thumbs into the waistband of his jeans, and coming to the kernel of the discussion. "Would tha like a bit of a wrastle, lad? Or happen a go at a straight fight?"

The gypsy looked at Ian, scowled, and then turned back to Sam.

"I saw you coming over the moor with my dog," he said, evenly.

"Who? Me?" Sam warbled with that soprano rising inflection which indicates the epitome of innocence outraged.

From that point on the argument went on according to exact schedule. Any Yorkshireman can tell you freehand just what words were said, who said them, and in what tones. For scores upon scores of years, though goodness knows why, malicious people have been accusing Yorkshiremen of finding dogs— especially dogs of likely-looking breeding. And, what hurts the county's sensitive pride even more, these purveyors of a cruel canard even go to the depths of alleging that Yorkshiremen will find a dog before he's very lost, as you might say.

Because of the frequency of these foul allegations, all Yorkshiremen have built up a standard defense. Nay, the defense by this time is almost born in them— elements of it mixed up in the genes and chromosomes or whatever it is. In fact, there is a record of a West Riding baby whose very first spoken words were, "It's a bloody lie. I didn't steal thy dog!" After that he learned how to say mama and dada.

So everyone knows how the stock argument about a lost dog goes, and where it goes to. The only trouble in this case was that Sam Small wasn't the

build to take it anywhere. So what was more natural than that Ian Cawper, in a peaceful, decent, and neighborly way, should pick up the thread.

"Now hop it afore Ah gie thee a smack in the bluggy lug," Ian said, which was quite according to schedule.

This is generally the end of the defense plea. After that a man either fights or remembers important business elsewhere. But the gypsy lad seemed to be an unusual case. When he heard Ian, he merely half-smiled. His eyes narrowed to slits and he made a weird sort of gesture toward Sam's house. Then he intoned, "*Mene, mene, tzigani om*!"

"Here, here," blustered Sam. "What's coming off? We'll have no language like that round here!"

"Now," said the gypsy, "you may have the dog for all the good she'll do you."

He began to laugh in a hollow sort of booming way. At that moment there was a low rumbling of thunder, and they got mixed up, so that you couldn't tell which was laughter and which was muttering thunder. And away the gypsy went.

"By gum," Sam said. "Must be a bit of a storm blowing over from Wuxley way."

Then his mind came back to the gypsy.

"Thieving bluggy lot, them gypsies, Ian," he said. "The varry idea," he added, with a self-righteous tone. "Accusing me of pinching his tyke."

Ian nodded. The two stood, watching the man until he was out of sight.

"The— the varry impertinence of him," Sam breathed.

"Aye," Ian said. "Well, Sam— let's hev a look at it."

"A pleasure, Ian. Come in."

Sam led the way into the cottage and there, on the rug, was a sweet little collie bitch, tricolored, and about a year old.

"Ba gum," breathed Ian. "Ah'm proud o' thee, Sam. For she's a right-looking pup. Where did tha find her?"

"Sit down, Ian, and Ah'll tell thee. Well, Ah were just taking a bit of a stroll this afternoon— Ah don't have much to do wi' ma afternoons what wi' Mully away, tha knows. Well, Ah'm happen a mile this side o' Silverstone Pit, or maybe a three-quarter mile, but call it a mile anyhow. And Ah sees this pup here sort of going along in a trot.

"That very minute, Ah says to maself, 'Ba gum, tha's lost by t'look o' things and if tha isn't, tha will be soon wi' no one to look out for thee!'

"Because there was nobody round, Ian— and if this gypsy lad were there he must ha' been behind me— and Ah wouldn't see him there, of course, for a chap hasn't eyes i' t'back of his head. So Ah gives a bit of a whistle to this tyke, soft, tha knows, and she comes trotting over. Ah warned her proper and honest. Ah said, clear as Ah could, 'Tha'd better go home, lass.'

"But she stood there. Well, heaven knows Ah'd done ma best to send her away. So Ah said to her, 'Well, if tha wean't goa home, tha's much too good a looking tyke to be round loose, and first thing tha knows somebody'll be pinching thee. So Ah'd better slip this handkerchief round they neck to protect thee fro' dirty thieves.' "

Ian nodded solemn approval.

"Aye, goodness knows Ah'd give her her chance, Ian," Sam went on. "A chap can't no more than ax a dog to go home, which Ah did. Well, that's all, Ian. Except Ah wasn't home five minutes when this gypsy-lad comes running up and accuses me o' stealing his tyke.

"The very idea, Ian! Why, any chap who ever handled dogs could tell thee that no gypsy ever born knew how to breed as clean a looking pup as that. Huh! In all probability, Ian, the bugger has stole it fro' somewhere. Aye, Ah know them's harsh words, but Ah wouldn't put it past them thieving gypsies to steal a man's dog.

"So tha can see plainly, in a manner o' speaking, we're nobbut doing what is right, proper, and honest in seeing this here tyke gets back to a white man in a manner o' speaking.

"Why, Ian, if we'd give this pup back to yon gypsy, Ah wouldn't wonder we'd ha' been compounding a felony or summat. Then we'd ha' stood liable to be summonsed for being accessory after and before the fact— and tha wouldn't like that, would tha, Ian?"

"By gum, no," Ian stated, stoutly.

"Indeed," Sam waxed, expansively, "it seems clear to me that we've nobbut done our duties as loyal Britons in thus upholding the law by keeping this dog here."

Ian scratched his head, slowly.

"Well, Sam," he said finally, "the way tha puts it, we've done nowt but what any honest, law-abiding chap would ha' done. And it will be a bit o' company for thee while thy missus is away. Tha can spend thy time training her. And finally— well, she is a bluggy nice-looking dog, isn't she?"

"That she is," Sam said, in a rosy humor now that he had established an air of virtue over the whole proceeding. "That she is."

SAM SMALL had no warning of what was going to happen. The only unusual thing he saw about the dog was that she was about the brightest thing he'd ever handled. Of course, he had plenty of time to give to her training, and so he expected her to learn quickly.

He christened her Flurry and in practically no time she'd learned her name. Then he taught her the usual routine: to come and go, to stand, to sit, to lie down, to stay put on command.

She picked this up so quickly that Sam started her on high-school training. He scattered coins around the floor of the cottage and told her to bring them. Every time she brought one he rewarded her with a tiny piece of beef liver. She learned this so expertly that soon a coin would no sooner touch the floor than Flurry would dart over, pick it up, bring it to Sam, and await the pleasant reward.

This is a very neat trick, as any Yorkshireman knows. It is taught because, as any thrifty person will agree, one cannot forecast when a dog, running loose, might chance to come across a coin that some careless passerby has dropped in the gutter, and would pick it up and come running home with it. This point must be made clear. It is for this purpose that Yorkshire dogs are trained to retrieve coins— not, as some ignobly minded persons have hinted darkly, so that they will snatch up a dropped coin and race homeward with it before the loser has had time to bend down and pick it up.

But, quickly as she learned this, Sam had no foreboding that even more wonderful things were in store. Then it happened, on an evening exactly two weeks after the gypsy had gone muttering away into the thunderstorm.

Sam was just praising Flurry for picking up a threepenny bit. There he was, holding the collie's muzzle in his cupped hand, looking into her eyes, talking aloud as a man will when alone with his dog.

