
PAST
MASTERS
217
Edgar Wallace
A E W Mason
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Jacques Futrelle
F Scott Fitzgerald
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PAST MASTERS 217

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: Death's Cold Arms

Arthur Leo Zagat

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Prologue

MARY DEAN saw the red flag sweep down, signaling that everyone was well clear of danger from the blast.

"All clear," she said. "Let it go."

With a single heave of his muscular shoulders Paul Faston thrust the plunger down into the little black box from which long wires trailed away. Muffled thunder pounded across the desert plateau. A tiny smoke-puff, grotesquely out of proportion to the sound, spurted out of the summit of the high cliff that from time immemorial had walled the far side of the alkali flat. The towering grey rock-face leaned away from the mesa with slow majesty. Then it arced down, faster and faster, crashed into a myriad fragments.

A shrill, piercing wail sliced through the deafening detonation of that gigantic collapse. It jerked Mary's startled look to the Indian powder-monkey who had been crouched alongside Paul. The overalled aborigine's coppery countenance was a writhing mask of abysmal terror. His arm, outflung and rigid, stabbed pointing fingers at the dust-cloud billowing above the fallen precipice.

The cloud was a vast, demoniac face, blotting out the *mesa,* the sky itself, with swirling darkness. Staring at it, a sudden freezing panic ran quivering through the girl's veins.

Wanoo's gibbering scream formed words.

"He wake!" the Indian squealed. "Nahmeto wake again. Thunder-sticks hurt Nahmeto and he wake to punish us. We all dead. When Nahmeto come in night we all dead!"

Somehow Mary's fingers were digging into Wanoo's shoulder. "Nahmeto! Who— who is...?"

"Nahmeto evil spirit of my people. Half man, half rock. When dark of moon come steal people and eat, make himself all man. Nahmeto go to sleep in mesa when paleface comes, now wake up again."

For a terrible instant the frenzy of ancestral fear in the Ute's voice swept Mary into his terror. An icy shudder ran through her, and then Paul's strong arm caught her away from the gibbering Indian.

"He's full of *tequila,* hon. Forget him."

Her lover's vibrant strength throbbed against her trembling, slim form, and the fear seeped away. The cloud was no longer a sinister face. It was just

swirling dust that thinned rapidly to let her see hazily the knot of laborers far to one side and the familiar low roofs of the mining camp.

"How was that for placing shots?" Paul's deep-chested voice ran on. "Look! The cliff front's cut off as clean as if I'd sliced it with a big knife, and there's the vein of silver ore your dad insisted must be there."

"It is. Paul, it's there!" Mary saw the dark splotch to which he pointed. "Dad's made his big strike at last. The strike he's hunted for all his life. Now he—
"

"Hell!" the exclamation jolted across her jubilance. "I'll be—"

"What—?"

"I'm not so good after all. See that spur sticking out like a sore thumb, twenty feet up? That should have come away with the rest. I'll swear I put a shot right there. The fulminate must have? Good Lord!"

Paul jerked away from her, abruptly, was running toward the blasted cliff-face, toward a khaki-clad figure clambering the riven, white-glaring granite. Mary was running too, her high- pitched cry flinging out before her, joining itself to Paul's almost incoherent shout.

"Ned! Don't! Stop, Ned. Stop!"

Ned Thiel knew as well as they the peril toward which he climbed, the peril lurking behind that outjut of weathered stone. Dynamite is tricky stuff and often a dud shot goes off minutes after it should by all rights be dead and harmless. But he was climbing swiftly, unheeding their shouts of warning. Ned was like that, swaggering, reckless. That was what had finally decided her against him, what had finally made her choose Paul instead of him in their fierce rivalry for her. Only minutes ago she had told Paul—

"Ned," Paul shouted again. "Ned, you ass!"

Thiel didn't hear him, or else didn't want to hear him. He got a brown hand on the rocky protuberance, another, swung free from the cliff face. For a moment his sturdy frame hung, penduluming, and then he had chinned up, was hidden...

Mary caught up with Paul. "Why is he doing that?" she panted.

A dark film of wrath underlay the anxiety in the hard-rock man's broad-boned face. "He's trying to show me up," he gritted. "Beating me to the dud to prove I didn't make the right connections."

A spurt of yellow flame from above checked him, and the flat pound of a dynamite blast. Paul's shoulder thrust Mary backwards. The rock was falling was bounding down the cliff. A piece split off from it, smaller, blacker, hit some vagrant inequality and took its own errant course.

It thudded to the ground, at Mary's feet. It wasn't stone. It was human flesh, charred, battered, hideous. The arms, the legs, were sheared from shredded

stumps by some gruesome whimsy of the explosion. Only the torso was left, and the head, rolling in macabre simulation of life.

Blackened eyelids flickered open. Living orbs stared up at Paul, at Mary. Eyes incredibly still alive flared with unutterable anguish— and with unutterable hate. Out of the flame-crisped horror that was once Ned Thiel's face a tortured soul glared at them, cursing them.

Dark vertigo swirled about Mary Dean.

"Don't look!" Paul's voice gibbered out of the thud of many running footfalls. "Don't look, Mary..."

"Nahmeto!" Wanoo's guttural accents jabbered out of the whirling nausea. "Nahmeto quick to punish..."

Merciful oblivion blotted out the voices, blotted out everything...

1: Footprints of the Demon

PAIN, almost physical, twisted in Mary Faston's breast. How terribly, she thought, her father had aged. She shouldn't have let Paul keep her away from him so long. A year it was, only a year, since the terrible accident to Ned Thiel and her own resultant nervous collapse. It might have been ten years, judging by the change in Henry Dean. His face was seamed, old. There was a queer pallor under his leathery tan, and in his sun- faded eyes a secret fear lurked.

"You shouldn't have come back here," he repeated. His gnarled hands fisted on the table-top, transparent and almost-flesh-less against the charts that were startlingly blue in the lamplight. "If I had known Paul would bring you with him I should never had wired him to come."

"I'm glad you did. Paul was fretting himself sick at that desk job in the city. He belongs out here and I belong wherever my husband is."

Dean didn't answer her. A hush crept in between them, the ominous silence of the desert night. Her father's thoughts seemed to have slid unaccountably away from his daughter as his tortured gaze had slid away to peer with some eerie dread out through the room's one iron-barred window.

Those bars! They were new since she had left. Outside torches flared from a multitude of high poles, the flat sand glistening in their flood of yellow radiance. Truck tracks rutted the alkali and above them a black, gargantuan network loomed, the interlaced high timbers of the ore-car trestle that slanted up to the workings in the unseen mesa face.

There was no work going on. Why then the blazing illumination? From what source came the brooding, almost tangible aura of apprehension the light could not dispel? Why were these thick bars over the windows, here and in the bedroom? What was it Henry Dean had whispered to Paul that had sent him striding, stiff- legged, out into the night with the collie, Laddie, at his heels?

"Dad! There's something dreadfully wrong. What is it?"

Mary's voice, throbbing with tenseness despite herself, pulled her father's gaze back to her.

"Wrong?" His lips were livid under the bristling white of his mustache. "I didn't say there was anything—wrong."

"You said I shouldn't have come."

"I meant— I— it might remind you of—"

"Of poor Ned? I'm over that. I know I was delirious for a week after the accident, and then Paul had to take me away after he married me, but I don't dream about Ned any more. I've managed to let the dead past bury its dead." Something in Dean's expression stopped her, tore a sudden, terrified question from her. "He *is* dead, isn't he? He isn't still alive— like that?"

A veil seemed to flicker, momentarily, over the old eyes. "Yes. Yes, of course he's dead. What made you—?"

And then he was on his feet, was twisting to the door, a snub- nosed automatic in his hand. Something had thudded meatily, just outside.

There it was! A pulsing, brown bundle, five feet beyond the threshold. A bundle around which a stain spread, glinting redly, on the glistening sand. A whimpering squeal of fierce agony spurted from it.

Mary got to the thing just behind her father. Got to it and froze, while dark horror ran, a black flame, through her veins. It was Laddie. The collie's legs were gone. They had been torn, by main strength it seemed, from their sockets, but the gory remnant of the dog still lived.

The pound of Dean's gun, orange-red jet of flame from its muzzle, put an end to the mutilated beast's sufferings. Mary shuddered.

"Nahmeto," a guttural voice grunted behind her. "Nahmeto strike once more."

Mary whirled to the overalled, high-cheek boned Indian. It was Wanoo, a rifle in his clenched hands.

Dean leaped past her.

"Shut up, damn you," he yelled, hysteria fuzzing the edges of his scream. "Shut up!" His fist lashed out, cracked against the Ute's mouth. "Get back to the ore-house where you belong!"

Wanoo rocked back on his heels. For a moment he was a motionless, dark statue, his black, reptilian eyes glittering with primordial hate. Then he had slipped away, a soundless shadow, as he had come.

"Dad," Mary cried. "Dad! Why did you do that?"

The miner jerked around to her.

"That's the only way to handle them," he snarled. "Smack them down."

"But—"The girl checked herself. She was afraid of her father, suddenly afraid of the man whose tender solicitude had enfolded her all her motherless years. It

was not Dad's face that confronted her, it was the face of some maniac, writhing, with inexplicable rage. And then, abruptly, the spasm had passed.

"I— I suppose I shouldn't have done it. I was too rough. But I've been going through hell and my nerves are shot. Through hell. I told Paul—"

"Paul! Father, Laddie was with Paul!" The words spewed from Mary. *"What's happened to Paul?"*

She spun around. The desert was empty, flat and terribly empty to the obscurity beyond the last glimmer of torchlight. Nothing moved, nothing had been out there. But Dean's hand was on her shoulder.

"Up there!" He pointed to the black loom of the cliff behind the small cluster of houses that made the construction camp. "The dog was thrown from up there."

"Come on then." Mary surged away, her flying feet crunching in the alkali. "Come on. We've got to find him."

Her father's feet pounded alongside of her. They were past the office shack, past the bunkhouse, were swallowed by the strangely baleful shadow of the trestle. Where it butted against the precipice a ladder lifted to obscurity.

Mary plunged toward the spidery steps. And halted. The blackness moved, at the base of the ladder. The girl crouched, trembling, and her father was crouched alongside her, his weapon jerking up. The moving shadow took on human form, lurching away from the cliff.

"Stick 'em up," Dean croaked. "I've got you covered."

The shadow grunted, stopped. As it straightened a face came into a vagrant light ray.

"Paul," Mary cried. "Paul! Thank God!"

"Yes." His voice was thin, pain-shot. "It's Paul." There was a blue bruise over his right temple and a streamlet of blood drooled from the corner of his mouth. "Where's—?" He choked, pitched forward. Lay, a crumpled, motionless black heap on the black sand.

Mary got to him, tugged at the prostrate form, cold fingers of a great fear clutching her throat. Paul rolled over. His eyelids flickered open, his eyes stared sightlessly up at her.

Then they were alive again, were dark pools that stared at some remembered horror. But his blood-smeared lips quirked in pathetic attempt at a reassuring smile.

"Fooled him," he muttered. "He thought I was—knocked out. Chased Laddie—and I—got away."

"What was it?" Henry Dean quavered. "Did you see him? Did you get a good look at him?"

"No. It— he jumped me— out of the dark— at the top of the ladder. Hit me— fist like rock. Laddie went for him. He batted the dog away, went after him— I'd followed— tracks."

"What tracks? Where?"

Her husband's hand jerked toward the foot of the ladder. From somewhere Dean produced a flashlight. Its beam shot out, struck the white sand into vivid existence. As if on a moving picture screen Paul's footprints scarred the light-disk, one set pointing toward the steps, a wavering set coming back. There were the small dots of the dog's paws, going only one way. And there was another spoor.

Mary's scalp was a tight cap for her skull as she gaped at those eerie imprints. The depressions were spaced alternately, as Paul's steps were spaced. But they weren't footprints. They weren't marks made by any human, or any beast. They were sharply rectangular, heeless, toeless, arch-less. They were like marks made by small boxes, pressed one after the other into the sand. Like the imprints of boxes, *or of feet hacked out of stone.*

She didn't will the dread name that spurted from her lips. It was as if some power outside herself spoke with her tongue.

"Nahmeto!" it gasped. "Nahmeto."

2: The Hanging Corpse

"YOU'VE got to tell me what it's all about, Dad. You've got to!" Mary Faston's mouth twisted, uncontrollably. "I've got to know."

They were in the office again, the entrance door bolted. Paul had lapsed back into unconsciousness after gasping out his fragmentary account of his adventure. Between them the girl and Dean had managed to carry him to the shack that housed the office and Dean's living quarters, had made him comfortable on the bed in the inner room. His injuries were not severe enough to account for his pallid stupor.

"I suppose I'll have to." All the firmness, all the resolution Mary remembered had gone out of Dean's voice and a queasy fear had taken their place. "Let's sit down and I'll tell you."

Once more they were seated across the desk from one another. Once more dread was an invisible but almost tangible miasma in the small room.

"It began just a week ago. The Indian laborers were a bit jittery right after the accident on that final blast, but they calmed down and all the preliminary work went along as well as could be expected. We started actual mining. The first reports came back from the smelter better even than I had hoped. And then— one morning— I woke up to find them all gone."

"All!"

"All except two. The night-watchman at the head of the shaft was still there. He'd be there yet if I hadn't buried him. His head was bashed in as if a ton rock had squashed it. But there wasn't any loose rock around heavy enough to have done that. And—"

Dean stopped himself, gulped. Mary saw that his hands were trembling.

"And what?" she demanded. "Don't hold anything back!"

"And his arm— his left arm— was torn out. I couldn't find it anywhere."

"Good Lord! What a fiendish thing! It's incredible!"

Incredible was it? What of Laddie, lying out there, a legless horror? Why had that been done to him?

"Wanoo was here, too," her father's dreary voice plodded on. "When the dynamiting was done I'd made him a sort of foreman over his people, didn't bother to replace Thiel or Paul, and he slept in the ore house. When he saw what had happened to the watchman, he shrieked out some nonsense about Nahmeto, started to run away. But I caught him and— and I made him understand he had to stay with me."

"You—"

Mary didn't have to ask what means of persuasion Dean had used. His grim tone, the sledgehammer fists into which his hands knotted, were answer enough.

"Wanoo stayed," he repeated. "But that didn't help any. I couldn't get anyone else to work here. Even the truck-drivers, white men, laughed at me. The El Greco mine, west of here, was working day and night shifts, was offering more money for trucking than I had been paying them. If I couldn't give them ore my contract was broken and they were free to work for the Tolmans. The Tolmans are making millions, Mary. Millions! And I'm going broke here. Every cent I've got is sunk in here. Every cent. Payments due at the end of the month..."

"Dad!" A sudden thought struck Mary. "Couldn't they be behind this? If you go broke they'll be able to buy the mine for a song and—"

"By Jupiter!" Dean surged erect, his face graying, his eyes coals of black fire. "That's it! That must be it!" He snatched at the door-bolt, rattled it back!

"Dad!" Mary leaped to him, grappled with him. "Wait! You can't go out there now. The— the killer's out there. He'll get you!"

He struck her away from him. "The killer, hell," he snarled. "I've skulked in here long enough while he prowled out there, making devil's tracks in the sand, laughing at me." His gun was in his hand as he slashed the door open. "Laughing— O God!"

Dean staggered back as though a physical blow had jolted him from the doorway. Through the yellow radiance a maniacal sound struck into the room. It

came from the darkness beyond the torch flare, a hyena-like gust of lunatic laughter, a mindless cachinnation high and shrill and terrible. Screaming it came to tear at Mary with talons of terror, screaming like the laughter of some fiend of Hades, watching the tortures of the damned. And then—as though a portal had shut on the pit of the Inferno from which it came—it cut off!

The sudden silence shuddered against the girl's ears—was split again by a shriek. By a shriek of utter agony this time, of unendurable pain.

A black something lurched from around a corner of the shack, pounded down onto the yellow shimmer of the desert. It floundered, sobbing out its high wail of agony, scrabbled toward the door. It was a man, down on all fours like some grotesque beast, and the groove he made in the sand was blotched by gory trail. It was Wanoo, thudding face down at last into the dirt, his anguish fading into a moan, into fearful silence.

Henry Dean rushed out to the Indian, went down on his knees alongside the quivering form. The gnarled fingers of his free hand dug into Wanoo's shoulder, shook it as a terrier would shake a rat.

"Spill it, you snake," he grunted. "Spill it! Who's paying you for this stunt?"

"Dad!" Shocked indignation at her father's brutality drove fear from Mary's brain. "Dad! Stop it! He's hurt! He's terribly hurt! Look at his leg!"

The limb, awkwardly twisted, was a mass of blood in which shreds of cloth and of lacerated flesh were inextricably intermingled. "Hurt, hell!" Dean snarled. "He had no business under my window. He was eavesdropping on us. When he heard you guess the truth, he pulled this trick to get us out here."

"Trick! Dad! He wouldn't do that to his leg to play a trick. It's— it's awful. No man would do that to himself."

"These Indians aren't like us. They can stand pain that would drive a white man crazy, and if they've got their minds set on— What's that?"

A shadow had flicked across him, across them both, as though a huge bat had flitted between them and the light. It jerked Dean to his feet, whirled him and the girl to peer, appalled by a nameless terror, into the torchlight flare.

Nothing. There was nothing in sight. Nothing that could have cast that shadow.

Then came the slithering whisper of sand and a ponderous thud from around the other side of the shack, where the bedroom window was!

"Paul!" Mary yelled. "It's after Paul!"

She snatched the automatic from her father's fingers, threw herself across the hut-front, past the corner. A formless dark shape slewed around to her from the shadowed shack-side. A ghastly, pallid countenance gibbered at her—a visage featureless and demoniac in the dimness—and her weapon thumped against her thumb-cushion, belching flame.

The lethal jet streaked the darkness, lashing straight to the spectral apparition. The bullet thudded— astoundingly— *as though it had splattered on solid rock!* The thing jolted back into darker shadow.

"You missed him," Dean spluttered, beside Mary. "You missed—" The white stab of his flashlight pierced the murk where hut-shadow joined cliff-shadow. "Give me that gat!"

A light-disk shone on the sand and revealed the weird tracks of something that was neither man nor beast. Uncanny, rectangular markings lead away until they were lost in the tumbled debris at the cliff-base.

Words twisted in Mary's throat, spurted from her frozen lips.

"I hit him. I'm sure I hit him."

She had not missed. She could not have missed. But the grisly attacker was gone. He was gone and there was no blood, no blood at all, on the sand where inexplicable imprints marked his flight.

No blood! A sound echoed within Mary's brain like a deathblow to sanity. The dull impact of lead on stone. On stone! And then a sourceless and demented mockery of laughter sounded out of the darkness.

"Kill me?" it seemed to say. "Bullets? Fool!"

"Look!" Mary's father grunted. "Look at this!" His light was playing on the window now. Two of the bars were twisted, as though a crowbar had attempted to pry them apart. "He was trying to get at..." But only the prowler's hands had been raised to them. Only his *hands.*

"Paul!" Mary whirled, was dashing back to the entrance, was through it, was across the office and in the small bedroom beyond.

A cry of relief came from her lips. Her husband was on the bed, and the white sheets mounding over his unconscious form were unrumpled, unstained. His face was pale, waxen. Pain-sweat dewed his forehead.

"I didn't—" The blurred scream of delirium burst from his pallid lips. "You're wrong, Ned. I didn't—"

Mary got a grip on herself, moved to the bedside. The touch of Paul's brow burned against her palm. "Hush, dear." She spoke as one might to a little child. "Hush. Sleep."

Paul's eyelids flickered open. They revealed terror, for a frantic instant, that faded as the brown eyes found Mary's face. "Honey," the sick man whispered. "Your hand feels— so good. So cool. Don't go away. Don't."

"I won't dear. I'm staying right here, with you. Always with you. Sleep. Sleep."

"He's all right," Henry Dean said from the doorway. "Stay here with him and he'll be all right. I'll get that damned Indian in here and drag out of him what he knows."

He shut the door. Paul's tortured eyes had closed again. Mary swayed, managed to let herself gently down on the edge of the bed. The room door was badly hung and a little light filtered in past its edge.

It must be a nightmare through which she moved. A dream of insensate fear such as she had wandered endlessly through in the dreadful days after Ned Thiel had died. In them she had seen Paul's torso torn apart, her father's, her own. Legless, armless lumps of flesh doomed forever to an endless death in life...

But she hadn't been able to think, in those nightmares of delirium. She had accepted the horrors as inevitable, not rebelled against them as she did now. There had been no such concrete evidence of the reality of the terrors encompassing her as this sleeping form at her side, as those twisted bars, black in the window's glow dimly reflected from the torches Dad had set up against the prowling menace.

What was it, the fleshless thing with the face of horror that had driven the iron-nerved engineer to the very brink of madness? Was it in truth that aboriginal demon, that Nahmeto, of which Wanoo had shrieked warning when Paul's dynamite had split the cliff away? Had the demon taken his first victim then, returned now to stamp out the rest of the blasphemous strangers who had disturbed his age-long rest?

No! That was superstitious nonsense. But— but perhaps the Indians did have something to do with it. Dean had mistreated Wanoo, had undoubtedly mistreated the others of his degenerate tribe. They were cruel, the Indians, cruel and cunning. Had Wanoo really been listening under the window? Had his distress been indeed a grisly, stoic trick to lure Dad and her out so that his accomplice could get at Paul? If their ears had not been so sharp to catch the sound of the prowler...

But the mangled wreck of Wanoo's legs had been terribly, horribly real. Despite Dad's words she could not believe the wounds self-inflicted. Was it the Tolmans, then, the owners of El Greco mine, who were behind these terrors? The Tolmans, as she had thought before, ruthless, unscrupulous men grown rich by dubious means. If only she could get a connected, detailed story out of Dad she could get at the answer to the mystery.

Mary glanced at Paul. He was asleep, peacefully asleep. His fever seemed to have gone down. She would chance leaving him. If he awakened, she wouldn't be far, only in the outer room, talking to Dad. If she tiptoed out, soundlessly...

Soundlessly! Her hand on the doorknob, Mary froze. The space beyond the portal was soundless, too. Realization came to her that she had heard nothing from the outer room since her father had shut the door and shuffled away. If he had dragged Wanoo in, had questioned him, the noise of it would certainly have come in to her.

She was afraid! She was deathly afraid of what she would see when she flung open the door. But she must.

It was open. The office was empty. Wanoo wasn't there. *Dad* wasn't there!

Mary's hand went to her mouth. Apprehension was an icy, leaden lump in her breast. She stared at the closed outer door with dilated, aching pupils. Dad was out there in the dreadful night. He was out there with Wanoo, with the Killer.

Silence lay heavy, ominous against the walls. A pall of silence shrouding what dread happening? A waiting silence, waiting for her to open the door, to step out into the fear- filled desert...

"Dad!" the girl whimpered. Her burning glance searched the room for some weapon. No gun. Dean had the only one there was. No knife. On the table a fist-size nugget of dirt-encrusted stone speckled with glints of native silver.

She snatched it up and she ran out through the door into the dancing flare of the torches. The ground before the house was appallingly empty. Even the terrible fragment of Laddie was gone. Even the slumped body of Wanoo from the depression where he had lain. But from that blood-splotched wallow a track wandered away across the glistening alkali— a track of deep-pressed imprints, rectangular, heelless, toeless. The track of the Killer-Thing!

It gripped Mary's agonized gaze with its sinister significance, pulled her stare along it as though vision were concrete, were something that could be dragged against will through the night. Across the arid flat, across the ruts the trucks had made in some far-off day when the world had been sane and free from terror. It swerved to lose itself in the black enormity of the ore-car trestle.

The dancing flare of a torch beyond the timbered spider-web lent it a trembling, grotesque life, as though the gigantic insect that had spun it plucked now at his raying network. With queer inconsequence Mary's eyes moved up along the interlaced beams to search for it— *and found it!*

The black thing hung, twisting, high up in the criss-cross mesh. It wasn't a spider. It was a human form, pendulant from a filament-like rope— a human form, hung by the neck.

Whose?

Mary was running along the plateau, the salt sands crunching under her flying feet, her hair streaming behind her, the scream that tore at her suspended in her choked throat till that terrible question should be answered.

3: The Ghoul Comes For His Bride

THE trestle, the hanging corpse, swam toward Mary Faston. She could see them clearly now; the twisted limbs, the head lolling on the broken neck. Flame licked up from somewhere, struck into awful distinctness a purple tongue jutting

out under a bristling white mustache, eyes bulging from an engorged countenance that was a gargoylesque, distorted caricature of the face she had loved. The scream tore loose— a shrill crescendo of grief and despair.

And then suddenly she was silent, was crouched and silent against a splintered, sun-dried upright. That scream of hers had evoked movement, somewhere near, a whispered hint of movement she had heard even through her wail. She probed the flickering shadows to find its source.

Nor was it with fear that she sought the skulker. Fear had gone from her, was cauterized from her soul by white-hot wrath. A lust for vengeance surged within her, snarled her lips away from her small white teeth, flared redly in her slitted eyes. For vengeance on the being, human or demoniac, that first had driven her father mad and then had killed him.

The yellow sand at the edge of the trestle's shadow was jogged, abruptly, by a moving silhouette. A figure limped cautiously out into the light. Mary bent lower in her covert.

Wanoo's swarthy visage turned toward the spot from which she had screamed. His eyes glittered reptilian in the ambient glare, and his arm bent up. He held an automatic— Dad's gun. No doubt now that he was the killer. No doubt that he was looking for her to complete his lethal task.

Mary snarled. Her hand lashed out, the silver nugget arced from it. It crunched sickeningly against Wanoo's forehead. He collapsed, sprawled, very still, in the sand.

"Got him!" the girl cried. "Dad! Do you see? I got him first shot!"

She flung herself out into the light, arms above her head in a gesture of triumph, a screech of victory keening from her lips. A thump above her punctuated that cry, the thump of her father's corpse windblown against wood that made a frame for a picture of grisly death.

And another sound slashed across the abrupt silence, a sharper sound. It was the slam of a closing door— the shack-door that she had left open behind her! Mary whirled. She saw the wooden leaf swing inward to the invisible thrust of the wind, slam shut again. Was it only the wind that swung that door?

She was running again toward the hut where she had left her husband! She was sprinting through the yellow-luminous night. Paul was so weak, so helpless, there. And Wanoo was not the only killer abroad that night.

She got hands on the door-knob, heaved it open, and flung herself into the inner room.

And froze, a moaning, rigid statue in the center of the bedroom floor. Paul wasn't there. The bed was horribly empty. While she had been gone from him, breaking her promise, abandoning her trust, the killer had come in through the door she had left unbarred, and had taken him.

The killer! Not Wanoo. Impossible for it to have been Wanoo. That other. That faceless thing on whose body bullets thudded with the sound of lead oil rock. Nahmeto! The ancient demon of the mesa awakened to ravening, furious life!

Ned! Dad! Paul! It had taken them all to punish them for their blasphemy. Only she was left. It would not spare her. Its vengeance on Paul accomplished, it would return for her. Like molten quicksilver the terror boiled through Mary's veins, woke her to action. She leaped out again into the office, sliced home the bolts that might hold the door against the threat and shoved the heavy desk against the portal.

And then it was there! Thud of heavy feet in the sand, crash of a ponderous something that was not flesh against the door, heralded its arrival. It was a snuffling menace battering against the barring wood. A gibbering shout demanding entrance.

Her skin an icy sheath for her quivering body, Mary was incapable of movement, of thought, of anything but stark and naked fear. She stared at the stout wooden barrier, at the strappings of iron that reinforced it, at the huge bolts Dean had fashioned, as he had fashioned the bars over the windows, in the mine smithy. Would they hold? Would they avail to keep out the demoniac entity whose shattering, furious blows shook the door, the shack itself, as though at any moment the structure must collapse?

Those blows, the sound of those blows, buffeted her body as though the wood, the space between, were non-existent. "Oh God!" The prayer was neither voice nor thought. It was a wordless entreaty wrung from the girl's very soul. "Oh great God! Make him stop. Stop him. Please stop him!"

Was it in frustration, that, pat to the instant of that prayer, the battering ended? End it did, and silence seemed to Mary Faston more fearful somehow than the tumult it followed. More fearful because underneath the silence there was the slither of something prowling along the side of the cabin, *the scrape of stone along its walls...*

And then the prickling, ghastly sensation of inimical, hostile eyes glaring at her from behind.

"Mary!" A familiar voice husked her name. "Mary!" *The voice of Ned Thiel!* The voice of one dead for a year.

The girl's blood froze. Ned was dead. Ned Thiel was dead. It was a voice from beyond the grave that called her.

"Mary Dean!"

How it happened Mary did not know; certainly she had not willed it, but abruptly she had swung to the sound of that voice and was facing the oblong, striped aperture in the wall that was the barred office window.

It was blurred to her vision, and then it was distinct in the glare of the lamp penduluming from the ceiling. And it framed a face that thrust, monstrous, incredible, against the bars.

At least it was oval-shaped, like a face. But no face under heaven could be like that, gray-green, square-meshed by fine, red threads as though some devil's seamstress had patched it together out of shroud-fragments from unblessed graves. The lashless eyes were black rents in the patchwork, the bridgeless nostrils two cavernous gouges, the mouth a writhing, toothless blasphemy.

"Mary Dean. I have come for you!"

"No," someone shrieked. "O God. O Mother of Mercy, no!"

It wasn't she who vented that pulsing cry. It wasn't she. Her throat was rasped with it, it shrilled from between her lips, but she was dreaming it as she was dreaming the Thing at which she stared. Somewhere deep within her, Mary's revolted soul denied its reality, denied the reality of all the delirium that had culminated in this. The nurse's needle would prick her, in seconds. The blessed relief of morphia would send its weltering dark up into her brain, releasing her once more from—

Thud!

Something pounded against the iron bars, thrust through them. The Thing's hand. *Not a hand!* A forked, crab-claw of dirt- encrusted ore speckled with silver as the nugget with which she had brought down Wanoo had been speckled. And dimly behind it she could make out an arm of the same jagged rock— of rock such as formed the mesa!

The macabre limb slid in, jerked, fulcruming between two bars. A stout black rod bent under the irresistible leverage.

The face blurred, withdrawing from the window. Another pincer appeared. The grotesque things pried at the barriers. The iron was bending, was twisting, was pulling loose from its fastenings...

Mary Dean laughed. It was funny, funny. The Thing had arms and hands of rock. It was all of rock except for its grisly face. No wonder her bullet hadn't killed it. That was funny too. You couldn't kill something that had never lived. It could kill you. It could rip the legs from a dog. It could hang your father. But you couldn't kill it.

The last bar squealed from its setting. The face thrust in. Shoulders followed it— naked shoulders amazingly the color of human flesh— from which earth-scummed arms groped to pull the demon through.

Nahmeto was in the room. Nahmeto. Half human, half rock. He had arms of silver ore ending in crablike pincers. He had legs of silver ore, grotesquely misshapen legs of white-splotched stone whose feet were rectangular blocks of rough-hewn rock. His torso was human. And he spoke with Ned Thiel's voice.

"Mary! You are mine at last. Mary!"

Ned— Nahmeto pounded across the floor to her. His claws reached out for her, touched her frock, ripped it from her.

Mary screamed, piercingly, horribly. The rocky arms went around her, hugged her close to the sweaty heat of that naked, incredible body. Slavering lips seared across her cheeks, found hers. From the lewd kiss tendrils of black fire darted upward to her brain, exploded within her skull, blasted her into a whirling maelstrom of darkness.

4: Machinery of Madness

"MARY!"

The darkness whispered her name, the dank-smelling, pain- pulsing darkness in which she weltered whispered to her, calling her out of sleep, out of blessed oblivion.

"Mary!"

She was cold. Damp-cold. The nurse had let the covers slip off from her. Mary reached down for them, touched nothing but her own flesh. What had they done with her nightgown? Why was the bed so hard, suddenly, cutting into her as if she were lying on jagged rock.

"Mary darling. Wake up. He's gone away."

He— Who? What was Paul whispering to her? What was he trying to tell her? He mustn't see her like this. They weren't married— yet. The girl's eyes flew open.

Queer! The dim nightlight flickered on rough-hewn stone above her. She *was* lying on stone! She was in an arched, low ceiled tunnel, like a mine-drift. It *was* a mine-drift. Terror pounced down on Mary, remembering. Nahmeto had carried her off to the drift of the silver mine, piercing the mesa face high above the desert.

"Mary, listen to me. Maybe we've got a chance."

Pain ran through her, fierce pain, as she rolled to Paul's whisper. She saw him. He was upright, stripped naked, lashed to a vertical timber that supported some weakness in the tunnel roof. The ropes binding him cut deep into his chest, into his belly, but oddly his arms and his legs were free. He was reaching backwards, his muscles bulging with effort, was trying to reach the rope knots behind him. But the beam was too .

"Paul!" Mary exclaimed. "You— you're alive. He didn't—"

"Kill me! Not yet!" Grimly. "Never mind that now. Can you get up? Can you get at these knots and untie them?"

"I'll try." Mary pushed feeble palms against the ground, shoved herself to her knees. The effort seemed to jolt her brain loose in her skull. Nausea twisted at the pit of her stomach, a dizzy vertigo whirled about her. But she persisted—

was on her feet— was staggering toward Paul— was around behind the pillar. Dim luminescence, seeping in through the tunnel entrance, showed her the knots holding him. Her fingers flew to them.

And she groaned. "They're wired tight, Paul. I can't."

"Then get away. Back through the tunnel."

"No! I'll find a sharp stone and cut them." She saw just what she needed, bent to pick it up...

Crazed laughter jabbered in her ears and she was caught by rasping stone that gripped her shoulders and held her thus with overpowering strength. Then she was in those indomitable arms again. An abortive shriek rasped in her throat. A chuckle of horrible, gloating triumph seared her ears, and she was being lifted away.

"Mary!" Paul cried out, alarm thinning his voice. "Mary! What's happened?"

"He's caught me. He was here all the time! He was playing with us!"

The shrill, maniac laugh drowned her out, the gibbering mockery of laughter that had first heralded the appearance of the demon. She was slammed against another beam, was lashed helplessly to it.

She could just see Paul, straining against his lashings to get some glimpse of her. They sliced his flesh. Little driblets of blood appeared.

"You devil!" Paul roared. "Let her go! If you hurt her I'll—"

"You'll do nothing, Paul Fasten!" The grotesque demon whose voice was Ned Thiel's voice lurched away from her. "You've done enough to me. It's my turn now."

"Ned!" Faston's shout was a scarlet thread flickering against the dimness. "You— I thought you were—"

"Dead. The old fool told you I'd died on the way to the hospital. He wanted to save you, and your wife, from thinking of me living. From being haunted by the thing you made me. Half- alive, without legs, without arms! I hanged him for that!"

"Oh, my God!" Paul saw him at last. "You—"

"Handsome, am I not?" Thiel chuckled. "I've seen myself in a mirror. Take a good look. I hope you like it. I hope you like what you see. *Murderer!*"

"Murderer! What do you mean?"

"You know what I mean. You fixed that shot so that it would catch me and kill me. That was the only way you could win Mary from me. But dynamite is tricky stuff, and it fooled you. It didn't kill me. It only tore my legs and arms away and burned the skin from my face. It only made me something the devil himself wouldn't touch with his pitchfork."

"I didn't. You're cra—"

"Maybe I am. Who wouldn't go crazy, with that happening to him? But they fixed me up, in the hospital. You see— I'm not the first man this has happened

to. There were lots of them, in the war. Basket-cases, they called them, and then they didn't call them any more. They hid them away in hospitals, in England and France, in Germany and in America. They hid them away and the people forgot about them. But the doctors didn't forget. For twenty years the doctors worked, and at last they found a way to make some of them— half-human— again. Those that had stumps left, of arms and legs. Stumps like I had, to which they could hitch legs and arms made of silver, with machinery inside by which they could be worked almost like real arms and legs."

Silver! Mary saw now that the limbs she had thought stone were really fashioned of that metal. Tarnished, crusted by earth as the madman had prowled the labyrinth of the mine till it had gone back to the appearance of the ore that gave it birth, Wanoo's ravings had made her see the silver as that rock of which the Indian demon Nahmeto was said to be formed. But Thiel was still talking.

"I was lucky, Paul Faston. They grafted skin on my burned face and they made me arms and legs. And then they turned me free, to find my bride. I've got her, now. I'm a man still, even if I am half-dead, and I'll take her when I am through with you. When I am through..."

The voice of Ned Thiel splintered again into demoniac laughter that sliced Mary's shredded nerves as with the keen edges of white hot knives. There was some insane intent behind that maniacal cachinnation, some plan for revenge more horrible than her wildest fears could conceive.

"Ned," she cried. "Ned! You're wrong! Paul didn't try to kill you to win me. He didn't have to! I'd promised myself to him already. I'd already told him I'd marry him."

The gargoylesque figure twisted around to her. "You lie! You loved me. You love me now..."

Perhaps another tack would succeed. "Of course I love you. But you don't love me." Unbelievably she managed to shut the hysteria out of her voice, the queasy revolt that seethed within her at the sight of that lewdness to make it reproachful, seductive.

"I don't love you! Would I have come back, half-dead as I am, to claim you if I didn't love you?"

"If you loved me you wouldn't have tied me here like this. The ropes hurt, Ned. They hurt dreadfully." If she could get free she somehow would save Paul. Thiel must be vulnerable at the places where his metal limbs were joined to their stumps. She'd grab up a stone and...

"They're cutting into me. Won't you loosen them, my darling?"

It was working. He was coming nearer, nearer, almost reluctantly.

"Do they hurt you, Mary? Are they too tight?"

"They are, Ned dear. Too tight." He was near enough now to reach out to her. The silver claws touched the rope that went across under Mary's breasts, slipped upward to dent her throbbing flesh. The madman drooled, flung himself against her. His loathsome face nuzzled avidly, eagerly, seeking sensation other men find with the hands and arms he did not have...

"Sweet," the crazed, sex-starved cripple blithered. "So sweet..."