"Ba gum," he said, "if tha isn't a smart un. Tha's gate everything— confirmation, class, breeding Ah'll warrant, and tha's t'smartest pup Ah ever did see."

The dog turned up her large brown eyes and gazed at him adoringly, and in a way that was pitifully eloquent.

Sam shook his head, sorrowfully.

"Tha knaws," he said, "tha's so perfect that sometimes Ah'm almost flaid for thee. Tha's too good to be true, and Ah almost feel at times as if..."

He did not finish, for the dog suddenly drew away and began to circle the hearth-rug uneasily.

"Why, what's up, lass?" he said.

The collie dropped her head and the whites of her eyes showed in a way that meant uneasy fear.

"Now, now," Sam went on. "There's nowt to be flaid on."

He patted the dog to comfort her.

"Aye, tha's that bonnie. So bonnie and neat and bright. Why, Ah'll warrant we won't have much trouble keeping thee here when Mully gets back, set as she is again' me having a tyke round the house."

Flurry walked away, dejectedly, and went to a corner of the room where she stood, half-trembling.

"Ba gum," Sam thought. "It's most as if she really understands what Ah say."

A prickly sensation began to run up the back of his neck. There was a curious tangy smell in the air. And then Sam lifted his head and snapped his fingers. There was a rumble of thunder in the air.

"Ah," he cried. "That maun be it. A little bit o' thunder. That's what's making thee act so unusual. Aye, tha's like all collies. Ah never did see one yet that wasn't a baby about thunder. Coom here then, lass. Coom!"

The dog walked to him uneasily. She struggled briefly in Sam's clutch as a nearer peal of thunder rumbled.

"Now, now," Sam reproved. "It's nowt just thunder, that's all. It's just rain coming, and it can't hurt thee. Ah wouldn't let it hurt thee."

When he spoke these last words, the dog looked up at him so trustingly, with eyes so steady and eloquent, that Sam was touched again.

"Eigh, tha looks as if tha'd understood every blessed word," he breathed. "Ba gum, Ah wish tha could talk."

The dog went and curled up on the rug.

"Well, Ah can if tha wants me to," she said.

"Of course tha can," Sam said. "And tha..."

Then he jumped right up out of his chair.

"Well, Ah'll be boogered!" he cried.

He looked around the room, and then he poked his fingers in his ears and shook his head. Finally he looked at the dog again.

"Am Ah going balmy, or did Ah hear someone— that is— well, someone say summat?"

"Of course tha did," the dog said, calmly. "Tha said tha wished Ah could talk, and Ah said Ah could if tha wanted me to."

Sam sat down as if he'd been shot.

"Aye," he said, weakly. "That's what Ah thought happened, but— er— Ah sort of wanted to check up on masen."

He sat weakly a moment, still looking at the dog who lay nonchalantly on the rug.

"Well, Ah'll be blowed," he said, finally. "What on earth made thee do it?"

"What, talk? Ah've just told thee..."

"No, Ah mean, what on earth made thee keep it a secret so long? Why didn't tha tell me afore tha could talk?"

"Well, tha never axed me," Flurry said, politely.

"Eigh, if this isn't a do," Sam said. "Why, tha's been pulling the wool over ma eyes proper and all, tha has. Here Ah've been sitting, barneying away at thee neight after neight, and tha's been sitting there, never saying a word. What made thee do it?"

"Nay," said Flurry. "Ah think it nobbut just coom over me, all of a sudden, as tha maught say. There were thee, saying tha wished Ah could talk, and then, like a flash, it coom over me that Ah could."

"But," said Sam, his native caution coming to the fore, "isn't it a bit odd, in a manner of speaking, having a dog talk?"

"Ah couldn't say about that," the dog went on. "But tha must agree that it'll be a change. It certainly were getting a bit monotonous, tha knaws— thee just jawing away at me hour after hour and me never saying a word back again."

"Well, now tha mentions it, it does appear a bit lopsided," Sam agreed. "Certainly it'll be a bit more homelike i' future, wi' someone to talk to. But first of all, we've got to give this all a bit of a thinking over."

Sam sat for five minutes, with his chin cupped in his hand. And he gave it a bit of a thinking over.

"Well, Ah've reached a conclusion," he said.

"What is it?" Flurry asked.

"We've got to be careful," Sam said.

"Careful? What about?"

"Well, that's just it. Now Ah've had experience in such matters afore. And Ah've learned by this time that unless a chap is careful, he gets hissen into a varry pretty pickle indeed afore he's through. So we've got to be careful."

"But careful about what?"

"That," said Sam, "is what Ah've got to give a bit o' thinking to. When Ah've determined what we've got to be careful about— well, then— Ah'll know what it is we've— er— got to be careful about. Understand?"

"It sounds very complicated to me," the dog said.

"It is," Sam agreed. "That's why— well— why we've got to be er— sort of— er..."

"Careful?" the dog suggested.

"That's it, exactly," Sam cried. "Tha's hit t'nail reight on t'yead! Ba gum, tha's a smart dog. Now let's settle down to some serious thinking."

AS THE RESULT of Sam's thinking over a course of several days, he finally came to the conclusions as to what he was to be careful about. Boiled down, it went like this: he had to be careful that no one else found out his dog could talk.

The best way to achieve this, he decided, was to keep anyone else from getting near the dog. In addition he warned her gravely that she mustn't speak in front of anyone else— only when he was alone with her. She agreed to this, but to make doubly sure Sam determined that no one else should ever come near his tyke.

This meant, necessarily, that he had to stay home with her at all hours. But he didn't mind this, for now his home was changed. No longer was it empty and lonesome.

As for Flurry, there were so many things she wanted to know that she never got bored. She would chatter on, in her sweet girlish voice, asking brightly all sorts of questions in her Yorkshire accent. Of course, it was only natural that she'd speak with a Yorkshire accent, for it was the only kind of English she had ever heard.

And what pleasant evenings they had together in the once-lonesome cottage. Many a happy hour they whiled away together, as you can readily imagine, before the warm fire. Just see them: Sam in his easy chair, puffing his pipe, and reading aloud to Flurry who lay coiled at his feet on the rug. What a picture there is in that— gray-headed age expounding his life's wisdoms, and fresh young youth, bright and alert, asking incessant questions. For Flurry's curiosity seemed insatiable. She wanted to know about everything.

At first, for instance, she was highly curious about reading. She was almost suspicious about it, and thought Sam was kidding her.

"Tha says there's words theer?" she said, in a rising tone.

"Aye, that's what Ah'm reading," Sam said.

"Let me see it."

Sam held down the Leeds and Yorkshire Mercury he was reading. Flurry squinted at it, and sniffed it, and then cocked her ears forward at it.

"Ah don't hear nowt," she said, scornfully, after a pause.

"Nay, there's nowt to hear," Sam explained.

"But tha just said there was."

"Nay, Ah've explained afore. It's nobbut words when Ah say it. Look, Ah'll put it this way. When it's on the paper, it's writing. But when Ah say it out loud, then it's reading. Now dosta understand?"

"Ah do not," Flurry said. "First thing tha says it's one thing, and next minute tha says it's another. Ah think we'd better drop the whole subject."

"But Ah've just said..."