The touch of him was slimy, repulsive. An uncontrollable shudder of loathing shook Mary. He felt it, sensed its meaning. He leaped away from her.

"You hate me," his writhing lips spewed from his visage of a ghoul. "You're looking at him, at his strong body, his whole limbs, and you cannot bear the touch of me. I'll fix that. Watch. Watch me, my sweet."

He jerked around, darted toward the tunnel entrance, vanished. And then, instantly, he was back.

He was back and trailing from his grotesque claws were four writhing ropes that stretched out to the portal. Their cut ends were looped in small nooses. He lurched to Paul, laughed...

And with a swiftness of movement that took the bound man by surprise he had slipped those nooses over Paul's arms, his legs, had tightened them at his armpits, his hip joints, had surged away.

"What are you going to do?" Mary shrieked, her frightened heart battering at its caging ribs. "What are you going to do?"

Thiel laughed once more. "Make him like I am, Mary darling. Make him like me. And then you can choose between us."

"Listen." His voice dropped low. "The other ends of these ropes are fastened to an ore-car, out there on the trestle. There's a ton of rock in that car and it's on the down-slant. All I've got to do now is to knock away the wedge that's breaking it.

"The car will start slowly, very slowly. There's slack in these cables, yards of slack. The car will go faster, faster..."

"You devil!" Mary screamed. "You fiend incarnate!"

"Who made me that way?" the madman snarled. "Who made me?"

He was gone again. He was outside the portal. His ponderous metal feet pounded on the rocky ledge, and then there was another sound. The thud of a sledgehammer on a wooden wedge.

"Paul! Paul dearest! What are we going to do?"

"This!" Paul's head was bent far down on his chest, across which the loose cables trailed that coiled to the door. His mouth was open and he was squirming to get one of them between his teeth.

"Can you get them off? Paul! Can you save yourself?"

"No," he grunted. "But I can save you. Here—!" He had a grip on the cable, his head jerked. The rope looped through the air, fell across Mary's shoulder. "Get that around your neck."

Thud! Thud! Thud! The sound of the sledge-hammer came into the tunnel.

Mary understood. Death, any death, would be better than what Thiel had in store for her.

Thud! Thud! Thud!

It was done. The cable was twisted around her neck. When the ore-car started...

Thud! Thud! Thud!

Death thudding out there. Death for herself, for Paul. Death! She could have saved them from this. She could have saved them—if that fatal shudder had not betrayed her revulsion to the maniac. She had condemned them to death!

"Ned!" she screamed. "Ned! Paul's fooling you. Paul's going to kill me, too. Save me, Ned!"

Thud. It wasn't the pound of the sledge this time; it was the thump of the half-dead man's metal foot. *Thud, thud, thud.* Gigantic, misshapen, he lurched in through the drift opening, saw the rope twisted around Mary's neck.

That ghoul's visage of his was incredibly more horrible than before. "You dog," he blithered. "Trying to rob me of my bride!"

"Save me," Mary moaned. "Save me, my dear."

He pounded toward her, was between her and Paul. Even in that moment his eyes of black flame licked her nakedness, covetously. His claws reached for the noose.

"Kiss me, Ned. Kiss me. I know I love you. I know now I've always loved you."

"Mine! You're mine! Aren't you mine, Mary?"

"Of course. Your— bride. Take me, Ned."

His hot breath fanned her cheeks. His loathsome body pressed close against hers, his writhing lips slid across her cheek, found her mouth.

Mary arched her body, thrusting breasts, abdomen against him, shoving him away. Off-balance, he staggered back...

As she planned, Paul's fingers closed on Thiel's upper arm, on his biceps of metal. Jerked. Twisted. Thiel shrieked in sudden agony as the limb came away from its stump, wires ripping from the living sinews to which they were attached. The arm was a club in Paul's hands. It flailed, crashed down on the maniac's skull. A crunch of smashed bone sickened Mary. Spurting blood sprayed over her.

Thiel was a crumpled, gory heap on the mine-drift floor.

"He's licked." Paul's triumphant shout battered at her ears. "You've licked him, Mary."

But there was no surge of triumph, of relief, in the girl's veins. She was staring at the ropes trailing across the floor, at the ropes that were fastened to Paul's limbs. They were moving. Slowly, almost imperceptibly, they were moving!

The wedge was loose! In that last second before she had called him away, Thiel had loosened the wedge. The nearer end of the trestle tracks were almost level, the car's own weight had held it steady for awhile, but now it was starting to move. In seconds it would reach the steeper pitch, plunge downward, tearing Paul's arms, his legs, out by the roots. But first the noose would jerk tight about her own throat.

"God!" Paul's cry told her that he, too, had seen their doom. "Head up, Mary. You've still got a chance."

He was sawing at a rope with the notched edge of the silver claw that terminated the arm he had torn from Thiel. At the rope that coiled across to encircle her neck. With no thought for himself he was working frantically, desperately, to save her.

"Don't, Paul," Mary cried. "Don't. Let us go together."

"Not you. Not you, dear. I've got it. I'm almost through."

A frayed thread broke loose. Others. But the ropes were almost taut now. Which would win?

The hemp dropped lax, trailing across her bosom. Paul snatched at the others gripping the three in a single, desperate clutch.

"Ugh!" A guttural exclamation pulled Mary's bulging eyes to the drift entrance. Wanoo sprang in, a knife glinting in his hand. Wanoo! Despair smashed down. Even if the impossible happened, even if Paul could get himself loose, Wanoo would finish them.

The ropes snapped tight! The Ute bent, slashed at them with his keen-edged weapon. They parted, twanging. The ore-car rushed away, making rumbling thunder. But she was alive. Paul was alive, unhurt.

"Ugh," Wanoo grunted, his beady eyes glittering as they stared down at what was left of Ned Thiel. "Ugh. Nahmeto dead. Nahmeto no tear Wanoo's leg again. Nahmeto no hit Wanoo on head with rock no more. Only boss got right to hit Wanoo."

2: A Double-Barrelled Ghost

Israel Zangwill

1864-1926

Phil May's Annual, Summer 1892

In: *The King of Schnorrers*, 1894

"Pray be seated yourself," said The Ghost simply. (Phil May, 1864-1903)

I WAS RUINED. The bank in which I had been a sleeping-partner from my cradle smashed suddenly, and I was exempted from income tax at one fell blow. It became necessary to dispose even of the family mansion and the hereditary furniture. The shame of not contributing to my country's exchequer spurred me to earnest reflection upon how to earn an income, and, having mixed myself another lemon-squash, I threw myself back on the canvas garden-chair, and watched the white, scented wreaths of my cigar-smoke hanging in the drowsy air, and provoking inexperienced bees to settle upon them. It was the sort of summer afternoon on which to eat lotus, and to sip the dew from the lips of Amaryllises; but although I had an affianced Amaryllis (whose Christian name was Jenny Grant), I had not the heart to dally with her in view of my sunk fortunes. She loved me for myself, no doubt, but then I was not myself since the

catastrophe; and although she had hastened to assure me of her unchanged regard, I was not at all certain whether *I* should be able to support a wife in addition to all my other misfortunes. So that I was not so comfortable that afternoon as I appeared to my perspiring valet: no rose in the garden had a pricklier thorn than I. The thought of my poverty weighed me down; and when the setting sun began flinging bars of gold among the clouds, the reminder of my past extravagance made my heart heavier still, and I broke down utterly.

Swearing at the manufacturers of such collapsible garden-chairs, I was struggling to rise when I perceived my rings of smoke comporting themselves strangely. They were widening and curving and flowing into definite outlines, as though the finger of the wind were shaping them into a rough sketch of the human figure. Sprawling amid the ruins of my chair, I watched the nebulous contours grow clearer and clearer, till at last the agitation subsided, and a misty old gentleman, clad in vapour of an eighteenth-century cut, stood plainly revealed upon the sun-flecked grass.

"Good afternoon, John," said the old gentleman, courteously removing his cocked hat.

"Good afternoon!" I gasped. "How do you know my name?"

"Because I have not forgotten my own," he replied. "I am John Halliwell, your great-grandfather. Don't you remember me?"

A flood of light burst upon my brain. Of course! I ought to have recognised him at once from the portrait by Sir Joshua Reynolds, just about to be sold by auction. The artist had gone to full length in painting him, and here he was complete, from his white wig, beautifully frizzled by the smoke, to his buckled shoes, from his knee-breeches to the frills at his wrists.

"Oh! pray pardon my not having recognised you," I cried remorsefully; "I have such a bad memory for faces. Won't you take a chair?"

"Sir, I have not sat down for a century and a half," he said simply. "Pray be seated yourself."

Thus reminded of my undignified position, I gathered myself up, and readjusting the complex apparatus, confided myself again to its canvas caresses. Then, grown conscious of my shirt-sleeves, I murmured,—

"Excuse my *deshabille*. I did not expect to see you."

"I am aware the season is inopportune," he said apologetically. "But I did not care to put off my visit till Christmas. You see, with us Christmas is a kind of Bank Holiday; and when there is a general excursion, a refined spirit prefers its own fireside. Moreover, I am not, as you may see, very robust, and I scarce like to risk exposing myself to such an extreme change of temperature. Your English Christmas is so cold. With the pyrometer at three hundred and fifty, it is hardly prudent to pass to thirty. On a sultry day like this the contrast is less marked."

"I understand," I said sympathetically.

"But I should hardly have ventured," he went on, "to trespass upon you at this untimely season merely out of deference to my own valetudinarian instincts. The fact is, I am a *littérateur*."

"Oh, indeed," I said vaguely; "I was not aware of it."

"Nobody was aware of it," he replied sadly; "but my calling at this professional hour will, perhaps, go to substantiate my statement."

I looked at him blankly. Was he quite sane? All the apparitions I had ever heard of spoke with some approach to coherence, however imbecile their behaviour. The statistics of insanity in the spiritual world have never been published, but I suspect the percentage of madness is high. Mere harmless idiocy is doubtless the prevalent form of dementia, judging by the way the poor unhappy spirits set about compassing their ends; but some of their actions can only be explained by the more violent species of mania. My great-grandfather seemed to read the suspicion in my eye, for he hastily continued:—

"Of course it is only the outside public who imagine that the spirits of literature really appear at Christmas. It is the annuals that appear at Christmas. The real season at which we are active on earth is summer, as every journalist knows. By Christmas the authors of our being have completely forgotten our existence. As a writer myself, and calling in connection with a literary matter, I thought it more professional to pay my visit during the dog days, especially as your being in trouble supplied me with an excuse for asking permission to go beyond bounds."

"You knew I was in trouble?" I murmured, touched by this sympathy from an unexpected quarter.

"Certainly. And from a selfish point of view I am not sorry. You have always been so inconsiderately happy that I could never find a seemly pretext to get out to see you."

"Is it only when your descendants are in trouble that you are allowed to visit them?" I enquired.

"Even so," he answered. "Of course spirits whose births were tragic, who were murdered into existence, are allowed to supplement the inefficient police departments of the upper globe, and a similar charter is usually extended to those who have hidden treasures on their conscience; but it is obvious that if all spirits were accorded what furloughs they pleased, eschatology would become a farce. Sir, you have no idea of the number of bogus criminal romances tendered daily by those wishing to enjoy the roving license of avenging spirits, for the ex-assassinated are the most enviable of immortals, and cases of personation are of frequent occurrence. Our actresses, too, are always pretending to have lost jewels; there is no end to the excuses. The Christmas Bank Holiday is naturally inadequate to our needs. Sir, I should have been far happier if my descendants had gone wrong; but in spite of the large fortune I had accumulated, both your

father and your grandfather were of exemplary respectability and unruffled cheerfulness. The solitary outing I had was when your father attended a séance, and I was knocked up in the middle of the night. But I did not enjoy my holiday in the least; the indignity of having to move the furniture made the blood boil in my veins as in a spirit-lamp, and exposed me to the malicious badinage of my circle on my return. I protested that I did not care a rap; but I was mightily rejoiced when I learnt that your father had denounced the proceedings as a swindle, and was resolved never to invite me to his table again. When you were born I thought you were born to trouble, as the sparks fly upwards from our dwelling-place; but I was mistaken. Up till now your life has been a long summer afternoon."

"Yes, but now the shades are falling," I said grimly. "It looks as if my life henceforwards will be a long holiday— for you."

He shook his wig mournfully.

"No, I am only out on parole. I have had to give my word of honour to try to set you on your legs again as soon as possible."

"You couldn't have come at a more opportune moment," I cried, remembering how he had found me. "You are a good as well as a great-grandfather, and I am proud of my descent. Won't you have a cigar?"

"Thank you, I never smoke— on earth," said the spirit hurriedly, with a flavour of bitter in his accents. "Let us to the point. You have been reduced to the painful necessity of earning your living."

I nodded silently, and took a sip of lemon-squash. A strange sense of salvation lulled my soul.

"How do you propose to do it?" asked my great-grandfather.

"Oh, I leave that to you," I said confidingly.

"Well, what do you say to a literary career?"

"Eh? What?" I gasped.

"A literary career," he repeated. "What makes you so astonished?"

"Well, for one thing it's exactly what Tom Addlestone, the leader-writer of the *Hurrygraph*, was recommending to me this morning. He said: 'John, my boy, if I had had your advantages ten years ago, I should have been spared many a headache and supplied with many a dinner. It may turn out a lucky thing yet that you gravitated so to literary society, and that so many press men had free passes to your suppers. Consider the number of men of letters you have mixed drinks with! Why, man, you can succeed in any branch of literature you please.'"

My great-grandfather's face was radiant. Perhaps it was only the setting sun that touched it.

"A chip of the old block," he murmured. "That was I in my young days. Johnson, Goldsmith, Sheridan, Burke, Hume, I knew them all— gay dogs, gay

dogs! Except that great hulking brute of a Johnson," he added, with a sudden savage snarl that showed his white teeth.

"I told Addlestone that I had no literary ability whatever, and he scoffed at me for my simplicity. All the same, I think he was only poking fun at me. My friends might puff me out to bull-size; but I am only a frog, and I should very soon burst. The public might be cajoled into buying one book; they could not be duped a second time. Don't you think I was right? I haven't any literary ability, have I?"

"Certainly not, certainly not," replied my great-grandfather with an alacrity and emphasis that would have seemed suspicious in a mere mortal. "But it does seem a shame to waste so great an opportunity. The ball that Addlestone waited years for is at your foot, and it is grievous to think that there it must remain merely because you do not know how to kick it."

"Well, but what's a man to do?"

"What's a man to do?" repeated my great-grandfather contemptuously. "Get a ghost, of course."

"By Jove!" I cried with a whistle. "That's a good idea! Addlestone has a ghost to do his leaders for him when he's lazy. I've seen the young fellow myself. Tom pays him six guineas a dozen, and gets three guineas apiece himself. But of course Tom has to live in much better style, and that makes it fair all round. You mean that I am to take advantage of my influence to get some other fellow work, and take a commission for the use of my name? That seems feasible enough. But where am I to find a ghost with the requisite talents?"

"Here," said my great-grandfather.

"What! You?"

"Yes, I," he replied calmly.

"But you couldn't write—"

"Not now, certainly not. All I wrote now would be burnt."

"Then how the devil—?" I began.

"Hush!" he interrupted nervously. "Listen, and I will a tale unfold. It is called *The Learned Pig*. I wrote it in my forty-fifth year, and it is full of sketches from the life of all the more notable personages of my time, from Lord Chesterfield to Mrs. Thrale, from Peg Woffington to Adam Smith and the ingenious Mr. Dibdin. I have painted the portrait of Sir Joshua quite as faithfully as he has painted mine. Of course much of the dialogue is real, taken from conversations preserved in my note-book. It is, I believe, a complete picture of the period, and being the only book I ever wrote or intended to write, I put my whole self into it, as well as all my friends."

"It must be, indeed, your masterpiece," I cried enthusiastically. "But why is it called *The Learned Pig*, and how has it escaped publication?"

"You shall hear. The learned pig is Dr. Johnson. He refused to take wine with me. I afterwards learnt that he had given up strong liqueurs altogether, and I went to see him again, but he received me with epigrams. He is the pivot of my book, all the other characters revolving about him. Naturally, I did not care to publish during his lifetime; not entirely, I admit, out of consideration to his feelings, but because foolish admirers had placed him on such a pedestal that he could damn any book he did not relish. I made sure of surviving him, so many and diverse were his distempers; whereas my manuscript survived me. In the moment of death I strove to tell your grandfather of the hiding-place in which I had bestowed it; but I could only make signs to which he had not the clue. You can imagine how it has embittered my spirit to have missed the aim of my life and my due niche in the pantheon of letters. In vain I strove to be registered among the 'hidden treasure' spirits, with the perambulatory privileges pertaining to the class. I was told that to recognise manuscripts under the head of 'treasures' would be to open a fresh door to abuse, there being few but had scribbled in their time and had a good conceit of their compositions to boot. I could offer no proofs of the value of my work, not even printers' proofs, and even the fact that the manuscript was concealed behind a sliding panel availed not to bring it into the coveted category. Moreover, not only did I have no other pretext to call on my descendants, but both my son and grandson were too respectable to be willingly connected with letters and too flourishing to be enticed by the prospects of profit. To you, however, this book will prove the avenue to fresh fortune."

"Do you mean I am to publish it under your name?"

"No, under yours."

"But, then, where does the satisfaction come in?"

"Your name is the same as mine."

"I see; but still, why not tell the truth about it? In a preface, for instance."

"Who would believe it? In my own day I could not credit that Macpherson spoke truly about the way Ossian came into his possession, nor to judge from gossip I have had with the younger ghosts did anyone attach credence to Sir Walter Scott's introductions."

"True," I said musingly. "It is a played-out dodge. But I am not certain whether an attack on Dr. Johnson would go down nowadays. We are aware that the man had porcine traits, but we have almost canonised him."

"The very reason why the book will be a success," he replied eagerly. "I understand that in these days of yours the best way of attracting attention is to fly in the face of all received opinion, and so in the realm of history to whitewash the villains and tar and feather the saints. The sliding panel of which I spoke is just behind the picture of me. Lose no time. Go at once, even as I must."

The shadowy contours of his form waved agitatedly in the wind.

"But how do you know anyone will bring it out?" I said doubtfully. "Am I to haunt the publishers' offices till—"

"No, no, I will do that," he interrupted in excitement. "Promise me you will help me."

"But I don't feel at all sure it stands a ghost of a chance," I said, growing colder in proportion as he grew more enthusiastic.

"It is the only chance of a ghost," he pleaded. "Come, give me your word. Any of your literary friends will get you a publisher, and where could you get a more promising ghost?"

"Oh, nonsense!" I said quietly, unconsciously quoting Ibsen. "There must be ghosts all the country over, as thick as the sand of the sea."

I was determined to put the matter on its proper footing, for I saw that under pretence of restoring my fortunes he was really trying to get me to pull his chestnuts out of the fire, and I resented the deceptive spirit that could put forward such tasks as favours. It was evident that he cherished a post-mortem grudge against the great lexicographer, as well as a posthumous craving for fame, and wished to use me as the instrument of his reputation and his revenge. But I was a man of the world, and I was not going to be rushed by a mere phantom.

"I don't deny there are plenty of ghosts about," he answered with insinuative deference. "Only will any of the others work for nothing?"

He saw he had scored a point, and his eyes twinkled.

"Yes, but I don't know that I approve of black-legs," I answered sternly. "You are taking the bread and butter out of some honest ghost's mouth."

The corners of his own mouth drooped; his eyes grew misty; he looked fading away. "Most true," he faltered; "but be pitiful. Have you no great-grand-filial feelings?"

"No, I lost everything in the crash," I answered coldly. "Suppose the book's a frost?"

"I shan't mind," he said eagerly.

"No, I don't suppose you *would* mind a frost," I retorted witheringly. "But look at the chaff you'd be letting me in for. Hadn't you better put off publication for a century or two?"

"No, no," he cried wildly; "our mansion will pass into strange hands. I shall not have the right of calling on the new proprietors."

"Phew!" I whistled; "perhaps that's why you timed your visit now, you artful old codger. I have always heard appearances are deceptive. However, I have ever been a patron of letters; and although I cannot approve of post-mundane malice, and think the dead past should be let bury its dead, still, if you are set upon it, I will try and use my influence to get your book published."

"Bless you!" he cried tremulously, with all the effusiveness natural to an author about to see himself in print, and trembled so violently that he dissipated himself away.

I stood staring a moment at the spot where he had stood, pleased at having out-manœuvred him; then my chair gave way with another crash, and I picked myself up painfully, together with the dead stump of my cigar, and brushed the ash off my trousers, and rubbed my eyes and wondered if I had been dreaming. But no! when I ran into the cheerless dining-room, with its pervading sense of imminent auction, I found the sliding panel behind the portrait by Reynolds, which seemed to beam kindly encouragement upon me, and, lo! *The Learned Pig* was there in a mass of musty manuscript.

As everybody knows, the book made a hit. The *Acadæum* was unusually generous in its praise: "A lively picture of the century of farthingales and stomachers, marred only by numerous anachronisms and that stilted air of faked-up archæological knowledge which is, we suppose, inevitable in historical novels. The conversations are particularly artificial. Still, we can forgive Mr. Halliwell a good deal of inaccuracy and inacquaintance with the period, in view of the graphic picture of the literary dictator from the novel point of view of a contemporary who was not among the worshippers. It is curious how the honest, sterling character of the man is brought out all the more clearly from the incapacity of the narrator to comprehend its greatness—to show this was a task that called for no little skill and subtlety. If it were only for this one ingenious idea, Mr. Halliwell's book would stand out from the mass of abortive attempts to resuscitate the past. He has failed to picture the times, but he has done what is better—he has given us human beings who are alive, instead of the futile shadows that flit through the Walhalla of the average historical novel."

All the leading critics were at one as to the cleverness with which the great soul of Dr. Johnson was made to stand out on the background of detraction, and the public was universally agreed that this was the only readable historical novel published for many years, and that the anachronisms didn't matter a pin. I don't know what I had done to Tom Addlestone; but when everybody was talking about me, he went about saying that I kept a ghost. I was annoyed, for I did not keep one in any sense, and I openly defied the world to produce him. Why, I never saw him again myself— I believe he was too disgusted with the fillip he had given Dr. Johnson's reputation, and did not even take advantage of the Christmas Bank Holiday. But Addlestone's libel got to Jenny Grant's ears, and she came to me indignantly, and said: "I won't have it. You must either give up me or the ghost."

"To give up you would be to give up the ghost, darling," I answered soothingly. "But you, and you alone, have a right to the truth. It is not my ghost at all, it is my great-grandfather's."

"Do you mean to say he bequeathed him to you?"

"It came to that."

I then told her the truth, and showed how in any case the profits of my ancestor's book rightfully reverted backwards to me. So we were married on them, and Jenny, fired by my success, tried *her* hand on a novel, and published it, truthfully enough, under the name of J. Halliwell. She has written all my stories ever since, including this one; which, if it be necessarily false in the letter, is true in the spirit.

3: Passing of the Third Floor Back

Jerome K. Jerome

1859-1927

The Saturday Evening Post, 19 Nov 1904

Collected in: *Passing of the Third Floor Back and other stories*, 1909

First as a play by Jerome K. Jerome, produced in London in 1908; then this novelette by Jerome in 1909; a silent film in 1918; filmed again in 1935 by British Gaumont.

THE NEIGHBOURHOOD of Bloomsbury Square towards four o'clock of a November afternoon is not so crowded as to secure to the stranger, of appearance anything out of the common, immunity from observation. Tibb's boy, screaming at the top of his voice that *she* was his honey, stopped suddenly, stepped backwards on to the toes of a voluble young lady wheeling a perambulator, and remained deaf, apparently, to the somewhat personal remarks of the voluble young lady. Not until he had reached the next corner— and then more as a soliloquy than as information to the street— did Tibb's boy recover sufficient interest in his own affairs to remark that *he* was her bee. The voluble young lady herself, following some half-a-dozen yards behind, forgot her wrongs in contemplation of the stranger's back. There was this that was peculiar about the stranger's back: that instead of being flat it presented a decided curve. "It ain't a 'ump, and it don't look like kervitcher of the spine," observed the voluble young lady to herself. "Blimy if I don't believe 'e's taking 'ome 'is washing up his back."

The constable at the corner, trying to seem busy doing nothing, noticed the stranger's approach with gathering interest. "That's an odd sort of a walk of yours, young man," thought the constable. "You take care you don't fall down and tumble over yourself."

"Thought he was a young man," murmured the constable, the stranger having passed him. "He had a young face right enough."

The daylight was fading. The stranger, finding it impossible to read the name of the street upon the corner house, turned back.

"Why, 'tis a young man," the constable told himself; "a mere boy."

"I beg your pardon," said the stranger; "but would you mind telling me my way to Bloomsbury Square."

"This is Bloomsbury Square," explained the constable; "leastways round the corner is. What number might you be wanting?"

The stranger took from the ticket pocket of his tightly buttoned overcoat a piece of paper, unfolded it and read it out: "Mrs. Pennycherry. Number Forty-eight."

"Round to the left," instructed him the constable; "fourth house. Been recommended there?"

"By— by a friend," replied the stranger. "Thank you very much."

"Ah," muttered the constable to himself; "guess you won't be calling him that by the end of the week, young—"

"Funny," added the constable, gazing after the retreating figure of the stranger. "Seen plenty of the other sex as looked young behind and old in front. This cove looks young in front and old behind. Guess he'll look old all round if he stops long at mother Pennycherry's: stingy old cat."

Constables whose beat included Bloomsbury Square had their reasons for not liking Mrs. Pennycherry. Indeed it might have been difficult to discover any human being with reasons for liking that sharp-featured lady. Maybe the keeping of second-rate boarding houses in the neighbourhood of Bloomsbury does not tend to develop the virtues of generosity and amiability.

Meanwhile the stranger, proceeding upon his way, had rung the bell of Number Forty-eight. Mrs. Pennycherry, peeping from the area and catching a glimpse, above the railings, of a handsome if somewhat effeminate masculine face, hastened to readjust her widow's cap before the looking-glass while directing Mary Jane to show the stranger, should he prove a problematical boarder, into the dining-room, and to light the gas.

"And don't stop gossiping, and don't you take it upon yourself to answer questions. Say I'll be up in a minute," were Mrs. Pennycherry's further instructions, "and mind you hide your hands as much as you can."

"WHAT ARE YOU grinning at?" demanded Mrs. Pennycherry, a couple of minutes later, of the dingy Mary Jane.

"Wasn't grinning," explained the meek Mary Jane, "was only smiling to myself."

"What at?"

"Dunno," admitted Mary Jane. But still she went on smiling.

"What's he like then?" demanded Mrs. Pennycherry.

"'E ain't the usual sort," was Mary Jane's opinion.

"Thank God for that," ejaculated Mrs. Pennycherry piously.

"Says 'e's been recommended, by a friend."

"By whom?"

"By a friend. 'E didn't say no name." Mrs. Pennycherry pondered. "He's not the funny sort, is he?"

Not that sort at all. Mary Jane was sure of it.

Mrs. Pennycherry ascended the stairs still pondering. As she entered the room the stranger rose and bowed. Nothing could have been simpler than the stranger's bow, yet there came with it to Mrs. Pennycherry a rush of old

sensations long forgotten. For one brief moment Mrs. Pennycherry saw herself an amiable well-bred lady, widow of a solicitor: a visitor had called to see her. It was but a momentary fancy. The next instant Reality reasserted itself. Mrs. Pennycherry, a lodging-house keeper, existing precariously upon a daily round of petty meannesses, was prepared for contest with a possible new boarder, who fortunately looked an inexperienced young gentleman.

"Someone has recommended me to you," began Mrs. Pennycherry; "may I ask who?"

But the stranger waved the question aside as immaterial.

"You might not remember— him," he smiled. "He thought that I should do well to pass the few months I am given— that I have to be in London, here. You can take me in?"

Mrs. Pennycherry thought that she would be able to take the stranger in.

"A room to sleep in," explained the stranger, "—any room will do— with food and drink sufficient for a man, is all that I require."

"For breakfast," began Mrs. Pennycherry, "I always give—"

"What is right and proper, I am convinced," interrupted the stranger. "Pray do not trouble to go into detail, Mrs. Pennycherry. With whatever it is I shall be content."

Mrs. Pennycherry, puzzled, shot a quick glance at the stranger, but his face, though the gentle eyes were smiling, was frank and serious.

"At all events you will see the room," suggested Mrs. Pennycherry, "before we discuss terms."

"Certainly," agreed the stranger. "I am a little tired and shall be glad to rest there."

Mrs. Pennycherry led the way upward; on the landing of the third floor, paused a moment undecided, then opened the door of the back bedroom.

"It is very comfortable," commented the stranger.

"For this room," stated Mrs. Pennycherry, "together with full board, consisting of—"

"Of everything needful. It goes without saying," again interrupted the stranger with his quiet grave smile.

"I have generally asked," continued Mrs. Pennycherry, "four pounds a week. To you—" Mrs. Pennycherry's voice, unknown to her, took to itself the note of aggressive generosity— "seeing you have been recommended here, say three pounds ten."

"Dear lady," said the stranger, "that is kind of you. As you have divined, I am not a rich man. If it be not imposing upon you I accept your reduction with gratitude."

Again Mrs. Pennycherry, familiar with the satirical method, shot a suspicious glance upon the stranger, but not a line was there, upon that smooth fair face,

to which a sneer could for a moment have clung. Clearly he was as simple as he looked.

"Gas, of course, extra."

"Of course," agreed the Stranger.

"Coals—"

"We shall not quarrel," for a third time the stranger interrupted. "You have been very considerate to me as it is. I feel, Mrs. Pennycherry, I can leave myself entirely in your hands."

The stranger appeared anxious to be alone. Mrs. Pennycherry, having put a match to the stranger's fire, turned to depart. And at this point it was that Mrs. Pennycherry, the holder hitherto of an unbroken record for sanity, behaved in a manner she herself, five minutes earlier in her career, would have deemed impossible— that no living soul who had ever known her would have believed, even had Mrs. Pennycherry gone down upon her knees and sworn it to them.

"Did I say three pound ten?" demanded Mrs. Pennycherry of the stranger, her hand upon the door. She spoke crossly. She was feeling cross, with the stranger, with herself— particularly with herself.

"You were kind enough to reduce it to that amount," replied the stranger; "but if upon reflection you find yourself unable—"

"I was making a mistake," said Mrs. Pennycherry, "it should have been two pound ten."

"I cannot— I will not accept such sacrifice," exclaimed the stranger; "the three pound ten I can well afford."

"Two pound ten are my terms," snapped Mrs. Pennycherry. "If you are bent on paying more, you can go elsewhere. You'll find plenty to oblige you."

Her vehemence must have impressed the stranger. "We will not contend further," he smiled. "I was merely afraid that in the goodness of your heart—"

"Oh, it isn't as good as all that," growled Mrs. Pennycherry.

"I am not so sure," returned the stranger. "I am somewhat suspicious of you. But wilful woman must, I suppose, have her way."

The stranger held out his hand, and to Mrs. Pennycherry, at that moment, it seemed the most natural thing in the world to take it as if it had been the hand of an old friend and to end the interview with a pleasant laugh— though laughing was an exercise not often indulged in by Mrs. Pennycherry.

Mary Jane was standing by the window, her hands folded in front of her, when Mrs. Pennycherry re-entered the kitchen. By standing close to the window one caught a glimpse of the trees in Bloomsbury Square and through their bare branches of the sky beyond.

"There's nothing much to do for the next half hour, till Cook comes back. I'll see to the door if you'd like a run out?" suggested Mrs. Pennycherry.

"It would be nice," agreed the girl so soon as she had recovered power of speech; "it's just the time of day I like."

"Don't be longer than the half hour," added Mrs. Pennycherry.

Forty-eight Bloomsbury Square, assembled after dinner in the drawing-room, discussed the stranger with that freedom and frankness characteristic of Forty-eight Bloomsbury Square, towards the absent.

"Not what I call a smart young man," was the opinion of Augustus Longcord, who was something in the City.

"Thpeaking for mythelf," commented his partner Isidore, "hav'n'th any uthe for the thmart young man. Too many of him, ath it ith."

"Must be pretty smart if he's one too many for you," laughed his partner.

There was this to be said for the repartee of Forty-eight Bloomsbury Square: it was simple of construction and easy of comprehension.

"Well it made me feel good just looking at him," declared Miss Kite, the highly coloured. "It was his clothes, I suppose— made me think of Noah and the ark— all that sort of thing."

"It would be clothes that would make you think— if anything," drawled the languid Miss Devine. She was a tall, handsome girl, engaged at the moment in futile efforts to recline with elegance and comfort combined upon a horsehair sofa. Miss Kite, by reason of having secured the only easy-chair, was unpopular that evening; so that Miss Devine's remark received from the rest of the company more approbation than perhaps it merited.

"Is that intended to be clever, dear, or only rude?" Miss Kite requested to be informed.

"Both," claimed Miss Devine.

"Myself? I must confess," shouted the tall young lady's father, commonly called the Colonel, "I found him a fool."

"I noticed you seemed to be getting on very well together," purred his wife, a plump, smiling little lady.

"Possibly we were," retorted the Colonel. "Fate has accustomed me to the society of fools."

"Isn't it a pity to start quarrelling immediately after dinner, you two," suggested their thoughtful daughter from the sofa, "you'll have nothing left to amuse you for the rest of the evening."

"He didn't strike me as a conversationalist," said the lady who was cousin to a baronet; "but he did pass the vegetables before he helped himself. A little thing like that shows breeding."

"Or that he didn't know you and thought maybe you'd leave him half a spoonful," laughed Augustus the wit.

"What I can't make out about him—" shouted the Colonel.

The stranger entered the room.

The Colonel, securing the evening paper, retired into a corner. The highly coloured Kite, reaching down from the mantelpiece a paper fan, held it coyly before her face. Miss Devine sat upright on the horse-hair sofa, and rearranged her skirts.

"Know anything?" demanded Augustus of the stranger, breaking the somewhat remarkable silence.

The stranger evidently did not understand. It was necessary for Augustus, the witty, to advance further into that odd silence.

"What's going to pull off the Lincoln handicap? Tell me, and I'll go out straight and put my shirt upon it."

"I think you would act unwisely," smiled the stranger; "I am not an authority upon the subject."

"Not! Why they told me you were Captain Spy of the *Sporting Life*— in disguise."

It would have been difficult for a joke to fall more flat. Nobody laughed, though why Mr. Augustus Longcord could not understand, and maybe none of his audience could have told him, for at Forty-eight Bloomsbury Square Mr. Augustus Longcord passed as a humorist. The stranger himself appeared unaware that he was being made fun of.

"You have been misinformed," assured him the stranger.

"I beg your pardon," said Mr. Augustus Longcord.

"It is nothing," replied the stranger in his sweet low voice, and passed on.

"Well what about this theatre," demanded Mr. Longcord of his friend and partner; "do you want to go or don't you?" Mr. Longcord was feeling irritable.

"Goth the ticketh— may ath well," thought Isidore.

"Damn stupid piece, I'm told."

"Motht of them thupid, more or leth. Pity to wathte the ticketh," argued Isidore, and the pair went out.

"Are you staying long in London?" asked Miss Kite, raising her practised eyes towards the stranger.

"Not long," answered the stranger. "At least I do not know. It depends."

An unusual quiet had invaded the drawing-room of Forty-eight Bloomsbury Square, generally noisy with strident voices about this hour. The Colonel remained engrossed in his paper. Mrs. Devine sat with her plump white hands folded on her lap, whether asleep or not it was impossible to say. The lady who was cousin to a baronet had shifted her chair beneath the gasolier, her eyes bent on her everlasting crochet work. The languid Miss Devine had crossed to the piano, where she sat fingering softly the tuneless keys, her back to the cold barely-furnished room.

"Sit down!" commanded saucily Miss Kite, indicating with her fan the vacant seat beside her. "Tell me about yourself. You interest me." Miss Kite adopted a

pretty authoritative air towards all youthful-looking members of the opposite sex. It harmonised with the peach complexion and the golden hair, and fitted her about as well.

"I am glad of that," answered the stranger, taking the chair suggested. "I so wish to interest you."

"You're a very bold boy." Miss Kite lowered her fan, for the purpose of glancing archly over the edge of it, and for the first time encountered the eyes of the stranger looking into hers. And then it was that Miss Kite experienced precisely the same curious sensation that an hour or so ago had troubled Mrs. Pennycherry when the stranger had first bowed to her. It seemed to Miss Kite that she was no longer the Miss Kite that, had she risen and looked into it, the fly-blown mirror over the marble mantelpiece would, she knew, have presented to her view; but quite another Miss Kite— a cheerful, bright-eyed lady verging on middle age, yet still good-looking in spite of her faded complexion and somewhat thin brown locks. Miss Kite felt a pang of jealousy shoot through her; this middle-aged Miss Kite seemed, on the whole, a more attractive lady. There was a wholesomeness, a broadmindedness about her that instinctively drew one towards her. Not hampered, as Miss Kite herself was, by the necessity of appearing to be somewhere between eighteen and twenty-two, this other Miss Kite could talk sensibly, even brilliantly: one felt it. A thoroughly "nice" woman this other Miss Kite; the real Miss Kite, though envious, was bound to admit it. Miss Kite wished to goodness she had never seen the woman. The glimpse of her had rendered Miss Kite dissatisfied with herself.

"I am not a boy," explained the stranger; "and I had no intention of being bold."

"I know," replied Miss Kite. "It was a silly remark. Whatever induced me to make it, I can't think. Getting foolish in my old age, I suppose."

The stranger laughed. "Surely you are not old."

"I'm thirty-nine," snapped out Miss Kite. "You don't call it young?"

"I think it a beautiful age," insisted the stranger; "young enough not to have lost the joy of youth, old enough to have learnt sympathy."

"Oh, I daresay," returned Miss Kite, "any age you'd think beautiful. I'm going to bed." Miss Kite rose. The paper fan had somehow got itself broken. She threw the fragments into the fire.