"Ah'd rather not hear no more about it," Flurry said. "Go on and read me something."

"How about cricket scores?"

"We had them last night."

"But these is different scores."

"No, we've been into all that before."

"Ah, then how about Parliament?"

"What's Parliament?"

Sam started out gladly, for if there ever was a chap glad to give his ideas on subjects of importance, it was Sam Small. He told how men went to London to represent the people.

"Why aren't you there?" Flurry wanted to know.

"That's what Ah often wonder. They could do worse."

"Go on. Then what?"

"Well, there's two parties— like the Ins and the Outs. The Ins— they're the Guv'ment. They draw up laws."

"What do the Outs do?"

"Well, they oppose 'em."

"That sounds very silly to me."

"Nay, ye've got to have that. That's democracy."

"Never mind pulling in other matters. What happens then? The Ins pass the laws. Is that all they do?"

"Nay, it isn't quite as easy as that. Varry often the Ins are soa busy combating the Outs, and trying to oopset their plans for oopsetting their plans that— well— it occupies most o' their time and they don't get round to passing the laws."

"What do they do that for?"

"That's politics."

"How silly. Let's talk no more about it."

"Nay, lass. The great institution o' democratic guv'ment is..."

"Ah'd really rather not discuss it further," Flurry said firmly. "It sounds very gormless to me."

Sam scratched his head.

"Well, Ah suppose it is a bit silly if ye look at it that way," Sam agreed. "Well, how about letters to the editor. Here's a chap writes he's heeard t'first white-billed hedge-golinkus three days ahead of any record of it ever being heeard afore. How about that?"

"Wait a moment. Let's go back. What's an editor?"

So off Sam went in another explanation.

Ah, what a picture was there. Night after night, it was the same— a fine sturdy Yorkshireman who had once been lonely, sitting by his hearthside, reading devotedly to his listening dog. What nobler scene could you wish?

It was Sam himself who broke the routine. As he said to himself, waste is a sin. And therefore it would be a pity to waste the wonderful opportunity presented by a dog that had the qualities Flurry had— and you must admit they were unusual qualities.

So what did he do but take Flurry down to The Spread Eagle, going in casual-like, greeting the chaps, and then sitting down with his pint before the fire with Flurry coiled at his feet. He knew someone would soon comment on the dog.

"Now Sam, lad," said Gaffer Sitherthwick. "How's tha been?"

"Now Gaffer," returned Sam in greeting, "Well, and how's tha been?"

"Well," Gaffer said, and that exhausted that part of the conversation.

Gaffer took a sup from his mug, burped politely and gravely, and then turned his eyes down to Flurry. Sam pretended to be interested in a bit of an irritation on the side of his nose.

"Likely pup," Gaffer said.

"Fair to middling," Sam answered.

"Barring a bit short i' t'skull, and a mite broad atween t'lugs, and a trifle gay on t'tail, and a midge low i' t'saddle— and all in all a bit small-boned. But outside o' that— not a bad pup."

"Thankee, Gaffer," Sam said. "To tell t'truth, she is a bit this way and that, in a manner of speaking. But she's a smart tyke."

"Smart?"

"Aye, smart."

"How smart?"

"Smart enow, Gaffer."

By this time Rowlie Helliker and Ian Cawper and Capper Wambley and the rest were gathering around, sensing a bit of a do coming.

"T'smartest tyke Ah ivver seed," the Gaffer said, casting his eye up at the ceiling, "were Black Tad, that theer Lancashire sheep trial champion. Now theer's a smart tyke."

The men grunted general approval.

"Eigh, aye, that Black Tad's smart," Sam agreed, and took a long sup. He coughed. "But this pup's smart too," he added.

"How smart?"

"Smart as ony that comes, Gaffer, and Ah'll lay money on that. Why, she can pick up pennies— aye, fardins and megs and threepenny bits."

"Once," said the Gaffer, cocking his eye at the ceiling again, "Ah seed a tyke in a pub near Huddersfield, that could really dew summat. Ony tyke can pick up coins; but this one would not only pick 'em up, but could bring 'em as named. To specify exact, if tha put down a florin, a bob, a tanner, a bit, a penny, and a meg, this here tyke would bring back ony in t'order named. Now could thy tyke dew that?"

Sam began to protest cunningly.

"Well, now," he cried. "That's summat varry special."

"Nay, nay now, don't weasel out," the Gaffer cried, looking around for backing. For he was a sharp one on making a tricky shilling, and always kept his wits about him.

"Sam said his tyke was as smart as ony that cooms, didn't he?"

"Aye," they agreed.

"And he said he'd lay money on it."

"Aye," confirmed the chorus, dutifully.

Sam did some very clever acting. He squirmed and wriggled and wiped his forehead.

"Well, it were a manner o' speaking," he protested.

"Nay, tha said tha'd lay money on it," the Gaffer insisted. "And soa Ah've gate ten bob that says thy tyke can't equal i' smartness this here dog Ah seed in this here pub once near Huddersfield."

"A bet," said Sam, taking out his money.

There was a hubbub in the pub, for the way Sam's words closed like a trap on the offer announced to one and all that summat, as they would say, was up.

"Rowlie here'll hold t'brass," Sam said, handing out his ten shillings. The Gaffer, beginning to feel that he'd bitten on a bait, did the same. But he comforted himself with the knowledge that there never had been a dog in a pub near Huddersfield who'd done what he said— and if a dog had never done such a trick it didn't seem probable that a dog would do it.

But Sam and the lads were clearing off a space on the great flags of The Spread Eagle floor, and putting the coins in a row. Sam made a great show of exactness, and the Gaffer weaseled as much as he could, mixing them up in size so that the biggest wouldn't be next to the next-biggest.

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21: New Year's Eve on Broadway

Mark Hellinger

1903-1947

In: *Moon Over Broadway*, 1931

NEW YEAR'S EVE on Broadway. 1931. The poet's dream. The bootlegger's heaven. The hat check girl's julep of joy. Lights. Love. Laughter. Tickets. Taxis. Tears. Bad Booze putting hics into hicks and bills into tills. Sadness. Gladness. Madness. New Year's Eve on Broadway.

I stood in front of the Astor Hotel and watched the crowds go this way and that, that way and this. The way of the whirled, you know. Everybody so happy. Or seeming so happy, which is the next best thing. Pushing. Milling. Grinning.

See that frail flivver shoot past that powerful Packard. Two people in the Packard. Nine in the Ford. Men selling trick mustaches. And ticklers. And balloons that blow up into chickens. It's nearing midnight. Those horns. And claxons. And sirens. Such a din!

Take a deep breath of that cold, fresh air. Boy, it's great to be alive. On New Year's Eve...

"SPARE a quarter, mister?"

Funny question to pop out of the air at that moment. Seemed almost out of place. Here was someone who was begging for money when all the others were spending money to beg for happiness.

I turned toward the voice. The man didn't look like the ordinary beggar. Small cap. Blue suit that was by no means a total wreck. A small overcoat wrapped tightly about him.

He might have been fifty years of age. Or fifty-five. Or sixty, for that matter.

"I'm not a real beggar, mister," he was saying. "Just trying to get enough to tide me over for a day or two. These days are not the same for an Old Timer like me. Broadway's different from what it used to be."

He was telling me, was he? Oh, well. I handed him a dollar on the chance that he'd talk. The dollar was well invested. He talked. And he said something.

"You know," he mused, "New Year's Eve always sets me thinking. Same as it does most folks, I guess. Makes me feel sorta sad inside. Not 'cause I'm broke for the time being. Not at all. I feel funny 'cause life ain't what it used to be.

"My mind runs back over the years. It seems like yesterday they were celebrating the start of a new century. New Year's Eve in 1900! Say, young feller, those were days on Broadway that were real days!

"Right across the street was Rector's! Ah, that was a place. No stupid dancing in those days. Just music and wine and the girl. But you remember Rector's, don't you? Sure. Everybody remembers Rector's.

"Look over there at that Times Building. Yes, it's beautiful in a way. But not as beautiful as the old Pabst restaurant that stood there in 1900. Say, they're all coming back to me everyone of those old landmarks.

"The old St. Cloud Hotel where the Knickerbocker Building stands now. The celebrated Metropole Hotel is now an idiotic jewelry store. The Rossmore Hotel is a haberdashery. And so on down the line. All gone. And what for?

"Martin's chop house open morning, noon and night. Charley Schloss's cafe. The Aulic Hotel. Engel's chop house. And down further, at 33rd street, was Trainor's Hotel. Steaks sirloin, I mean for fifty cents, and a huge lettuce and tomato salad for fifteen cents. Say, those were happy times!

"Hammerstein's Victoria Theatre stood right there on the corner of 42nd St. Famous people played there. Real artists and celebrities of the day. And now what have you got? Movies! Brain food for fools. Bah!

"And the women. Ah, they were real then. And the styles were beautiful. High necks and long trains. Pompadours. None of your painted flappers with dangling cigarettes. Just women as God intended 'em to be.

"The men have changed too. And for worse. If a man took two small drinks of whiskey in 1900, he was drinking a lot and kept it quiet. Any man who carried a flask was a cheap skate. Today the man who doesn't carry a flask is the cheap skate and the more he drinks, the more he brags about it. It's all wrong.

"Look at those damned taxis rushing around like a pack of demons. In the good old days, you had your hansom cab or your victoria. Those were vehicles for ladies and gentlemen. You went across 42nd St. in a horse car, nobody ever dreamed of that nuisance they called the subway and—"

The Old Timer interrupted his narrative abruptly. He looked at me for a moment and then broke into a broad grin.

"Say, I'm telling you about 1900 and here we are standing in front of the Astor Hotel this very minute. I remember the New Year's Eve of that year 'cause I was married two weeks later. And if that ain't enough to make a man remember things, I don't know what is.

"Yes, sir. It seems to me I was standing right close to this spot that night talking to some people who lived in the Cumberland flats, which occupied this block before they built the Astor. I'd had a bit too much wine, I guess, 'cause I can remember an old man coming down the steps and shaking his cane at me for something I did.

"I have to laugh when I think what I told him. 'Say, I yelled, 'why don't you go to bed ? This is New Year's Eve— a night for the young fellows."

"Well, sir—"

Came the sudden shriek of a motor horn and the grinding of brakes. The Old Timer, carried away by his enthusiasm, had stepped off the curb. A battered machine, carrying some ten young people, had barely missed hitting him. Only a sharp turn of the wheel had saved the Old Timer from losing his memories forever.

A young girl sat in the rear of that machine. Pretty as a picture, she was sprawled over two of the boys while her legs dangled contentedly over the right rear fender. And as the Old Timer slipped and almost fell, the girl howled with laughter.

"Hey, pop," she screamed, "you wanna watch your step. You got one foot in the grave and you ain't wise to yourself. Get hep, baby. This ain't no night for grandpas to be chasin' around."

THE CROWD laughed. Crowds always do. Such a funny girl. Great kid really. Called the turn all right. "No night for grandpas." Ha, ha. Ho, ho.

A whistle. A blinking light. Traffic. More noise. And when I looked around the Old Timer had vanished. His story was finished. Out for another dollar, no doubt.

Oh, well. Just another episode. Lights. Love. Laughter. See them go! Take another breath of that cold, fresh air. 1931. It's great to be alive on New Year's Eve.

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22: The Pipe

Anonymous

In: *Classic Mystery and Detective Stories*, 1909

"RANDOLPH CRESCENT, N.W.

"MY DEAR PUGH— I hope you will like the pipe which I send with this. It is rather a curious example of a certain school of Indian carving. And is a present from

"Yours truly, Joseph Tress."

IT WAS REALLY very handsome of Tress— very handsome! The more especially as I was aware that to give presents was not exactly in Tress's line. The truth is that when I saw what manner of pipe it was I was amazed. It was contained in a sandalwood box, which was itself illustrated with some remarkable specimens of carving. I use the word "remarkable" advisedly, because, although the workmanship was undoubtedly, in its way, artistic, the result could not be described as beautiful. The carver had thought proper to ornament the box with some of the ugliest figures I remember to have seen. They appeared to me to be devils. Or perhaps they were intended to represent deities appertaining to some mythological system with which, thank goodness, I am unacquainted. The pipe itself was worthy of the case in which it was contained. It was of meerschaum, with an amber mouthpiece. It was rather too large for ordinary smoking. But then, of course, one doesn't smoke a pipe like that. There are pipes in my collection which I should as soon think of smoking as I should of eating. Ask a china maniac to let you have afternoon tea out of his Old Chelsea, and you will learn some home truths as to the durability of human friendships. The glory of the pipe, as Tress had suggested, lay in its carving. Not that I claim that it was beautiful, any more than I make such a claim for the carving on the box, but, as Tress said in his note, it was curious.

The stem and the bowl were quite plain, but on the edge of the bowl was perched some kind of lizard. I told myself it was an octopus when I first saw it, but I have since had reason to believe that it was some almost unique member of the lizard tribe. The creature was represented as climbing over the edge of the bowl down toward the stem, and its legs, or feelers, or tentacula, or whatever the things are called, were, if I may use a vulgarism, sprawling about "all over the place." For instance, two or three of them were twined about the bowl, two or three of them were twisted round the stem, and one, a particularly horrible one, was uplifted in the air, so that if you put the pipe in your mouth the thing was pointing straight at your nose.

Not the least agreeable feature about the creature was that it was hideously lifelike. It appeared to have been carved in amber, but some coloring matter must have been introduced, for inside the amber the creature was of a

peculiarly ghastly green. The more I examined the pipe the more amazed I was at Tress's generosity. He and I are rival collectors. I am not going to say, in so many words, that his collection of pipes contains nothing but rubbish, because, as a matter of fact, he has two or three rather decent specimens. But to compare his collection to mine would be absurd. Tress is conscious of this, and he resents it. He resents it to such an extent that he has been known, at least on one occasion, to declare that one single pipe of his— I believe he alluded to the Brummagem relic preposterously attributed to Sir Walter Raleigh— was worth the whole of my collection put together. Although I have forgiven this, as I hope I always shall forgive remarks made when envious passions get the better of our nobler nature, even of a Joseph Tress, it is not to be supposed that I have forgotten it. He was, therefore, not at all the sort of person from whom I expected to receive a present. And such a present! I do not believe that he himself had a finer pipe in his collection. And to have given it to me! I had misjudged the man. I wondered where he had got it from. I had seen his pipes; I knew them off by heart— and some nice trumpery he has among them, too! but I had never seen *that* pipe before. The more I looked at it, the more my amazement grew. The beast perched upon the edge of the bowl was so lifelike. Its two bead-like eyes seemed to gleam at me with positively human intelligence. The pipe fascinated me to such an extent that I actually resolved to— smoke it!