"It is early yet," pleaded the stranger, "I was looking forward to a talk with you."

"Well, you'll be able to look forward to it," retorted Miss Kite. "Good-night."

The truth was, Miss Kite was impatient to have a look at herself in the glass, in her own room with the door shut. The vision of that other Miss Kite— the clean-looking lady of the pale face and the brown hair had been so vivid, Miss

Kite wondered whether temporary forgetfulness might not have fallen upon her while dressing for dinner that evening.

The stranger, left to his own devices, strolled towards the loo table, seeking something to read.

"You seem to have frightened away Miss Kite," remarked the lady who was cousin to a baronet.

"It seems so," admitted the stranger.

"My cousin, Sir William Bosster," observed the crocheting lady, "who married old Lord Egham's niece— you never met the Eghams?"

"Hitherto," replied the stranger, "I have not had that pleasure."

"A charming family. Cannot understand— my cousin Sir William, I mean, cannot understand my remaining here. 'My dear Emily'— he says the same thing every time he sees me: 'My dear Emily, how can you exist among the sort of people one meets with in a boarding-house.' But they amuse me."

A sense of humour, agreed the stranger, was always of advantage.

"Our family on my mother's side," continued Sir William's cousin in her placid monotone, "was connected with the Tatton-Joneses, who when King George the Fourth—" Sir William's cousin, needing another reel of cotton, glanced up, and met the stranger's gaze.

"I'm sure I don't know why I'm telling you all this," said Sir William's cousin in an irritable tone. "It can't possibly interest you."

"Everything connected with you interests me," gravely the stranger assured her.

"It is very kind of you to say so," sighed Sir William's cousin, but without conviction; "I am afraid sometimes I bore people."

The polite stranger refrained from contradiction.

"You see," continued the poor lady, "I really am of good family."

"Dear lady," said the stranger, "your gentle face, your gentle voice, your gentle bearing, all proclaim it."

She looked without flinching into the stranger's eyes, and gradually a smile banished the reigning dulness of her features.

"How foolish of me." She spoke rather to herself than to the stranger. "Why, of course, people— people whose opinion is worth troubling about— judge of you by what you are, not by what you go about saying you are."

The stranger remained silent.

"I am the widow of a provincial doctor, with an income of just two hundred and thirty pounds per annum," she argued. "The sensible thing for me to do is to make the best of it, and to worry myself about these high and mighty relations of mine as little as they have ever worried themselves about me."

The stranger appeared unable to think of anything worth saying.

"I have other connections," remembered Sir William's cousin; "those of my poor husband, to whom instead of being the 'poor relation' I could be the fairy god-mama. They are my people— or would be," added Sir William's cousin tartly, "if I wasn't a vulgar snob."

She flushed the instant she had said the words and, rising, commenced preparations for a hurried departure.

"Now it seems I am driving you away," sighed the stranger.

"Having been called a 'vulgar snob,'" retorted the lady with some heat, "I think it about time I went."

"The words were your own," the stranger reminded her.

"Whatever I may have thought," remarked the indignant dame, "no lady— least of all in the presence of a total stranger— would have called herself—" The poor dame paused, bewildered. "There is something very curious the matter with me this evening, that I cannot understand," she explained, "I seem quite unable to avoid insulting myself."

Still surrounded by bewilderment, she wished the stranger good-night, hoping that when next they met she would be more herself. The stranger, hoping so also, opened the door and closed it again behind her.

"Tell me," laughed Miss Devine, who by sheer force of talent was contriving to wring harmony from the reluctant piano, "how did you manage to do it? I should like to know."

"How did I do what?" inquired the stranger.

"Contrive to get rid so quickly of those two old frumps?"

"How well you play!" observed the stranger. "I knew you had genius for music the moment I saw you."

"How could you tell?"

"It is written so clearly in your face."

The girl laughed, well pleased. "You seem to have lost no time in studying my face."

"It is a beautiful and interesting face," observed the stranger.

She swung round sharply on the stool and their eyes met.

"You can read faces?"

"Yes."

"Tell me, what else do you read in mine?"

"Frankness, courage—"

"Ah, yes, all the virtues. Perhaps. We will take them for granted." It was odd how serious the girl had suddenly become. "Tell me the reverse side."

"I see no reverse side," replied the stranger. "I see but a fair girl, bursting into noble womanhood."

"And nothing else? You read no trace of greed, of vanity, of sordidness, of—" An angry laugh escaped her lips. "And you are a reader of faces!"

"A reader of faces." The stranger smiled. "Do you know what is written upon yours at this very moment? A love of truth that is almost fierce, scorn of lies, scorn of hypocrisy, the desire for all things pure, contempt of all things that are contemptible— especially of such things as are contemptible in woman. Tell me, do I not read aright?"

I wonder, thought the girl, is that why those two others both hurried from the room? Does everyone feel ashamed of the littleness that is in them when looked at by those clear, believing eyes of yours?

The idea occurred to her: "Papa seemed to have a good deal to say to you during dinner. Tell me, what were you talking about?"

"The military looking gentleman upon my left? We talked about your mother principally."

"I am sorry," returned the girl, wishful now she had not asked the question. "I was hoping he might have chosen another topic for the first evening!"

"He did try one or two," admitted the stranger; "but I have been about the world so little, I was glad when he talked to me about himself. I feel we shall be friends. He spoke so nicely, too, about Mrs. Devine."

"Indeed," commented the girl.

"He told me he had been married for twenty years and had never regretted it but once!"

Her black eyes flashed upon him, but meeting his, the suspicion died from them. She turned aside to hide her smile.

"So he regretted it— once."

"Only once," explained the stranger, "in a passing irritable mood. It was so frank of him to admit it. He told me— I think he has taken a liking to me. Indeed he hinted as much. He said he did not often get an opportunity of talking to a man like myself— he told me that he and your mother, when they travel together, are always mistaken for a honeymoon couple. Some of the experiences he related to me were really quite amusing." The stranger laughed at recollection of them—"that even here, in this place, they are generally referred to as 'Darby and Joan.'"

"Yes," said the girl, "that is true. Mr. Longcord gave them that name, the second evening after our arrival. It was considered clever— but rather obvious I thought myself."

"Nothing— so it seems to me," said the stranger, "is more beautiful than the love that has weathered the storms of life. The sweet, tender blossom that flowers in the heart of the young— in hearts such as yours— that, too, is beautiful. The love of the young for the young, that is the beginning of life. But the love of the old for the old, that is the beginning of— of things longer."

"You seem to find all things beautiful," the girl grumbled.

"But are not all things beautiful?" demanded the stranger.

The Colonel had finished his paper. "You two are engaged in a very absorbing conversation," observed the Colonel, approaching them.

"We were discussing Darbies and Joans," explained his daughter. "How beautiful is the love that has weathered the storms of life!"

"Ah!" smiled the Colonel, "that is hardly fair. My friend has been repeating to cynical youth the confessions of an amorous husband's affection for his middle-aged and somewhat—" The Colonel in playful mood laid his hand upon the stranger's shoulder, an action that necessitated his looking straight into the stranger's eyes. The Colonel drew himself up stiffly and turned scarlet.

Somebody was calling the Colonel a cad. Not only that, but was explaining quite clearly, so that the Colonel could see it for himself, why he was a cad.

"That you and your wife lead a cat and dog existence is a disgrace to both of you. At least you might have the decency to try and hide it from the world— not make a jest of your shame to every passing stranger. You are a cad, sir, a cad!"

Who was daring to say these things? Not the stranger, his lips had not moved. Besides, it was not his voice. Indeed it sounded much more like the voice of the Colonel himself. The Colonel looked from the stranger to his daughter, from his daughter back to the stranger. Clearly they had not heard the voice— a mere hallucination. The Colonel breathed again.

Yet the impression remaining was not to be shaken off. Undoubtedly it was bad taste to have joked to the stranger upon such a subject. No gentleman would have done so.

But then no gentleman would have permitted such a jest to be possible. No gentleman would be forever wrangling with his wife— certainly never in public. However irritating the woman, a gentleman would have exercised self-control.

Mrs. Devine had risen, was coming slowly across the room. Fear laid hold of the Colonel. She was going to address some aggravating remark to him— he could see it in her eye— which would irritate him into savage retort.

Even this prize idiot of a stranger would understand why boarding-house wits had dubbed them "Darby and Joan," would grasp the fact that the gallant Colonel had thought it amusing, in conversation with a table acquaintance, to hold his own wife up to ridicule.

"My dear," cried the Colonel, hurrying to speak first, "does not this room strike you as cold? Let me fetch you a shawl."

It was useless: the Colonel felt it. It had been too long the custom of both of them to preface with politeness their deadliest insults to each other. She came on, thinking of a suitable reply: suitable from her point of view, that is. In another moment the truth would be out. A wild, fantastic possibility flashed through the Colonel's brain: If to him, why not to her?

"Letitia," cried the Colonel, and the tone of his voice surprised her into silence, "I want you to look closely at our friend. Does he not remind you of someone?"

Mrs. Devine, so urged, looked at the stranger long and hard. "Yes," she murmured, turning to her husband, "he does, who is it?"

"I cannot fix it," replied the Colonel; "I thought that maybe you would remember."

"It will come to me," mused Mrs. Devine. "It is someone— years ago, when I was a girl— in Devonshire. Thank you, if it isn't troubling you, Harry. I left it in the dining-room."

It was, as Mr. Augustus Longcord explained to his partner Isidore, the colossal foolishness of the stranger that was the cause of all the trouble. "Give me a man, who can take care of himself— or thinks he can," declared Augustus Longcord, "and I am prepared to give a good account of myself. But when a helpless baby refuses even to look at what you call your figures, tells you that your mere word is sufficient for him, and hands you over his cheque-book to fill up for yourself— well, it isn't playing the game."

"Auguthuth," was the curt comment of his partner, "you're a fool."

"All right, my boy, you try," suggested Augustus.

"Jutht what I mean to do," asserted his partner.

"Well," demanded Augustus one evening later, meeting Isidore ascending the stairs after a long talk with the stranger in the dining-room with the door shut.

"Oh, don't arth me," retorted Isidore, "thilly ath, thath what he ith."

"What did he say?"

"What did he thay! talked about the Jewth: what a grand rathe they were— how people mithjudged them: all that thort of rot.

"Thaid thome of the motht honorable men he had ever met had been Jewth. Thought I wath one of 'em!"

"Well, did you get anything out of him?"

"Get anything out of him. Of courthe not. Couldn't very well thell the whole rathe, ath it were, for a couple of hundred poundth, after that. Didn't theem worth it."

There were many things Forty-eight Bloomsbury Square came gradually to the conclusion were not worth the doing:— Snatching at the gravy; pouncing out of one's turn upon the vegetables and helping oneself to more than one's fair share; manoeuvering for the easy-chair; sitting on the evening paper while pretending not to have seen it— all such-like tiresome bits of business. For the little one made out of it, really it was not worth the bother. Grumbling everlastingly at one's food; grumbling everlastingly at most things; abusing Pennycherry behind her back; abusing, for a change, one's fellow-boarders;

squabbling with one's fellow-boarders about nothing in particular; sneering at one's fellow-boarders; talking scandal of one's fellow-boarders; making senseless jokes about one's fellow-boarders; talking big about oneself, nobody believing one— all such-like vulgarities. Other boarding-houses might indulge in them: Forty-eight Bloomsbury Square had its dignity to consider.

The truth is, Forty-eight Bloomsbury Square was coming to a very good opinion of itself: for the which not Bloomsbury Square so much as the stranger must be blamed. The stranger had arrived at Forty-eight Bloomsbury Square with the preconceived idea— where obtained from Heaven knows— that its seemingly commonplace, mean-minded, coarse-fibred occupants were in reality ladies and gentlemen of the first water; and time and observation had apparently only strengthened this absurd idea. The natural result was, Forty-eight Bloomsbury Square was coming round to the stranger's opinion of itself.

Mrs. Pennycherry, the stranger would persist in regarding as a lady born and bred, compelled by circumstances over which she had no control to fill an arduous but honorable position of middle-class society— a sort of foster-mother, to whom were due the thanks and gratitude of her promiscuous family; and this view of herself Mrs. Pennycherry now clung to with obstinate conviction. There were disadvantages attaching, but these Mrs. Pennycherry appeared prepared to suffer cheerfully. A lady born and bred cannot charge other ladies and gentlemen for coals and candles they have never burnt; a foster-mother cannot palm off upon her children New Zealand mutton for Southdown. A mere lodging-house-keeper can play these tricks, and pocket the profits. But a lady feels she cannot: Mrs. Pennycherry felt she no longer could.

To the stranger Miss Kite was a witty and delightful conversationalist of most attractive personality. Miss Kite had one failing: it was lack of vanity. She was unaware of her own delicate and refined beauty. If Miss Kite could only see herself with his, the stranger's eyes, the modesty that rendered her distrustful of her natural charms would fall from her. The stranger was so sure of it Miss Kite determined to put it to the test. One evening, an hour before dinner, there entered the drawing-room, when the stranger only was there and before the gas was lighted, a pleasant, good-looking lady, somewhat pale, with neatly-arranged brown hair, who demanded of the stranger if he knew her. All her body was trembling, and her voice seemed inclined to run away from her and become a sob. But when the stranger, looking straight into her eyes, told her that from the likeness he thought she must be Miss Kite's younger sister, but much prettier, it became a laugh instead: and that evening the golden-haired Miss Kite disappeared never to show her high-coloured face again; and what perhaps, more than all else, might have impressed some former habitue of Forty-eight Bloomsbury Square with awe, it was that no one in the house made even a passing inquiry concerning her.

Sir William's cousin the stranger thought an acquisition to any boarding-house. A lady of high-class family! There was nothing outward or visible perhaps to tell you that she was of high-class family. She herself, naturally, would not mention the fact, yet somehow you felt it. Unconsciously she set a high-class tone, diffused an atmosphere of gentle manners. Not that the stranger had said this in so many words; Sir William's cousin gathered that he thought it, and felt herself in agreement with him.

For Mr. Longcord and his partner, as representatives of the best type of business men, the stranger had a great respect. With what unfortunate results to themselves has been noted. The curious thing is that the Firm appeared content with the price they had paid for the stranger's good opinion— had even, it was rumoured, acquired a taste for honest men's respect— that in the long run was likely to cost them dear. But we all have our pet extravagance.

The Colonel and Mrs. Devine both suffered a good deal at first from the necessity imposed upon them of learning, somewhat late in life, new tricks. In the privacy of their own apartment they condoled with one another.

"Tomfool nonsense," grumbled the Colonel, "you and I starting billing and cooing at our age!"

"What I object to," said Mrs. Devine, "is the feeling that somehow I am being made to do it."

"The idea that a man and his wife cannot have their little joke together for fear of what some impertinent jackanapes may think of them! it's damn ridiculous," the Colonel exploded.

"Even when he isn't there," said Mrs. Devine, "I seem to see him looking at me with those vexing eyes of his. Really the man quite haunts me."

"I have met him somewhere," mused the Colonel, "I'll swear I've met him somewhere. I wish to goodness he would go."

A hundred things a day the Colonel wanted to say to Mrs. Devine, a hundred things a day Mrs. Devine would have liked to observe to the Colonel. But by the time the opportunity occurred— when nobody else was by to hear— all interest in saying them was gone.

"Women will be women," was the sentiment with which the Colonel consoled himself. "A man must bear with them— must never forget that he is a gentleman."

"Oh, well, I suppose they're all alike," laughed Mrs. Devine to herself, having arrived at that stage of despair when one seeks refuge in cheerfulness. "What's the use of putting oneself out— it does no good, and only upsets one." There is a certain satisfaction in feeling you are bearing with heroic resignation the irritating follies of others. Colonel and Mrs. Devine came to enjoy the luxury of much self-approbation.

But the person seriously annoyed by the stranger's bigoted belief in the innate goodness of everyone he came across was the languid, handsome Miss Devine. The stranger would have it that Miss Devine was a noble-souled, high-minded young woman, something midway between a Flora Macdonald and a Joan of Arc. Miss Devine, on the contrary, knew herself to be a sleek, luxury-loving animal, quite willing to sell herself to the bidder who could offer her the finest clothes, the richest foods, the most sumptuous surroundings. Such a bidder was to hand in the person of a retired bookmaker, a somewhat greasy old gentleman, but exceedingly rich and undoubtedly fond of her.

Miss Devine, having made up her mind that the thing had got to be done, was anxious that it should be done quickly. And here it was that the stranger's ridiculous opinion of her not only irritated but inconvenienced her. Under the very eyes of a person— however foolish— convinced that you are possessed of all the highest attributes of your sex, it is difficult to behave as though actuated by only the basest motives. A dozen times had Miss Devine determined to end the matter by formal acceptance of her elderly admirer's large and flabby hand, and a dozen times— the vision intervening of the stranger's grave, believing eyes— had Miss Devine refused decided answer. The stranger would one day depart. Indeed, he had told her himself, he was but a passing traveller. When he was gone it would be easier. So she thought at the time.

One afternoon the stranger entered the room where she was standing by the window, looking out upon the bare branches of the trees in Bloomsbury Square. She remembered afterwards, it was just such another foggy afternoon as the afternoon of the stranger's arrival three months before. No one else was in the room. The stranger closed the door, and came towards her with that curious, quick-leaping step of his. His long coat was tightly buttoned, and in his hands he carried his old felt hat and the massive knotted stick that was almost a staff.

"I have come to say good-bye," explained the stranger. "I am going."

"I shall not see you again?" asked the girl.

"I cannot say," replied the stranger. "But you will think of me?"

"Yes," she answered with a smile, "I can promise that."

"And I shall always remember you," promised the stranger, "and I wish you every joy— the joy of love, the joy of a happy marriage."

The girl winced. "Love and marriage are not always the same thing," she said.

"Not always," agreed the stranger, "but in your case they will be one."

She looked at him.

"Do you think I have not noticed?" smiled the stranger, "a gallant, handsome lad, and clever. You love him and he loves you. I could not have gone away without knowing it was well with you."

Her gaze wandered towards the fading light.

"Ah, yes, I love him," she answered petulantly. "Your eyes can see clearly enough, when they want to. But one does not live on love, in our world. I will tell you the man I am going to marry if you care to know." She would not meet his eyes. She kept her gaze still fixed upon the dingy trees, the mist beyond, and spoke rapidly and vehemently: "The man who can give me all my soul's desire—money and the things that money can buy. You think me a woman, I'm only a pig. He is moist, and breathes like a porpoise; with cunning in place of a brain, and the rest of him mere stomach. But he is good enough for me."

She hoped this would shock the stranger and that now, perhaps, he would go. It irritated her to hear him only laugh.

"No," he said, "you will not marry him."

"Who will stop me?" she cried angrily.

"Your Better Self."

His voice had a strange ring of authority, compelling her to turn and look upon his face. Yes, it was true, the fancy that from the very first had haunted her. She had met him, talked to him— in silent country roads, in crowded city streets, where was it? And always in talking with him her spirit had been lifted up: she had been— what he had always thought her.