I filled it with Perique. Ordinarily I use Birdseye, but on those very rare occasions on which I use a specimen I smoke Perique. I lit up with quite a small sensation of excitement. As I did so I kept my eyes perforce fixed upon the beast. The beast pointed its upraised tentacle directly at me. As I inhaled the pungent tobacco that tentacle impressed me with a feeling of actual uncanniness. It was broad daylight, and I was smoking in front of the window, yet to such an extent was I affected that it seemed to me that the tentacle was not only vibrating, which, owing to the peculiarity of its position, was quite within the range of probability, but actually moving, elongating— stretching forward, that is, farther toward me, and toward the tip of my nose. So impressed was I by this idea that I took the pipe out of my mouth and minutely examined the beast. Really, the delusion was excusable. So cunningly had the artist wrought that he succeeded in producing a creature which, such was its uncanniness, I could only hope had no original in nature.

Replacing the pipe between my lips I took several whiffs. Never had smoking had such an effect on me before. Either the pipe, or the creature on it, exercised some singular fascination. I seemed, without an instant's warning, to be passing into some land of dreams. I saw the beast, which was perched upon the bowl, writhe and twist. I saw it lift itself bodily from the meerschaum.

ii

"FEELING BETTER now?"

I looked up. Joseph Tress was speaking.

"What's the matter? Have I been ill?"

"You appear to have been in some kind of swoon."

Tress's tone was peculiar, even a little dry.

"Swoon! I never was guilty of such a thing in my life."

"Nor was I, until I smoked that pipe."

I sat up. The act of sitting up made me conscious of the fact that I had been lying down. Conscious, too, that I was feeling more than a little dazed. It seemed as though I was waking out of some strange, lethargic sleep— a kind of feeling which I have read of and heard about, but never before experienced.

"Where am I?"

"You're on the couch in your own room. You *were* on the floor; but I thought it would be better to pick you up and place you on the couch— though no one performed the same kind office to me when I was on the floor."

Again Tress's tone was distinctly dry.

"How came *you* here?"

"Ah, that's the question." He rubbed his chin— a habit of his which has annoyed me more than once before. "Do you think you're sufficiently recovered to enable you to understand a little simple explanation?" I stared at him, amazed. He went on stroking his chin. "The truth is that when I sent you the pipe I made a slight omission."

"An omission?"

"I omitted to advise you not to smoke it."

"And why?"

"Because— well, I've reason to believe the thing is drugged."

"Drugged!"

"Or poisoned."

"Poisoned!" I was wide awake enough then. I jumped off the couch with a celerity which proved it.

"It is this way. I became its owner in rather a singular manner." He paused, as if for me to make a remark; but I was silent. "It is not often that I smoke a specimen, but, for some reason, I did smoke this. I commenced to smoke it, that is. How long I continued to smoke it is more than I can say. It had on me the same peculiar effect which it appears to have had on you. When I recovered consciousness I was lying on the floor."

"On the floor?"

"On the floor. In about as uncomfortable a position as you can easily conceive. I was lying face downward, with my legs bent under me. I was never

so surprised in my life as I was when I found myself *where* I was. At first I supposed that I had had a stroke. But by degrees it dawned upon me that I didn't *feel* as though I had had a stroke." Tress, by the way, has been an army surgeon. "I was conscious of distinct nausea. Looking about, I saw the pipe. With me it had fallen on to the floor. I took it for granted, considering the delicacy of the carving, that the fall had broken it. But when I picked it up I found it quite uninjured. While I was examining it a thought flashed to my brain. Might it not be answerable for what had happened to me? Suppose, for instance, it was drugged? I had heard of such things. Besides, in my case were present all the symptoms of drug poisoning, though what drug had been used I couldn't in the least conceive. I resolved that I would give the pipe another trial."

"On yourself? or on another party, meaning me?"

"On myself, my dear Pugh— on myself! At that point of my investigations I had not begun to think of you. I lit up and had another smoke."

"With what result?"

"Well, that depends on the standpoint from which you regard the thing. From one point of view the result was wholly satisfactory— I proved that the thing was drugged, and more."

"Did you have another fall?"

"I did. And something else besides."

"On that account, I presume, you resolved to pass the treasure on to me?"

"Partly on that account, and partly on another."

"On my word, I appreciate your generosity. You might have labeled the thing as poison."

"Exactly. But then you must remember how often you have told me that you *never* smoke your specimens."

"That was no reason why you shouldn't have given me a hint that the thing was more dangerous than dynamite."

"That did occur to me afterwards. Therefore I called to supply the slight omission."

"*Slight* omission, you call it! I wonder what you would have called it if you had found me dead."

"If I had known that you *intended* smoking it I should not have been at all surprised if I had."

"Really, Tress, I appreciate your kindness more and more! And where is this example of your splendid benevolence? Have you pocketed it, regretting your lapse into the unaccustomed paths of generosity? Or is it smashed to atoms?"

"Neither the one nor the other. You will find the pipe upon the table. I neither desire its restoration nor is it in any way injured. It is merely an expression of personal opinion when I say that I don't believe that it *could* be injured. Of course, having discovered its deleterious properties, you will not

want to smoke it again. You will therefore be able to enjoy the consciousness of being the possessor of what I honestly believe to be the most remarkable pipe in existence. Good day, Pugh."

He was gone before I could say a word. I immediately concluded, from the precipitancy of his flight, that the pipe *was* injured. But when I subjected it to close examination I could discover no signs of damage. While I was still eying it with jealous scrutiny the door reopened, and Tress came in again.

"By the way, Pugh, there is one thing I might mention, especially as I know it won't make any difference to you."

"That depends on what it is. If you have changed your mind, and want the pipe back again, I tell you frankly that it won't. In my opinion, a thing once given is given for good."

"Quite so; I don't want it back again. You may make your mind easy on that point. I merely wanted to tell you *why* I gave it you."

"You have told me that already."

"Only partly, my dear Pugh— only partly. You don't suppose I should have given you such a pipe as that merely because it happened to be drugged? Scarcely! I gave it you because I discovered from indisputable evidence, and to my cost, that it was haunted."

"Haunted?"

"Yes, haunted. Good day."

He was gone again. I ran out of the room, and shouted after him down the stairs. He was already at the bottom of the flight.

"Tress! Come back! What do you mean by talking such nonsense?"

"Of course it's only nonsense. We know that that sort of thing always is nonsense. But if you should have reason to suppose that there is something in it besides nonsense, you may think it worth your while to make inquiries of me. But I won't have that pipe back again in my possession on any terms— mind that!"

The bang of the front door told me that he had gone out into the street. I let him go. I laughed to myself as I reëntered the room. Haunted! That was not a bad idea of his. I saw the whole position at a glance. The truth of the matter was that he did regret his generosity, and he was ready to go any lengths if he could only succeed in cajoling me into restoring his gift. He was aware that I have views upon certain matters which are not wholly in accordance with those which are popularly supposed to be the views of the day, and particularly that on the question of what are commonly called supernatural visitations I have a standpoint of my own. Therefore, it was not a bad move on his part to try to make me believe that about the pipe on which he knew I had set my heart there was something which could not be accounted for by ordinary laws. Yet, as his own sense would have told him it would do, if he had only allowed himself to

reflect for a moment, the move failed. Because I am not yet so far gone as to suppose that a pipe, a thing of meerschaum and of amber, in the sense in which I understand the word, *could* be haunted— a pipe, a mere pipe.

"Hollo! I thought the creature's legs were twined right round the bowl!"

I was holding the pipe in my hand, regarding it with the affectionate eyes with which a connoisseur does regard a curio, when I was induced to make this exclamation. I was certainly under the impression that, when I first took the pipe out of the box, two, if not three of the feelers had been twined about the bowl— twined tightly, so that you could not see daylight between them and it. Now they were almost entirely detached, only the tips touching the meerschaum, and those particular feelers were gathered up as though the creature were in the act of taking a spring. Of course I was under a misapprehension: the feelers *couldn't* have been twined; a moment before I should have been ready to bet a thousand to one that they were. Still, one does make mistakes, and very egregious mistakes, at times. At the same time, I confess that when I saw that dreadful-looking animal poised on the extreme edge of the bowl, for all the world as though it were just going to spring at me, I was a little startled. I remembered that when I was smoking the pipe I did think I saw the uplifted tentacle moving, as though it were reaching out to me. And I had a clear recollection that just as I had been sinking into that strange state of unconsciousness, I had been under the impression that the creature was writhing and twisting, as though it had suddenly become instinct with life. Under the circumstances, these reflections were not pleasant. I wished Tress had not talked that nonsense about the thing being haunted. It was surely sufficient to know that it was drugged and poisonous, without anything else.

I replaced it in the sandalwood box. I locked the box in a cabinet. Quite apart from the question as to whether that pipe was or was not haunted, I know it haunted me. It was with me in a figurative— which was worse than actual— sense all the day. Still worse, it was with me all the night. It was with me in my dreams. Such dreams! Possibly I had not yet wholly recovered from the effects of that insidious drug, but, whether or no, it was very wrong of Tress to set my thoughts into such a channel. He knows that I am of a highly imaginative temperament, and that it is easier to get morbid thoughts into my mind than to get them out again. Before that night was through I wished very heartily that I had never seen the pipe! I woke from one nightmare to fall into another. One dreadful dream was with me all the time— of a hideous, green reptile which advanced toward me out of some awful darkness, slowly, inch by inch, until it clutched me round the neck, and, gluing its lips to mine, sucked the life's blood out of my veins as it embraced me with a slimy kiss. Such dreams are not restful. I woke anything but refreshed when the morning came. And when I got up and dressed I felt that, on the whole, it would perhaps have been better if I never

had gone to bed. My nerves were unstrung, and I had that generally tremulous feeling which is, I believe, an inseparable companion of the more advanced stages of dipsomania. I ate no breakfast. I am no breakfast eater as a rule, but that morning I ate absolutely nothing.

"If this sort of thing is to continue, I will let Tress have his pipe again. He may have the laugh of me, but anything is better than this."

It was with almost funereal forebodings that I went to the cabinet in which I had placed the sandalwood box. But when I opened it my feelings of gloom partially vanished. Of what phantasies had I been guilty! It must have been an entire delusion on my part to have supposed that those tentacula had ever been twined about the bowl. The creature was in exactly the same position in which I had left it the day before— as, of course, I knew it would be— poised, as if about to spring. I was telling myself how foolish I had been to allow myself to dwell for a moment on Tress's words, when Martin Brasher was shown in.

Brasher is an old friend of mine. We have a common ground— ghosts. Only we approach them from different points of view. He takes the scientific— psychological— inquiry side. He is always anxious to hear of a ghost, so that he may have an opportunity of "showing it up."

"I've something in your line here," I observed, as he came in.

"In my line? How so? *I'm* not pipe mad."

"No; but you're ghost mad. And this is a haunted pipe."

"A haunted pipe! I think you're rather more mad about ghosts, my dear Pugh, than I am."

Then I told him all about it. He was deeply interested, especially when I told him that the pipe was drugged. But when I repeated Tress's words about its being haunted, and mentioned my own delusion about the creature moving, he took a more serious view of the case than I had expected he would do.

"I propose that we act on Tress's suggestion, and go and make inquiries of him."

"But you don't really think that there is anything in it?"

"On these subjects I never allow myself to think at all. There are Tress's words, and there is your story. It is agreed on all hands that the pipe has peculiar properties. It seems to me that there is a sufficient case here to merit inquiry."

He persuaded me. I went with him. The pipe, in the sandalwood box, went too. Tress received us with a grin— a grin which was accentuated when I placed the sandalwood box on the table.

"You understand," he said, "that a gift is a gift. On no terms will I consent to receive that pipe back in my possession."

I was rather nettled by his tone.

"You need be under no alarm. I have no intention of suggesting anything of the kind."

"Our business here," began Brasher— I must own that his manner is a little ponderous—"is of a scientific, I may say also, and at the same time, of a judicial nature. Our object is the Pursuit of Truth and the Advancement of Inquiry."

"Have you been trying another smoke?" inquired Tress, nodding his head toward me.

Before I had time to answer, Brasher went droning on:

"Our friend here tells me that you say this pipe is haunted."

"I say it is haunted because it *is* haunted."

I looked at Tress. I half suspected that he was poking fun at us. But he appeared to be serious enough.

"In these matters," remarked Brasher, as though he were giving utterance to a new and important truth, "there is a scientific and nonscientific method of inquiry. The scientific method is to begin at the beginning. May I ask how this pipe came into your possession?"

Tress paused before he answered.

"You may ask." He paused again. "Oh, you certainly may ask. But it doesn't follow that I shall tell you."

"Surely your object, like ours, can be but the Spreading About of the Truth?"

"I don't see it at all. It is possible to imagine a case in which the spreading about of the truth might make me look a little awkward."

"Indeed!" Brasher pursed up his lips. "Your words would almost lead one to suppose that there was something about your method of acquiring the pipe which you have good and weighty reasons for concealing."

"I don't know why I should conceal the thing from you. I don't suppose either of you is any better than I am. I don't mind telling you how I got the pipe. I stole it."

"Stole it!"

Brasher seemed both amazed and shocked. But I, who had previous experience of Tress's methods of adding to his collection, was not at all surprised. Some of the pipes which he calls his, if only the whole truth about them were publicly known, would send him to jail.

"That's nothing!" he continued. "All collectors steal! The eighth commandment was not intended to apply to them. Why, Pugh there has 'conveyed' three fourths of the pipes which he flatters himself are his."

I was so dumfoundered by the charge that it took my breath away. I sat in astounded silence. Tress went raving on:

"I was so shy of this particular pipe when I had obtained it, that I put it away for quite three months. When I took it out to have a look at it something about the thing so tickled me that I resolved to smoke it. Owing to peculiar

circumstances attending the manner in which the thing came into my possession, and on which I need not dwell— you don't like to dwell on those sort of things, do you, Pugh?— I knew really nothing about the pipe. As was the case with Pugh, one peculiarity I learned from actual experience. It was also from actual experience that I learned that the thing was— well, I said haunted, but you may use any other word you like."