"There are those," continued the stranger (and for the first time she saw that he was of a noble presence, that his gentle, child-like eyes could also command), "whose Better Self lies slain by their own hand and troubles them no more. But yours, my child, you have let grow too strong; it will ever be your master. You must obey. Flee from it and it will follow you; you cannot escape it. Insult it and it will chastise you with burning shame, with stinging self-reproach from day to day." The sternness faded from the beautiful face, the tenderness crept back. He laid his hand upon the young girl's shoulder. "You will marry your lover," he smiled. "With him you will walk the way of sunlight and of shadow."

And the girl, looking up into the strong, calm face, knew that it would be so, that the power of resisting her Better Self had passed away from her for ever.

"Now," said the stranger, "come to the door with me. Leave-takings are but wasted sadness. Let me pass out quietly. Close the door softly behind me."

She thought that perhaps he would turn his face again, but she saw no more of him than the odd roundness of his back under the tightly buttoned coat, before he faded into the gathering fog.

Then softly she closed the door.

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4: John Ovington Returns

Max Brand

(Frederick Faust, 1892-1944)

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THE OLD SERVANT stopped and faced him. The light from the candle he carried flickered across his bald head as he nodded wonderingly, and John Ovington hardly repressed a smile.

"You are quite sure you were never in the house before?" asked Hillton.

"No," said Ovington, "I was never here before, but somehow it seems to me that a big amber-coloured vase with black figures tracing down the sides should stand by that window. It's just a fancy, but rather unusual in its clearness."

"The Ovingtons are an unusual family, sir," said Hillton, and he raised his candle so that its light fell more fully on the sternly graven face of his new master. After his moment's scrutiny he shook his head as one who gives up a problem.

"A vase like the one you speak of stood there ever since the house was built, but last week Mrs Worth broke it while she was cleaning the room. Every week I have the rooms cleaned, sir, but for the past year they have never been used, none except the kitchen and Mr Ovington's bedroom where he lay sick for so long."

"And died?" said Ovington.

"And died, sir. He wouldn't trust any one save me. I wrote the letter which brought you here, and I signed it for him."

"I shall never forget that letter," said Ovington. "And that is the room where I sleep now?"

"The master has always slept in that room since the family came here to live," he answered. "Now I think you have seen the whole house, Mr Ovington."

"But isn't there a room behind those folding doors?" asked Ovington.

"That is the library, and it hasn't been opened these past fifteen years. Fifteen dreary years, sir. It must be fearful thick with dust."

"And why has it been closed all this time?"

"That was the time when young Master Ovington died, and since then the master couldn't bear to go into that room. For the family pictures hang there, and he couldn't stand to look on them, he having lost his heir. The family name ended with him, as he thought. It was only through the lawyers that we traced the line to you, sir, through your great-grandfather, John Ovington, the man who disappeared."

"So I understand," said Ovington. "But let's have a look at the room."

Hillton drew in his wrinkled lips anxiously.

"Tonight, sir?"

"Why not?"

"It's a fearsome place to go into at night with all the great, stern old Ovingtons painted and hanging on the wall. It's most like a graveyard, sir, with the ghosts up and sitting on their tombs. I'm sure you will not like it to be there at night, Mr Ovington."

"Tut!" smiled Ovington, and he laid a reassuring hand on the old man's shoulder. "We'll risk the dust and the family pictures."

It was only after much reluctant fumbling and many sidewise glances as if in hope that Ovington's resolution would die away that Hillton finally produced the key. The lock had set so fast that it required a great effort for Ovington to send it gritting back. He swung the door wide and stepped into the high, dark room. The wavering of the light behind him made him turn to Hillton, who stood outside the door, the candle fairly shaking in his hand.

"Come, come!" laughed Ovington. "After all, it's only a room with nothing more dangerous in it than shadows."

"No, sir," said Hillton, "I'm not afraid. But it's a strange house and a strange people."

He entered slowly, the candle held high above his head, and he peered about at every step.

Into the highest shadows of the raftered ceiling the wavering candle-light hardly reached, but it shone on the ponderous table, thickly dusted, and into the black throat of the fireplace, and picked out the long row of portraits receding dimly on either side of the room. Among them were a few dressed in the ruffs of the Tudor period. Others appeared in sombre Puritan grey, straight faces under tall hats. Among these one caught Ovington's eye.

He took the candle from Hillton and held it close to the portrait. He almost thought for a moment that he was dressed for a fancy ball and stood before a mirror, for it was his own face which returned his gaze with a half scowl and a half sneer, the same strong nose, thin cheeks, and unflinching eyes. He blinded himself with his hand and looked again, but the resemblance persisted. He felt that his forehead had grown very cold.

"And who is this, Hillton?" he asked, wondering if the servant would notice the resemblance.

"That is your great-grandfather, whose name was John Ovington, like your name," said Hillton, forgetting his uneasiness as he talked. "He was the strangest of all the Ovingtons, for he rode away one day and never came back, and that is the last people ever heard of him. And all that was many and many years ago. So long that my father could not remember."

He led the way to the window and drew aside the curtain, loosing a cloud of choking dust. Outside the moon glimmered on the garden terraces, which

stepped down to a tree-covered hollow, but the other side of the valley rose dark and steep, with a great square house topping it.

"That is the Jervan house," said Hillton, and his pointing hand trembled in the moonlight. "That is the house where Beatrice Jervan lived, who was the sweetheart of our John Ovington in those old days, but John Ovington went across the seas and fought in France. So when he came back Beatrice Jervan loved him no longer, and they say that he would have forced her to marry him, for he was a stark fierce man, but she fled away in the night with another man. And John Ovington waited for them at a forking of the Newbury Road as they fled on their horses. He stopped them and would have made them turn back, but the man drew a horse-pistol and shot him through the shoulder and rode on with Beatrice Jervan, and God knows what became of them both. We only know that a granddaughter of that couple married back into the Jervan family, and now there is a Beatrice Jervan over there again in that house; and over here"— he laughed tremulously in the moonlight— "is a John Ovington again.

"Well, when the man rode on with Beatrice that other John Ovington rose up from the road where he had fallen and called after them: 'I have failed this time, but I shall not fail twice. I shall come again. I shall wait for you in this place, Beatrice Jervan, and carry you away with me forever.'

"But that he never did, for shortly afterwards he went and took ship in Boston Harbour and went across the sea to other countries. And he was your great-grandfather. All that he left was this picture on the wall and a little cedar chest of his papers which sits on that shelf next to the brass-bound Bible. He was the last of the old family, for after him his cousin took the name and the inheritance."

Through a long moment Ovington stood staring at the opposite house.

"I am going to stay here and read some of those papers," said he at last, "so you can leave the candle, Hillton."

"Will you sit here all alone, sir, on your first night?"

He folded his hands in his anxiety, and when Ovington nodded he turned and went falteringly from the room, shaking his head solemnly as he walked.

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ON TOP OF the papers in the small chest lay a miniature of a girl. It had evidently at one time been a bust painted by an artist of some skill, but the lower part of the picture was rubbed and faded beyond recognition of any form. Only the face remained clear. The hair drew back from the forehead in the severe lines which pleased those grim old New Englanders, and the eyes drooped demurely downwards, but no moral preceptor could lessen the curve

and the lure of the red lips. It seemed to Ovington that the eyes might at any moment flash up and yield him unknown depths of light and mockery.

He dropped the miniature to his knee and sat for a long time looking straight before him. When he had rallied his thoughts he commenced to turn over the papers. They were all letters written in a woman's hand, and despite the yellowing of time and the fading of the ink, he could make out the words with little effort. Arranged in the order of their receipt the letters told their own story of the love between Beatrice Jervan and John Ovington.

There was a long group covering the period of the wooing, and then came the time when Ovington decided to go to the war, and her letter:

I could not say it last night. I needed quiet so that I could think it all out clearly, and now I know what I wanted to say. You must not go to the war, John dear.

I know that glory is a wonderful thing, but a good wife is a wonderful thing, too, John, and would you care to win glory and lose a wife? Not that I am sure you would lose me; but I love happiness, dear, and I am afraid of pain; and if you were thousands and thousands of miles away, what would I have to remember you by? It is so hard to remember a man by his silences, John!

Dear, will you try to please me in this? And then I will try to please you all the days of my life. But the sea is so broad, and the French shoot so straight—and I do so love laughter, John! Come to me tonight, and I know I can change your mind.

He rose and walked with the candle until he faced the picture of John Ovington. Yes, that was the face of a man able to defy the charm of sudden glances and slow smiles. He went back to the letters. They diminished rapidly in length, and then came this:

If you want me, you must come and fight for me, Captain John Ovington. There may be dreadful fighting on the plains of France, but I think you will find enough war here on the hills of Connecticut. He has yellow, curling hair, John, and wide, blue eyes, and a gentle voice and a ringing laugh, and he's as much of a man as you are, almost. If you want me, you must come for me. It may be too late. I can't tell.

Then came a short note:

You need not come. It is too late!

But John Ovington had decided to come back and try, and after his return were two letters, the last:

If you will not come to see me, John Ovington, I shall come to see you; though if I do that I know that mother will faint.

I think I have never seen so grave a man as the John Ovington I met on the bridge the other day. Have you truly forgotten me? All grave men are not silent, John Ovington. I have a plan to discover if you can really smile.

I will be by the fountain in the garden tonight if it is not too cold.

And John Ovington had evidently changed his mind that night and gone to the garden and made desperate love, hoping against hope, for the last letter said:

Vincent Colvin has been with me all this morning. I am going to ride away with him tonight. I have not forgotten, but I promised myself to him long ago, and now I shall keep the promise. My father objects, so we are going to go out for a ride from which we shall never come back, and we will take the Newbury Road.

Oh, my dear, it breaks my heart to ride out of your life. It has all been so strange, so maddeningly dear and painful. Must this be good-bye?

He read no more that night, but he sat a long time at the window watching the night mist creep up the valley, tangling among the trees, and at last setting a grey veil across the window pane.

THE NEXT MORNING the challenge of the keen October air drew him out into the open. In the stables he found a great black charger and had him saddled. The groom eyed him dubiously as he lengthened his stirrups to suit his western fashion of riding, but when he swung into the saddle and started down the path with his broad hat curling up in front to the wind and his cloak fluttering behind him, while his powerful pull on the reins held down the horse to an uneasy prance, the groom grinned with open admiration.

"I reckon an Ovington," he said, "is always an Ovington."

But as he took the road down the valley Ovington could not forget the adventure of the previous evening, for the Connecticut hills rolled up on either side, a remembered beauty of yellowing browns, gold, and crimson running riotously together, and all the trees still shining with the touch of the night mist. And the great lift and sway of the gallop set his heart singing in unison with the hoof-beats. He could not tell how far he had ridden, for every bend invited him on and on down flaming vistas.

He passed from the main road on to a narrow path which, after a quarter of a mile, surged to the left, and around a quick turn he thundered across a stream on a narrow foot-bridge, a frail structure which tottered and shook under him. At the same time he heard the clatter of hoofs coming towards him down the same path and in a moment a racing brown horse flashed about the curve and dashed on to the bridge.

It was far too narrow for two horses to edge by each other. He brought his mount to a rearing stop.

When he looked again the brown horse stood head to head with his black, and he was face to face with the loveliest girl he had ever seen, but a remembered beauty—yes, the face of the miniature, a spray of autumn leaves at her breast stirring as she panted.

"This is a real escape, isn't it?" she cried, and her voice carried more mirth than fear.

"I guess it's an escape," he said quietly, after another moment of staring. "Here, there is not room for two to pass. I'll back off the bridge."

But when he drew on the reins the black horse reared straight up, and when he came down stiff-legged the little bridge wavered and groaned.

"Don't do that!" she cried, truly frightened by this time. "I'll back off."

She moved her horse back cautiously, step and step, and he followed, but when they came on to the path again he still blocked the way and the puzzled searching of the eyes made her flush slightly.

"Your name is Beatrice Jervan," he stated.

"Yes," she said.

"And mine is John Ovington."

She clapped her hands in delighted discovery.

"Are you really the new John Ovington? Let's shake hands and be friends. We're neighbours, you know."

He rode beside her and took her hand. He knew that she was saying:

"But you are a stranger here. How did you know my name?"

He smiled vaguely on her. "Can you tell me how old this bridge is?"

"Yes," she said, wondering. "It is said to be a hundred and fifty years old. But I doubt it."

"Well," he said, "I feel as if I had known you for one hundred and fifty years."

"With that soft hat and that riding-cloak," she laughed, "you look as if you might be a bandit of that period."

"With that smile," he said, "you look as if you might be a woman of almost any period. May I ride with you?" he continued. "If I may I'll try not to say any more foolish things like that last one."

"It doesn't matter," she said, "it's the October air that makes one happy without knowing just why. Of course you may ride with me if you care to."

They made back across the bridge again and up on to the road. As they broke into a canter he fell back a little to watch the lilt of her perfect horsemanship.

"If you ride so far back I can't talk to you," she complained, "and then you'll think I'm stupid."

"You don't have to talk," he said. "I'm quite perfectly entertained, and besides—"

But she spurred her horse to a wild gallop and the rest of his sentence was jolted from his mind as he pursued. The long stride of the black brought him beside her in a few seconds.

"You ride well," he shouted as he reined in to her pace, "but you see you can't escape me."

She slowed down rather sullenly.

"I have never been passed before on these roads," she said.

"Not passed," he corrected; "merely caught."

She accepted the comment with a cold glance. He rode a little behind her, perfectly happy and perfectly silent. A keen wind rose and whirled down the valley to meet them. Sometimes the force of the gust seemed to sway her back in her saddle. From stirrup to head she gave the graceful lines to the sway and lunge of the gallop, and Ovington ground his teeth to keep from singing aloud. It seemed hardly a moment before she checked her horse.

"Our ways part here," she said, then smiling: "Are you always silent, Mr Ovington?"

He raised his hat without replying, wheeled, and spurred up the hill, and she remained for a breathing space watching the play of his broad shoulders as he rode.

iii

THROUGH THE NEXT ten days he wandered about the place uneasily. He could hardly define his own mood. He felt vaguely that he was waiting, but he had not the slightest idea for what. But on the tenth day a letter came and he knew. He recognized the handwriting, but before he dared to tear it open he went first to the little cedar chest and compared the two scripts.

They were identical.

The letter began without prelude just as that other letter came to that other John Ovington a hundred and fifty years before:

If you will not come to see me, John Ovington, I shall come to see you.

A red mist came before him. He felt himself trembling like a child, and it was some time before he could resume the reading. Without a single variation the letter repeated the time-yellowed manuscript of the cedar chest.

I think I have never seen so grave a man. All grave men are not silent, John Ovington. I have a plan to discover if you can really smile. I will be in the garden tonight if it is not too cold.

"I will not go," he said aloud, as if to convince himself against himself. "I will not let this damned riddle ruin me as it ruined a John Ovington four generations before me."

He commenced to pace up and down the room. According to the old story he should go to that garden tonight and make desperate love to her. And according to that story he was lost in the end, fate played against him.

Ovington tried to rally his reason. He tried to convince himself that this was all a weird dream, but the two letters lay convincingly side by side. Had the spirit of the old John Ovington truly come back to try the old task again? Would there be for him the same agony of heart and mind? He covered his face with his hands and groaned aloud, for he saw again the spray of autumn leaves stirring at her breast.

After supper he went into the library to fight out the night there, but the old portraits leered down at him, the little cedar chest loomed like a silent oracle of sorrow. He rose at last and went out to pace the terraces of the garden.

His foot sounded hollowly over the little bridge across the river, but he did not notice it. Unconsciously he wandered up the path on the other side of the valley, through the opening of the hedge of evergreen, and on to the velvet lawns of the Jervan estate.

A light laugh only a few feet away startled him. He found that he stood near a circle of shrubbery, in the center of which a fountain splashed and showered, and through the light falling of the spray he heard the thrilling velvet of Beatrice Jervan's voice:

"Go away now, Vincent. I so want to be alone."

And a pleasant voice answered:

"Have I wearied you, dear?"

"No," she answered, "but I am tired of saying pretty things and hearing them, just for a little while. I am hungry for the quiet and the chill of this air. Please go back to the house and tell them that I am taking a walk through the garden. They will understand."

"And I shall see you later? And you are not cold?"

"You will see me later. I am not the least cold."

"*Au revoir* a little while. Dear, I am full of strange thoughts tonight. It is almost as if you were slipping away from me.. I have reached out to you a hundred times, and my heart has closed on nothing. What does it mean?"

"Fantasy!" she said, and as she laughed the sound broke and ran trilling down like the musical chuckle of a bird. "Adieu. You need not fear. I shall stay true to our plan. Adieu."

Ovington heard the man's lightly treading step pass away over the lawn, the shrubbery brushed against him noisily, and then the silence slipped back over the place and the faintly moving air shook the fountain into light showerings of spray, felt rather than heard, like the pulse of a heart. And a great yellow moon floated up through the branches of the eastern trees, took the changing tracery of the black limbs, and now drifted abroad into the pathless heaven, so her light, peering aslant over the shrubbery, looked on the silver nodding head of the fountain.

And deeper and deeper slanted the light until he saw it glimmer like a dark star in the hair of Beatrice.

She raised her head up to meet that light. It fell upon her face like a sculptured smile, and Ovington stood breathless watching, waiting, with a musical dread in his heart. Then the dark fur which clung against her throat shifted and the shadow of the lifted eyes changed. He stepped into the circle of the shrubbery and stood before her, and she, looking up, saw the black outline of his head against the rolling moon.

"You are for all the world like a man come down from the moon," she said, and her voice was so low that she seemed to be talking to herself rather than to him.

He stood for a long moment before he could speak.

"And who," he asked, "is dear Vincent?"

"Vincent is a very nice boy," she answered, "who has yellow curling hair and wide blue eyes and is as much of a man as you are, John Ovington."

He dropped into the stone seat beside her and leaned forward, his hands clasped and his eyes on the ground. He was so perilously near her that she could make out the tensed lips, the frowning forehead of his profile, but the wide brim of his hat put all the rest of his face in shadow. She watched his strongly interlaced fingers.

"So you are a silent man, John Ovington?"

"I am thinking very hard," he answered.

"Yes, you are troubled about something?" He felt the perfume and the touch of her breath as she leaned swiftly towards him. And as she leaned she saw the interlacing fingers grind together. A tremor shook her that was half fear and half delight.

"I suppose," he began at last, "that you have watched the sun glinting in Vincent's yellow hair?"

"Of course," she said.

"And your fingers have touched it where the sun has fallen?"

"That," she said, "is a secret."

"I am quite sure I have no use for Vincent," he said.

In the pause the wind went rushing past them and ran on through the far-off tree-tops, whispering and muttering.

"And I suppose," he went on, "that you could not begin to count the moments you have spent looking into Vincent's wide, blue eyes?"

"I am sure that would be hard to reckon," she said gravely.

"I think I could hate Vincent," he mused. "Do you like him a great deal?"

"I'm sure I dislike confessionals."

"It is rather hard," he said at last.

"What is hard?"

"To play against fate, and to come into the play with the stage set against me."

"I don't understand!"

But watching those gripping fingers she did understand, and the shaking of the fountain counted out the waiting seconds until he spoke again.