"Tell us, as briefly as possible, what it was you really did discover."

"Take the pipe out of the box!" Brasher took the pipe out of the box and held it in his hand. "You see that creature on it. Well, when I first had it it was underneath the pipe."

"How do you mean that it was underneath the pipe?"

"It was bunched together underneath the stem, just at the end of the mouthpiece, in the same way in which a fly might be suspended from the ceiling. When I began to smoke the pipe I saw the creature move."

"But I thought that unconsciousness immediately followed."

"It did follow, but not before I saw that the thing was moving. It was because I thought that I had been, in a way, a victim of delirium that I tried the second smoke. Suspecting that the thing was drugged I swallowed what I believed would prove a powerful antidote. It enabled me to resist the influence of the narcotic much longer than before, and while I still retained my senses I saw the creature crawl along under the stem and over the bowl. It was that sight, I believe, as much as anything else, which sent me silly. When I came to I then and there decided to present the pipe to Pugh. There is one more thing I would remark. When the pipe left me the creature's legs were twined about the bowl. Now they are withdrawn. Possibly you, Pugh, are able to cap my story with a little one which is all your own."

"I certainly did imagine that I saw the creature move. But I supposed that while I was under the influence of the drug imagination had played me a trick."

"Not a bit of it! Depend upon it, the beast is bewitched. Even to my eye it looks as though it were, and to a trained eye like yours, Pugh! You've been looking for the devil a long time, and you've got him at last."

"I— I wish you wouldn't make those remarks, Tress. They jar on me."

"I confess," interpolated Brasher— I noticed that he had put the pipe down on the table as though he were tired of holding it—"that, to *my* thinking, such remarks are not appropriate. At the same time what you have told us is, I am bound to allow, a little curious. But of course what I require is ocular demonstration. I haven't seen the movement myself."

"No, but you very soon will do if you care to have a pull at the pipe on your own account. Do, Brasher, to oblige me! There's a dear!"

"It appears, then, that the movement is only observable when the pipe is smoked. We have at least arrived at step No. 1."

"Here's a match, Brasher! Light up, and we shall have arrived at step No. 2."

Tress lit a match and held it out to Brasher. Brasher retreated from its neighborhood.

"Thank you, Mr. Tress, I am no smoker, as you are aware. And I have no desire to acquire the art of smoking by means of a poisoned pipe."

Tress laughed. He blew out the match and threw it into the grate.

"Then I tell you what I'll do— I'll have up Bob."

"Bob— why Bob?"

"Bob"— whose real name was Robert Haines, though I should think he must have forgotten the fact, so seldom was he addressed by it— was Tress's servant. He had been an old soldier, and had accompanied his master when he left the service. He was as depraved a character as Tress himself. I am not sure even that he was not worse than his master. I shall never forget how he once behaved toward myself. He actually had the assurance to accuse me of attempting to steal the Wardour Street relic which Tress fondly deludes himself was once the property of Sir Walter Raleigh. The truth is that I had slipped it with my handkerchief into my pocket in a fit of absence of mind. A man who could accuse *me* of such a thing would be guilty of anything. I was therefore quite at one with Brasher when he asked what Bob could possibly be wanted for. Tress explained.

"I'll get him to smoke the pipe," he said.

Brasher and I exchanged glances, but we refrained from speech.

"It won't do him any harm," said Tress.

"What— not a poisoned pipe?" asked Brasher.

"It's not poisoned— it's only drugged."

"*Only* drugged!"

"Nothing hurts Bob. He is like an ostrich. He has digestive organs which are peculiarly his own. It will only serve him as it served me— and Pugh— it will knock him over. It is all done in the Pursuit of Truth and for the Advancement of Inquiry."

I could see that Brasher did not altogether like the tone in which Tress repeated his words. As for me, it was not to be supposed that I should put myself out in a matter which in no way concerned me. If Tress chose to poison the man, it was his affair, not mine. He went to the door and shouted:

"Bob! Come here, you scoundrel!"

That is the way in which he speaks to him. No really decent servant would stand it. I shouldn't care to address Nalder, my servant, in such a way. He would give me notice on the spot. Bob came in. He is a great hulking fellow who is always on the grin. Tress had a decanter of brandy in his hand. He filled a tumbler with the neat spirit.

"Bob, what would you say to a glassful of brandy— the real thing— my boy?"

"Thank you, sir."

"And what would you say to a pull at a pipe when the brandy is drunk!"

"A pipe?" The fellow is sharp enough when he likes. I saw him look at the pipe upon the table, and then at us, and then a gleam of intelligence came into his eyes. "I'd do it for a dollar, sir."

"A dollar, you thief?"

"I meant ten shillings, sir."

"Ten shillings, you brazen vagabond?"

"I should have said a pound."

"A pound! Was ever the like of that! Do I understand you to ask a pound for taking a pull at your master's pipe?"

"I'm thinking that I'll have to make it two."

"The deuce you are! Here, Pugh, lend me a pound."

"I'm afraid I've left my purse behind."

"Then lend me ten shillings— Ananias!"

"I doubt if I have more than five."

"Then give me the five. And, Brasher, lend me the other fifteen."

Brasher lent him the fifteen. I doubt if we shall either of us ever see our money again. He handed the pound to Bob.

"Here's the brandy— drink it up!" Bob drank it without a word, draining the glass of every drop. "And here's the pipe."

"Is it poisoned, sir?"

"Poisoned, you villain! What do you mean?"

"It isn't the first time I've seen your tricks, sir— is it now? And you're not the one to give a pound for nothing at all. If it kills me you'll send my body to my mother— she'd like to know that I was dead."

"Send your body to your grandmother! You idiot, sit down and smoke!"

Bob sat down. Tress had filled the pipe, and handed it, with a lighted match, to Bob. The fellow declined the match. He handled the pipe very gingerly, turning it over and over, eying it with all his eyes.

"Thank you, sir— I'll light up myself if it's the same to you. I carry matches of my own. It's a beautiful pipe, entirely. I never see the like of it for ugliness. And what's the slimy-looking varmint that looks as though it would like to have my life? Is it living, or is it dead?"

"Come, we don't want to sit here all day, my man!"

"Well, sir, the look of this here pipe has quite upset my stomach. I'd like another drop of liquor, if it's the same to you."

"Another drop! Why, you've had a tumblerful already! Here's another tumblerful to put on top of that. You won't want the pipe to kill you— you'll be killed before you get to it."

"And isn't it better to die a natural death?"

Bob emptied the second tumbler of brandy as though it were water. I believe he would empty a hogshead without turning a hair! Then he gave another look at the pipe. Then, taking a match from his waistcoat pocket, he drew a long breath, as though he were resigning himself to fate. Striking the match on the seat of his trousers, while, shaded by his hand, the flame was gathering strength, he looked at each of us in turn. When he looked at Tress I distinctly saw him wink his eye. What my feelings would have been if a servant of mine had winked his eye at me I am unable to imagine! The match was applied to the tobacco, a puff of smoke came through his lips— the pipe was alight!