"It would have been so easy in any other setting," he said. "For instance I might have seen you first at a teatable, saying the silly things that go with tea."

"I hate tea," she said fervently.

"Or I might have seen you at the end of a long ride instead of the beginning. I might have seen you with your hair tumbling roughly and your hat askew, and your figure slumping wearily at every stride of the horse. You would not have mattered then, very much."

She looked up to the moon, but it seemed too bright, too searching, now, and she dropped her eyes hastily back to his hands.

"But even as it was," he said, "I could have stood out against you if it had not been for the spray of autumn leaves at your breast." He nodded solemnly. "That was what did the harm. It was hardly fair, do you think?"

"They were only autumn leaves," she said, "and anyway I don't understand why you are so solemn."

"That is fibbing," be remarked unemotionally, "and it is not even a white fib. You know perfectly well that the stage was set, and that I had not a chance when I came blundering on to the boards, a mere supernumerary in the last act. But, knowing all this, why did you send me the note? I don't like bear-baiting when I am the bear."

She looked away from him suddenly into the shadows of the shrubbery. Then, almost desperately:

"Is this mere neighborliness, John Ovington? Can a man meet a girl once and then talk as you are talking?"

"Does it seem impossible to you, Beatrice?" he muttered.

"Does it really seem so strange to you? Tell me frankly."

"I don't know," her lips framed, but without sound.

"Your face is so in the shadow," she said in a very low voice, "that I cannot tell whether or not you are smiling to yourself."

"I don't dare to look up to you for fear that you would understand too clearly. But tell me truly, why did you write that note?"

"I cannot tell. I sat down before a piece of paper and the words came of themselves. I don't know what I wrote. I am sorry if I hurt you."

"And I cannot tell why I came here tonight," he answered, "for I determined to stay away, but my steps guided themselves. Here I am. It is not you or I who speak here tonight, Beatrice, but old forces greater than we. We are puppets in the game. We are the guests of chance. Do you not feel it?"

"I cannot say," she said, "but everything seems changed. It is as if I knew you for a long time. When you speak I remember your words from long ago. And my heart is cold and strange. And— and— I wish you would go, John Ovington. I am afraid of you."

"I cannot go yet," he answered bitterly, "for I sit here and see as plainly as if I were looking at you, the stir of your breast, and the moonlight white and cold along your throat, and the unconscious smiling of your lips, and the unsearchable shadows of your eyes."

He turned to her fiercely and his left hand gripped the back of the stone seat as he leaned over her.

"Can't you make them clear and plain and readable? Can't you make me feel that I have no hope? That you are completely lost to me? That I have no share in your soul? Why do you torment me with this damnable ghost of hope, Beatrice?"

She made no answer to the compelling whisper, but through a long moment she met his eyes and into the silence once more the shaking of the fountain beat like a pulse. Then she shrank a little away with a musical tremor of sound, and her hand fell palm up across her eyes. He drew her to him, rich with the soft warmth of her body.

His lips touched her throat. A sob formed there. He kissed the tremulous hollow of her hand. At once it fell away helplessly. He crushed the parted lips. At once her breath came brokenly and moaning to his ear, and while the thunder of his heart shook both their spirits, she whispered:

"God help me! God help me!"

Thereat he rose suddenly and turned away with bowed head, for at the moan of her voice the thought of the yellow, rustling papers of the cedar box came upon him like a drift of the last leaves of dead autumn. Then he knew that she was by his side.

"It is not ended yet," she was saying. "If we are the guests of chance now, oh, be strong and become the master of it all! Find out the way. There is always one road home, John, I trust in you."

When he was able to raise his head she was gone, and a mist that drew across the moon made all the play grey and cold.

He reached his house again and stood a long time before the picture of John Ovington until it seemed that the hard half sneer of the pictured smile was meant for him, and when he slept that night the mockery of the smile followed him.

iv

BUT WHEN HE rose the next morning and looked over the shimmer of color running on the hills, a new hope swelled in him and a confidence of power. But as the day drew on the thought of the papers in the cedar box depressed him.

In the middle of the afternoon Hillton brought him a letter. Once more he knew the contents before he broke the seal, but as he read the expected words a sick feeling of suspense came over him.

Vincent Colvin has been with me all this morning. I am going to ride away with him tonight. I have not forgotten, but I promised myself to him long ago, and now I shall keep the promise. My father objects, so we are going out for a ride from which we shall never come back. We will take the Newbury Road. Oh, my dear, it breaks my heart to ride out of your life! It has all been so strange, so maddingly dear and painful. Must this be good-bye?

Once the letter was finished the suspense left him. Automatically he ordered his trunk packed and arranged his affairs as if he were about to go on a long journey. At sunset he went for the last time to look at the picture of the other John Ovington.

The smile twitched the lips and the sneer was doubly bitter.

After that he rode the black horse down the Newbury Road. He hardly knew what position to take, but when he came to a branching of the road the black horse of his own accord drew down to a walk. He had ridden him under the black shadow of an oak by the roadside before he remembered Hillton's story:

"And John Ovington waited for them at a forking of the Newbury Road."

HE WOULD HAVE ridden out and found some other waiting-place as he remembered, but a grim determination came up in him and he sat his horse motionless. He remained there for perhaps an hour. The moon came up and ran white along the road. Then a clatter of hoofs beat far away.

Colvin came first as they rounded the last run, a large man riding strongly on a grey horse. They were a hundred yards away when Ovington rode out from beneath the tree, his hand raised.

Colvin brought his horse to a stop on grinding hoofs.

"Who the devil are you, sir?" he shouted. "What do you mean by stopping me?"

"I haven't the least wish to stop you," said Ovington calmly, "but I intend to stop Beatrice Jervan tonight. As for you, you may ride to hell, for all of me."

He could see Colvin's face set with fury.

"What authority have you for this?" he demanded, still partially controlling his voice.

"The authority of good sense," smiled Ovington, "which says that it is both too late and far too cold for a girl to be out riding."

"Damn your impertinence," cried Colvin. "Get out of the road or I'll ride you down like a dog!"

"Ah," said Ovington, "you talk well, Colvin. But there is an older score to settle between us than you dream of. You must ride this way alone tonight."

"You fool," shouted Colvin, "if you must have it, take it!"

As he spoke a revolver flashed in his hand, but as it dropped to the level Ovington spurred his black suddenly forward.

With his left hand he struck up Colvin's arm, and the revolver roared past his ear. With his right arm he seized Colvin about the waist and drew him bodily from the saddle.

As he swayed a moment struggling on the saddle-bow, Ovington swung his right hand free and struck. The blow fell behind Colvin's ear and he collapsed without a sound.

Ovington flung his limp body to the ground.

"You have killed him!" whispered Beatrice. "Flee! Flee!"

"He is merely stunned," said Ovington. "Turn your horse. We ride another way this night."

She reined her horse away and raised her riding-crop.

"Keep away," she cried in a choked voice. "I am afraid! Keep away. He has my promise— I shall never leave him!"

He laughed short and hard.

"Promise?" he said. "Do you think that words will stop me tonight after I have conquered destiny at last? Do you dream that words will stop me? Then one way with both!"

As he spoke he rode upon her. The riding-crop fell upon his shoulder, but he did not notice it. He swept her from the saddle into his arms and crushed the parted lips fiercely against his own.

"Dearest," he said, "after four generations of waiting, I have returned for you and won you away from fate."

Suddenly her straining body gave to him, he heard a murmuring and changed voice in his ear:

"Ride! Ride! He is stirring on the road. He is awakening!"

And as they spurred up the road he turned his head and saw the grey horse and the brown fleeing side by side far away with loose shaken bridle-reins and empty saddles.

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5: Looney the Mutt

Don Marquis

1878-1937

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LOONEY had but one object in life, one thought, one conscious motive of existence— to find Slim again. After he found Slim, things would be different, things would be better, somehow. Just how, Looney did not know.

Looney did not know much, anyhow. Likely he would never have known much, in the most favorable circumstances. And the circumstances under which he had passed his life were scarcely conducive to mental growth. He could remember, vaguely, that he had not always been called Looney Hogan. There had been a time when he was called Kid Hogan. Something had happened inside his head one day, and then there had come a period of which he remembered nothing at all; after that, when he could remember again, he was not Kid any more, but Looney. Perhaps some one had hit him on the head. People were always hitting him, before he knew Slim. And now that Slim was gone, people were always hitting him again. When he was with Slim, Slim had not let people hit him— often. So he must find Slim again; Slim, who was the only God he had ever known.

In the course of time he became known, in his own queer world, from Baltimore to Seattle, from Los Angeles to Boston, as Slim's Lost Mutt, or as Looney the Mutt. Looney did not resent being called a dog, particularly, but he never called himself "The Mutt"; he stuck to "Looney"; Slim had called him Looney, and Looney must, therefore, be right.

The humors of Looney's world are not, uniformly, kindly humors. Giving Looney the Mutt a "bum steer" as to Slim's whereabouts was considered a legitimate jest.

"Youse ain't seen Slim Matchett anywheres?" he would ask of hobo or wobbly, working stiff or yeggman, his faded pale-blue eyes peering from his weather-worn face with the same anxious intensity, the same eager hope, as if he had not asked the question ten thousand times before.

And the other wanderer, if he were one that knew of Looney the Mutt and Looney's quest would answer, like as not:

"Slimmy de Match? Uh-huh! I seen Slim last mont' in Chi. He's lookin' fer youse, Looney." One day the Burlington Crip, who lacked a hand, and who looked so mean that it was of common report that he had got sore at himself and bitten it off, varied the reply a bit by saying:

"I seen Slim las' week, an' he says: 'Where t' hell's dat kid o' mine? Youse ain't seen nuttin' o' dat kid o' mine, has you, Crip? Dat kid o' mine give me de

slip, Crip. He lammistered, and I ain't seen him since. If youse gets yer lamps on dat kid o' mine, Crip, give him a wallop on his mush fer me, an' tell him to come an' find me an' I'm gonna give him another one.'"

Looney stared and wondered and grieved. It hurt him especially that Slim should think that he, Looney, had run away from Slim; he agonized anew that he could not tell Slim at once that such was not the truth. And he wondered and grieved at the change that must have taken place in Slim, who now promised him "a wallop on the mush." For Slim had never struck him. It was Slim who had always kept other people from striking him. It was Slim who had, upon occasion, struck other people to protect him— once, in a hangout among the lakeside sand dunes south of Chicago, Slim had knifed a man who had, by way of jovial byplay to enliven a dull afternoon, flung Looney into the fire.

It never occurred to Looney to doubt, entirely, these bearers of misinformation. He was hunting Slim, and of course, he thought, Slim was hunting Looney. His nature was all credulity. Such mind as the boy possessed— he was somewhere in his twenties, but had the physique of a boy— was saturated with belief in Slim, with faith in Slim, and he thought that all the world must admire Slim. He did not see why any one should tell lies that might increase Slim's difficulties, or his own.

There was a big red star he used to look at nights, when he slept in the open, and because it seemed to him bigger and better and more splendid than any of the other stars he took to calling it Slim's star. It was a cocky, confident-looking star; it looked as if it would know how to take care of itself, and Slim had been like that. It looked good-natured, too, and Slim had been that way. When Looney had rustled the scoffin's for Slim, Slim had always let him have some of the best chow— or almost always. And he used to talk to that star about Slim when he was alone. It seemed sympathetic. And although he believed the hoboes were telling him the truth when they said that they had seen Slim, it was apparent even to his intelligence that they had no real sympathy with his quest.

Once he did find a certain sympathy, if no great understanding. He worked a week, one Spring, for a farmer in Indiana. The farmer wished to keep him, for that Summer at least, for Looney was docile, willing enough, and had a natural, unconscious tact with the work-horses. Looney was never afraid of animals, and they were never afraid of him. Dogs took to him, and the instant liking of dogs had often stood him in good stead in his profession.

"Why won't you stay?" asked the farmer.

"Slim's lookin' fer me, somewheres," said Looney. And he told the farmer about Slim. The farmer, having perceived Looney's mental twilight, and feeling kindly toward the creature, advanced an argument that he thought might hold him.

"Slim is just as likely to find you if you stay in one place, as if you go travelin' all over the country," he said.

"Huh-uh," said Looney. "He ain't, Mister. It's this way, Mister: every time I stop long anywheres, Slim, he passes me by."

And then he continued, after a pause: "Slim, he was always good to me, Mister. I kinda want to be the one that finds Slim, instead of just stayin' still an' waitin' to be found."

They were standing in the dusk by the barn, and the early stars were out. Looney told him about Slim's star.

"I want to be the guy that does the findin'," went on Looney presently, "because I was the guy that done the losin'. One night they was five or six of us layin' under a lot of railroad ties we had propped up against a fence to keep the weather off, an' we figgered on hoppin' a train fer Chi that night. Well, the train comes along, but I'm asleep. See? The rest of t' gang gits into an empty in de dark, an' I don't wake up. I s'pose Slim he t'inks I'm wit' t' gang, but I don't wake up under them ties till mornin'. I went to Chi soon's I could, but I ain't never glommed him since, Mister. I didn't find him dere. An' dat's t' way I lost Slim, Mister."

"Maybe," suggested the farmer, "he is dead."

"Nit," said Looney. "He ain't dead. If Slim was croaked or anything, I'd be wised up to it. Look at that there star. Dat is Slim's star, like I told youse. If Slim had been bumped off, or anything, Mister, that star wouldn't be shinin' that way, Mister."

And he went back to his own world— his world— which was a succession of freight and cattle cars, ruinous sheds and shelters in dubious suburbs near to railroad sidings, police stations, workhouses, jails, city missions, transient hangouts in bedraggled clumps of wood, improvised shacks, shared with others of his kind in vacant lots in sooty industrial towns, chance bivouacs amidst lumber piles and under dripping water tanks, lucky infrequent lodgings in slum hotels that used to charge fifteen cents for a bed and now charge a quarter, golden moments in vile barrooms and blind tigers, occasional orgies in quarries or gravel pits or abandoned tin-roofed tool houses, uneasy, loiterings and interrupted slumbers in urban parks and the squares or outskirts of villages. Sometimes he worked, as he had with the Indiana farmer, with the wheat harvesters of the Northwest, or the snow shovelers of the metropoli, or the fruit gatherers of California; but more often he loafed, and rustled grub and small coin from the charitably disposed.

It all seemed the natural way of life to Looney. He could not remember anything else. He viewed the people of the world who did not live so, and whom he saw to be the majority, as strange, unaccountable beings whom he could never hope to understand; he vaguely perceived that they were stronger than he

and his ever-hiking clan, and he knew that they might do unpleasant things to him with their laws and their courts and their strength, but he bore them no rancor, unlike many of his associates.

He had no theories about work or idleness; he accepted either as it came; he had little conscious thought about anything, except finding Slim again. And one thing worried him: Slim, who was supposed to be looking for Looney, even as Looney was looking for Slim, left no mark. He was forever looking for it, searching for the traces of Slim's knife— a name, a date, a destination, a message bidding Looney to follow or to wait— on freight sheds and water tanks, and known and charted telegraph poles and the tool houses of construction gangs. But Slim, always just ahead of him, as he thought, continually returning and passing him, ever receding in the distance, left no mark, no wanderer's pateran, behind. Looney left his own marks everywhere, but, strangely enough, it seemed that Slim never saw them. Looney remembered that one time when he and Slim were together Slim had wished to meet and confer with the Burlington Crip, and had left word to that effect, penciled and carved and sown by the speech of the mouth, from the Barbary Coast to the Erie Basin. And the Burlington Crip, with his snaggle teeth and his stump where a hand had been, had joined them on the Brooklyn waterfront within two months. It had been simple, and Looney wondered why Slim omitted this easy method of communication. Perhaps Slim was using it and Looney was not finding the marks. He knew himself for stupid, and set his failure down to that, never to neglect on Slim's part. For Slim was Slim, and Slim could do no wrong.

His habit of searching for some scratched or written word of Slim's became known to his whole section of the underworld, and furnished material for an elaboration of the standing jest at his expense. When ennui descended upon some chance gathering in one of the transient hangouts— caravanserai as familiar to the loose-foot, casual guests, from coast to coast, as was ever the Blackstone in Chicago or the Biltmore in New York to those who read this simple history— it was customary for some wag to say:

"Looney, I seen a mark that looked like Slim's mark on a shed down in Alexandria, Virginny, right by where the Long Bridge starts over to Washington."

And it might be that Looney would start at once, without a word, for Alexandria. Therein lay the cream of this subtle witticism, for its perpetrators— in Looney's swift departures.

Or it might be that Looney would sit and ponder, his washed-out eyes interrogating the speaker in a puzzled fashion, but never doubting. And then the jester would say, perhaps: "Why don't you get a move onto you, Looney? You're gonna miss Slim again."

And Looney would answer, perchance: "Slim, he ain't there now. The' was one of them wobblies' bump-off men sayin' he seen Slim in Tacoma two weeks ago, an' Slim was headin' this way. I'm gonna wait fer him a while longer."

But he never waited long. He could never make himself. As he had told the Indiana farmer, he was afraid to wait long. It was the Burlington Crip who had made him afraid to do that. The Crip had told him one time: "Looney, Slim went through here last night, while youse was asleep over on that lumber pile. I forgets youse is lookin' fer him or I'd a tipped him off youse was here."

Slim had been within a hundred yards of him, and he had been asleep and had never known! What would Slim think, if he knew that? So thereafter he was continually tortured by the fancy that Slim might be passing him in the night; or that Slim, while he himself was riding the rods underneath a railway car, might be on the blind baggage of that very train, and would hop off first and be missed again. From day to day he became more muddled and perplexed trying to decide whether it would be better to choose this route or that, whether it would be better to stop here a week, or go yonder with all possible speed. And from month to month he developed more and more the questing, peering, wavering manner of the lost dog that seeks its master.

Looney was always welcome in the hang-outs of the wandering underworld. Not only was he a source of diversion, a convenient butt, but few could rustle grub so successfully. His meager frame and his wistfulness, his evident feebleness of intellect, drew alms from the solvent population, and Looney faithfully brought his takings to the hangouts and was dispatched again for more. Servant and butt he was to such lords as the Burlington Crip and the English Basher. But he did not mind so long as he was not physically maltreated— as he often was. The occasional crimes of his associates, the occasional connection of some of them with industrial warfare here and there, Looney sometimes participated in; but he never understood. If he were told to do so and so, for the most part he did it. If he were asked to do too much, or was beaten up for his stupidity, and he was always stupid, he quietly slunk away at his first opportunity.

The English Basher was a red-faced savage with fists as hard and rough as tarred rope; and he conceived the idea that Looney should be his kid, and wait upon him, even as he had been Slim's kid. Looney, afraid of the man, for a time seemed to acquiesce. But the Basher had reckoned without Looney's faculty for blundering.

He dispatched Looney one day, ostensibly to bum a handout, but in reality to get the lay of a certain house in a suburb near Cincinnati, which the Basher meditated cracking the next convenient night. Looney returned with the food but without the information. He had been willing enough, for he admired yeggmen and all their ways and works, and was withheld by no moral

considerations from anything he was asked to do; but he had bungled. He had been in the kitchen, he had eaten his own scoffin's there, he had talked with the cook for twenty minutes, he had even brought up from the cellar a scuttle of coal for the kitchen range to save the cook's back, but he actually knew less about that house, its plan, its fastenings, its doors and basement windows than the Basher had been able to gather with a single stroke of the eye as he loitered down the street.