During this process of lighting the pipe we had sat— I do not wish to use exaggerated language, but we had sat and watched that alcoholic scamp's proceedings as though we were witnessing an action which would leave its mark upon the age. When we saw the pipe was lighted we gave a simultaneous start. Brasher put his hands under his coat tails and gave a kind of hop. I raised myself a good six inches from my chair, and Tress rubbed his palms together with a chuckle. Bob alone was calm.

"Now," cried Tress, "you'll see the devil moving."

Bob took the pipe from between his lips.

"See what?" he said.

"Bob, you rascal, put that pipe back into your mouth, and smoke it for your life!"

Bob was eying the pipe askance.

"I dare say, but what I want to know is whether this here varmint's dead or whether he isn't. I don't want to have him flying at my nose— and he looks vicious enough for anything."

"Give me back that pound, you thief, and get out of my house, and bundle."

"I ain't going to give you back no pound."

"Then smoke that pipe!"

"I am smoking it, ain't I?"

With the utmost deliberation Bob returned the pipe to his mouth. He emitted another whiff or two of smoke.

"Now— now!" cried Tress, all excitement, and wagging his hand in the air.

We gathered round. As we did so Bob again withdrew the pipe.

"What is the meaning of all this here? I ain't going to have you playing none of your larks on me. I know there's something up, but I ain't going to throw my life away for twenty shillings— not quite I ain't."

Tress, whose temper is not at any time one of the best, was seized with quite a spasm of rage.

"As I live, my lad, if you try to cheat me by taking that pipe from between your lips until I tell you, you leave this room that instant, never again to be a servant of mine."

I presume the fellow knew from long experience when his master meant what he said, and when he didn't. Without an attempt at remonstrance he replaced the pipe. He continued stolidly to puff away. Tress caught me by the arm.

"What did I tell you? There— there! That tentacle is moving."

The uplifted tentacle *was* moving. It was doing what I had seen it do, as I supposed, in my distorted imagination— it was reaching forward. Undoubtedly Bob saw what it was doing; but, whether in obedience to his master's commands, or whether because the drug was already beginning to take effect, he made no movement to withdraw the pipe. He watched the slowly advancing tentacle, coming closer and closer toward his nose, with an expression of such intense horror on his countenance that it became quite shocking. Farther and farther the creature reached forward, until on a sudden, with a sort of jerk, the movement assumed a downward direction, and the tentacle was slowly lowered until the tip rested on the stem of the pipe. For a moment the creature remained motionless. I was quieting my nerves with the reflection that this thing was but some trick of the carver's art, and that what we had seen we had seen in a sort of nightmare, when the whole hideous reptile was seized with what seemed to be a fit of convulsive shuddering. It seemed to be in agony. It trembled so violently that I expected to see it loosen its hold of the stem and fall to the ground. I was sufficiently master of myself to steal a glance at Bob. We had had an inkling of what might happen. He was wholly unprepared. As he saw that dreadful, human-looking creature, coming to life, as it seemed, within an inch or two of his nose, his eyes dilated to twice their usual size. I hoped, for his sake, that unconsciousness would supervene, through the action of the drug, before through sheer fright his senses left him. Perhaps mechanically he puffed steadily on.

The creature's shuddering became more violent. It appeared to swell before our eyes. Then, just as suddenly as it began, the shuddering ceased. There was another instant of quiescence. Then the creature began to crawl along the stem of the pipe! It moved with marvelous caution, the merest fraction of an inch at a time. But still it moved! Our eyes were riveted on it with a fascination which was absolutely nauseous. I am unpleasantly affected even as I think of it now. My dreams of the night before had been nothing to this.

Slowly, slowly, it went, nearer and nearer to the smoker's nose. Its mode of progression was in the highest degree unsightly. It glided, never, so far as I could

see, removing its tentacles from the stem of the pipe. It slipped its hindmost feelers onward until they came up to those which were in advance. Then, in their turn, it advanced those which were in front. It seemed, too, to move with the utmost labor, shuddering as though it were in pain.

We were all, for our parts, speechless. I was momentarily hoping that the drug would take effect on Bob. Either his constitution enabled him to offer a strong resistance to narcotics, or else the large quantity of neat spirit which he had drunk acted— as Tress had malevolently intended that it should— as an antidote. It seemed to me that he would *never* succumb. On went the creature— on, and on, in its infinitesimal progression. I was spellbound. I would have given the world to scream, to have been able to utter a sound. I could do nothing else but watch.

The creature had reached the end of the stem. It had gained the amber mouthpiece. It was within an inch of the smoker's nose. Still on it went. It seemed to move with greater freedom on the amber. It increased its rate of progress. It was actually touching the foremost feature on the smoker's countenance. I expected to see it grip the wretched Bob, when it began to oscillate from side to side. Its oscillations increased in violence. It fell to the floor. That same instant the narcotic prevailed. Bob slipped sideways from the chair, the pipe still held tightly between his rigid jaws.

We were silent. There lay Bob. Close beside him lay the creature. A few more inches to the left, and he would have fallen on and squashed it flat. It had fallen on its back. Its feelers were extended upward. They were writhing and twisting and turning in the air.

Tress was the first to speak.

"I think a little brandy won't be amiss." Emptying the remainder of the brandy into a glass, he swallowed it at a draught. "Now for a closer examination of our friend." Taking a pair of tongs from the grate he nipped the creature between them. He deposited it upon the table. "I rather fancy that this is a case for dissection."

He took a penknife from his waistcoat pocket. Opening the large blade, he thrust its point into the object on the table. Little or no resistance seemed to be offered to the passage of the blade, but as it was inserted the tentacula simultaneously began to writhe and twist. Tress withdrew the knife.

"I thought so!" He held the blade out for our inspection. The point was covered with some viscid-looking matter. "That's blood! The thing's alive!"

"Alive!"

"Alive! That's the secret of the whole performance!"

"But—"

"But me no buts, my Pugh! The mystery's exploded! One more ghost is lost to the world! The person from whom I *obtained* that pipe was an Indian

juggler— up to many tricks of the trade. He, or some one for him, got hold of this sweet thing in reptiles— and a sweeter thing would, I imagine, be hard to find— and covered it with some preparation of, possibly, gum arabic. He allowed this to harden. Then he stuck the thing— still living, for those sort of gentry are hard to kill— to the pipe. The consequence was that when anyone lit up, the warmth was communicated to the adhesive agent— again some preparation of gum, no doubt— it moistened it, and the creature, with infinite difficulty, was able to move. But I am open to lay odds with any gentleman of sporting tastes that *this* time the creature's traveling days *are* done. It has given me rather a larger taste of the horrors than is good for my digestion."

With the aid of the tongs he removed the creature from the table. He placed it on the hearth. Before Brasher or I had a notion of what it was he intended to do he covered it with a heavy marble paper weight. Then he stood upon the weight, and between the marble and the hearth he ground the creature flat.

While the execution was still proceeding, Bob sat up upon the floor.

"Hollo!" he asked, "what's happened?"

"We've emptied the bottle, Bob," said Tress. "But there's another where that came from. Perhaps you could drink another tumblerful, my boy?"

Bob drank it!

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