"Cripes! Whadje chin about with the kitchen mechanic all dat time, you?" demanded the Basher.

"She was stringin' me along," said Looney humbly, "an' I spilled to her about me an' Slim."

"Slim! — — yer, I've a mind t' croak yer!" cried the Basher.

And he nearly did it, knocking the boy down repeatedly, till finally Looney lay still upon the ground.

"'S'elp me," said the Basher, "I've a mind to give yer m' boots! You get up an' beat it! An' if I ever gets my lamps onto you again I *will* croak you, by Gawd, an' no mistake!"

Looney staggered to his feet and hobbled to a safe distance. And then, spitting out a broken tooth, he dared to mutter: "If Slimmy was here, he'd see de color o' youse insides, Slimmy would. Slimmy, he knifed a yegg oncet wot done less'n dat t'me!"

It was only a week or two after he left the Basher that Looney's faith in Slim's star was tested again. Half a dozen of the brotherhood were gathered about a fire in a gravel pit in northern Illinois, swapping yarns and experiences and making merry. It was a tremendous fire, and lighted up the hollow as if it were the entrance to Gehenna, flinging the grotesque shadows of the men against the overhanging embankments, and causing the inhabitants of a village a mile or so away to wonder what farmer's haystack was aflame. The tramps were wasting five times the wood they needed, after their fashion. They had eaten to repletion, and they were wasting the left-over food from their evening gorge; they had booze; they were smoking; they felt, for the hour, at peace with the world.

"Wot ever *did* become of dat Slim?" asked the Burlington Crip, who happened to be of the party, looking speculatively at Looney. Even the sinister Crip, for the nonce, was not toting with him his usual mordant grouch.

Looney was tending the fire, while he listened to tales of the spacious days of the great Johnny Yegg himself, and other Titans of the road who have now assumed the state of legendary heroes; and he was, as usual, saying nothing.

"Slim? Slimmy t' Match wot Looney here's been tailin' after fer so long?" said the San Diego Kid. "Slim, he was bumped off in Paterson t'ree or four years ago."

"He wasn't neither," spoke up Looney. "Tex, here, seen him in Chi last mont'."

And, indeed, Tex had told Looney so. But now, thus directly appealed to, Tex answered nothing. And for the first time Looney began to get the vague suspicion that these, his friends, might have trifled with him before. Certainly they were serious now. He looked around the sprawled circle and sensed that their manner was somehow different from the attitude with which they had usually discussed his quest for Slim.

"Bumped off?" said Tex. "How?"

"A wobbly done it," said the San Diego Kid. "Slim, he was scabbin'. Strike-breakin'. And they was some wobblies there helpin' on the strike. See? An' this wobbly bumps Slim off."

"He didn't neither," said Looney again.

"T' hell he didn't? He said he did," said the San Diego Kid pacifically. "Is a guy gonna say he's bumped off a guy unless he's bumped him off?"

Looney, somewhat shaken, withdrew from the group to seek comfort from the constellations; and particularly from that big, red star, the apparent king of stars, which he had come to think of as Slim's star, and vaguely, as Slim's mascot. It was brighter and redder than ever that night, Looney thought, and sitting on a discarded railroad tie and staring at the planet, Looney gradually recovered his faith.

"He ain't neither been bumped off, Slim ain't," he muttered, "an' I'm gonna find him yet."

And Slim had not been bumped off, however sincere the San Diego Kid may have been in his belief.

It was some months later that Looney did find him in a little city in Pennsylvania— or found some one that looked like him.

Looney had dropped from a freight train early in the morning, had rustled himself some grub, had eaten two good meals and had part of a day's sleep, and now, just as dark was coming on, and the street lamps were being lighted, was loafing aimlessly on the platform of the railway depot. He purposed to take a train south that night, when it became so dark that he could crawl into an empty in the yards without too much danger of being seen and he was merely putting in the time until full night came on.

While he was standing idly so, an automobile drew up beside the station platform and an elegantly dressed and slender man of about thirty got out. He assisted from the car a woman and a small child, and they made toward the door of the waiting room.

"Slim!" cried Looney, rushing forward.

For this was Slim— it must be Slim— it was Slimmy the Match in every feature— and yet, the car!— the clothes— the woman— the baby— the prosperity— *Was* it Slim?

"Slim!" cried Looney again, his heart leaping in his meager body. "It's me, Slim! It's Looney! I've got youse again, Slim! Gawd! I've found yuh!"

The woman hastily snatched the child up into her arms, with a suppressed scream, and recoiled.

The man made no sound, but he, too, drew back a step, not seeming to see Looney's outstretched hand.

But he did see it— he saw more than that. He saw, as if they were flashed before him at lightning speed upon a cinema screen, a dozen scenes of a wild and reckless and indigent youth that he had thought was dead forever; he saw these roughneck years suddenly leap alive and stalk toward him again, toward him and his; he saw his later years of industry, his hard-won success, his position so strenuously battled for, his respectability that was become so dear to him, all his house of life so laboriously builded, crumbling before the touch of this torn and grotesque outcast that confronted and claimed him, this wavering, dusty lunatic whom he dimly remembered. If his wife knew— if her people knew— if the business men of this town were to know—

He shuddered and turned sick, and then with a sudden recovery he took his child from its mother and guided her before him into the waiting room.

Looney watched them enter, in silence. He stood dazed for a moment, and then he slowly turned and walked down the railroad track beyond the limits of the town. There, upon a spot of turf beside the right of way, he threw himself upon his face and sobbed and moaned, as a broken-hearted child sobs, as a dog moans upon its master's grave.

But after a while he looked up. Slim's star was looking down at him, red and confident and heartening as ever. He gazed at it a long time, and then an idea took form in his ruined brain and he said aloud:

"Now, dat wasn't *really* Slim! I been lookin' fer Slim so long I t'ink I see Slim where he ain't! Dat was jus' some guy wot looks like Slimmy. Slimmy, he wouldn't never of gone back on an old pal like dat!"

The rumble of an approaching train caught his ears. He got to his feet and prepared to board it.

"Slim, he's waitin' fer me somewheres," he told the star. "I may be kinda looney about some t'ings, but I knows Slim, an' dey ain't no yellow streak nowheres in Slim!"

And with unshaken loyalty Looney the Mutt boarded the train and set off upon his endless quest anew.

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6: The Skeleton on Round Island

Mary Hartwell Catherwood

1847-1902

Harper's New Monthly Magazine, March 1898

Collected in: *Mackinac and Lake Stories*, 1899

ON THE 15TH DAY OF MARCH, 1897, Ignace Pelott died at Mackinac Island, aged ninety-three years.

The old quarter-breed, son of a half breed Chippewa mother and French father, took with him into silence much wilderness lore of the Northwest. He was full of stories when warmed to recital, though at the beginning of a talk his gentle eyes dwelt on the listener with anxiety, and he tapped his forehead— "So many things gone from there!" His habit of saying "Oh God, yes," or "Oh God, no," was not in the least irreverent, but simply his mild way of using island English.

While water lapped the beach before his door and the sun smote sparkles on the strait, he told about this adventure across the ice, and his hearer has taken but few liberties with the recital.

I AM TO CARRY Mamselle Rosalin of Green Bay from Mackinac to Cheboygan that time, and it is the end of March, and the wind have turn from east to west in the morning. A man will go out with the wind in the east, to haul wood from Boblo, or cut a hole to fish, and by night he cannot get home— ice, it is rotten; it goes to pieces quick when the March wind turns.

I am not afraid for me— long, tall fellow then; eye that can see to Point aux Pins; I can lift more than any other man that goes in the boats to Green Bay or the Soo; can swim, run on snow-shoes, go without eating two, three days, and draw my belt in. Sometimes the ice-floes carry me miles, for they all go east down the lakes when they start, and I have landed the other side of Drummond. But when you have a woman with you— Oh God, yes, that is different.

The way of it is this: I have brought the mail from St. Ignace with my traino— you know the *train-au-galise*— the birch sledge with dogs. It is flat, and turn up at the front like a toboggan. And I have take the traino because it is not safe for a horse; the wind is in the west, and the strait bends and looks too sleek. Ice a couple of inches thick will bear up a man and dogs. But this old ice a foot thick, it is turning rotten. I have come from St. Ignace early in the afternoon, and the people crowd about to get their letters, and there is Mamselle Rosalin crying to go to Cheboygan, because her lady has arrive there sick, and has sent the letter a week ago. Her friends say:

"It is too late to go to-day, and the strait is dangerous."

She say: "I make a bundle and walk. I must go when my lady is sick and her husband the lieutenant is away, and she has need of me."

Mamselle's friends talk and she cry. She runs and makes a little bundle in the house and comes out ready to walk to Cheboygan. There is nobody can prevent her. Some island people are descend from noblesse of France. But none of them have travel like Mamselle Rosalin with the officer's wife to Indiana, to Chicago, to Detroit. She is like me, French.* The girls use to turn their heads to see me walk in to mass; but I never look grand as Mamselle Rosalin when she step out to that ice.

** The old fellow would not own the Chippewa.*

I have not a bit of sense; I forget maman and my brothers and sisters that depend on me. I run to Mamselle Rosalin, take off my cap, and bow from my head to my heel, like you do in the dance. I will take her to Cheboygan with my traino— Oh God, yes! And I laugh at the wet track the sledge make, and pat my dogs and tell them they are not tired. I wrap her up in the fur, and she thank me and tremble, and look me through with her big black eyes so that I am ready to go down in the strait.

The people on the shore hurrah, though some of them cry out to warn us.

"The ice is cracked from Mission Point to the hook of Round Island, Ignace Pelott!"

"I know that," I say. "Good-day, messieurs!"

The crack from Mission Point— under what you call Robinson's Folly— to the hook of Round Island always comes first in a breaking up; and I hold my breath in my teeth as I skurry the dogs across it. The ice grinds, the water follows the sledge. But the sun is so far down in the southwest, I think "The wind will grow colder. The real thaw will not come before to-morrow."

I am to steer betwixt the east side of Round Island and Boblo. When we come into the shadow of Boblo we are chill with damp, far worse than the clear sharp air that blows from Canada. I lope beside the traino, and not take my eyes off the course to Cheboygan, except that I see the islands look blue, and darkness stretching before its time. The sweat drop off my face, yet I feel that wind through my wool clothes, and am glad of the shelter between Boblo and Round Island, for the strait outside will be the worst.

There is an Indian burying-ground on open land above the beach on that side of Round Island. I look up when the thick woods are pass, for the sunset ought to show there. But what I see is a skeleton like it is sliding down hill from the graveyard to the beach. It does not move. The earth is wash from it, and it hangs staring at me.

I cannot tell how that make me feel! I laugh, for it is funny; but I am ashame, like my father is expose and Mamselle Rosalin can see him. If I do not cover him again I am disgrace. I think I will wait till some other day when I can get back from Cheboygan; for what will she say if I stop the traino when we have such a long journey, and it is so near night, and the strait almost ready to move? So I crack the whip, but something pull, pull! I cannot go on! I say to myself, "The ground is froze; how can I cover up that skeleton without any shovel, or even a hatchet to break the earth?"

But something pull, pull, so I am oblige to stop, and the dogs turn in without one word and drag the sledge up the beach of Bound Island.

"What is the matter?" says Mamselle Eosalin. She is out of the sledge as soon as it stops.

I not know what to answer, but tell her I have to cut a stick to mend my whip-handle. I think I will cut a stick and rake some earth over the skeleton to cover it, and come another day with a shovel and dig a new grave. The dogs lie down and pant, and she looks through me with her big eyes like she beg me to hurry.

But there is no danger she will see the skeleton. We both look back to Mackinac. The island have its hump up against the north, and the village in its lap around the bay, and the Mission eastward near the cliff; but all seem to be moving! We run along the beach of Bound Island, and then we see the channel between that and Boblo is moving too, and the ice is like wet loaf-sugar, grinding as it floats.

We hear some roars away off, like cannon when the Americans come to the island. My head swims. I cross myself and know why something pull, pull, to make me bring the traino to the beach, and I am oblige to that skeleton who slide down hill to warn me.

When we have seen Mackinac, we walk to the other side and look south and southeast towards Cheboygan.. All is the same. The ice is moving out of the strait.

"We are strand on this island!" says Mamselle Rosalin. "Oh, what shall we do?"

I tell her it is better to be prisoners on Bound Island than on a cake of ice in the strait, for I have tried the cake of ice and know.

"We will camp and build a fire in the cove opposite Mackinac," I say. "Maman and the children will see the light and feel sure we are safe."

"I have done wrong," says she. "If you lose your life on this journey, it is my fault."

Oh God, no! I tell her. She is not to blame for anything, and there is no danger. I have float many a time when the strait breaks up, and not save my hide so dry as it is now. We only have to stay on Round Island till we can get off.

"And how long will that be?" she ask.

I shrug my shoulders. There is no telling. Sometimes the strait clears very soon, sometimes not. Maybe two, three days.

Rosalin sit down on a stone.

I tell her we can make camp, and show signals to Mackinac, and when the ice permit, a boat will be sent.

She is crying, and I say her lady will be well. No use to go to Cheboygan anyhow, for it is a week since her lady sent for her. But she cry on, and I think she wish I leave her alone, so I say I will get wood. And I unharness the dogs, and run along the beach to cover that skeleton before dark. I look and cannot find him at all. Then I go up to the graveyard and look down. There is no skeleton anywhere. I have seen his skull and his ribs and his arms and legs, all sliding down hill. But he is gone!

The dusk close in upon the islands, and I not know what to think— cross myself, two, three times; and wish we had land on Boblo instead of Round Island, though there are wild beasts on both.

But there is no time to be scare at skeletons that slide down and disappear, for Mamselle Rosalin must have her camp and her place to sleep. Every man use to the bateaux have always his tinder-box, his knife, his tobacco, but I have more than that; I have leave Mackinac so quick I forget to take out the storekeeper's bacon that line the bottom of the sledge, and Mamselle Eosalin sit on it in the furs! We have plenty meat, and I sing like a voyageur while I build the fire. Drift, so dry in summer you can light it with a coal from your pipe, lay on the beach, but is now winter-soaked, and I make a fireplace of logs, and cut pine branches to help it.

It is all thick woods on Round Island, so close it tear you to pieces if you try to break through; only four-footed things can crawl there. When the fire is blazing up I take my knife and cut a tunnel like a little room, and pile plenty evergreen branches. This is to shelter Mamselle Rosalin, for the night is so raw she shiver. Our tent is the sky, darkness, and clouds. But I am happy. I unload the sledge. The bacon is wet. On long sticks the slices sizzle and sing while I toast them, and the dogs come close and blink by the fire, and lick their chops. Rosalin laugh and I laugh, for it smell like a good kitchen; and we sit and eat nothing but toasted meat— better than lye corn and tallow that you have when you go out with the boats. Then I feed the dogs, and she walk with me to the water edge, and we drink with our hands.

It is my house, when we sit on the fur by the fire. I am so light I want my fiddle. I wish it last like a dream that Mamselle Rosalin and me keep house together on Round Island. You not want to go to heaven when the one you think about all the time stays close by you.

But pretty soon I want to go to heaven quick. I think I jump in the lake if maman and the children had anybody but me. When I light my pipe she smile. Then her great big eyes look off towards Mackinac, and I turn and see the little far-away lights.

"They know we are on Round Island together," I say to cheer her, and she move to the edge of the fur. Then she say "Good-night," and get up and go to her tunnel-house in the bushes, and I jump up too, and spread the fur there for her. And I not get back to the fire before she make a door of all the branches I have cut, and is hid like a squirrel I feel I dance for joy because she is in my camp for me to guard. But what is that? It is a woman that cry out loud by herself! I understand now why she sit down so hopeless when we first land. I have not know much about women, but I understand how she feel. It is not her lady, or the dark, or the ice break up, or the cold. It is not Ignace Pelott. It is the name of being prison on Round Island with a man till the ice is out of the straits. She is so shame she want to die. I think I will kill myself. If Mamselle Rosalin cry out loud once more, I plunge in the lake— and then what become of maman and the children?

She is quieter; and I sit down and cannot smoke, and the dogs pity me. Old Sauvage lay his nose on my knee. I do not say a word to him, but I pat him, and we talk with our eyes, and the bright camp-fire shows each what the other is say.

"Old Sauvage," I tell him, "I am not good man like the priest. I have been out with the boats, and in Indian camps, and I not had in my life a chance to marry, because there are maman and the children. But you know, old Sauvage, how I have feel about Mamselle Rosalin, it is three years."

Old Sauvage hit his tail on the ground and answer he know.

"I have love her like a dog that not dare to lick her hand. And now she hate me because I am shut on Round Island with her while the ice goes out. I not good man, but it pretty tough to stand that." Old Sauvage hit his tail on the ground and say, "That so." I hear the water on the gravel like it sound when we find a place to drink; then it is plenty company, but now it is lonesome. The water say to people on Mackinac, "Rosalin and Ignace Pelott, they are on Round Island." What make you proud, maybe, when you turn it and look at it the other way, make you sick. But I cannot walk the broken ice, and if I could, she would be lef alone with the dogs. I think I will build another camp.

But soon there is a shaking in the bushes, and Sauvage and his sledgemates bristle and stand up and show their teeth. Out comes Mamselle Rosalin with a scream to the other side of the fire.

I have nothing except my knife, and I take a chunk of burning wood and go into her house. Maybe I see some green eyes. I have handle vild-cat skin too much not to know that smell in the dark.

I take all the branches from Rosalin's house and pile them by the fire, and spread the fur robe on them. And I pull out red coals and put more logs on before I sit down away off between her and the spot where she hear that noise. If the graveyard was over us, I would expect to see that skeleton once more.

"What was it?" she whisper.

I tell her maybe a stray wolf.

"Wolves not eat people, mamselle, unless they hunt in a pack; and they run from fire. You know what M'sieu' Cable tell about wolves that chase him on the ice when he skate to Cheboygan? He come to great wide crack in ice, he so scare he jump it and skate right on! Then he look back, and see the wolves go in, head down, every wolf caught and drown in the crack. It is two days before he come home, and the east wind have blow to freeze that crack over— and there are all the wolf tails, stick up, froze stiff in a row! He bring them home with him— but los them on the way, though he show the knife that cut them off!"

"I have hear that," says Rosalin. "I think he lie."

"He say he take his out on a book," I tell her, but we both laugh, and she is curl down so close to the fire her cheeks turn rosy. For a camp-fire will heat the air all around until the world is like a big dark room; and we are shelter from the wind. I am glad she is begin to enjoy herself. And all the time I have a hand on my knife, and the cold chills down my back where that hungry vild-cat will set his claws if he jump on me; and I cannot turn around to face him because Rosalin thinks it is nothing but a cowardly wolf that sneak away. Old Sauvage is uneasy and come to me, his fangs all expose, but I drive him back and listen to the bushes behind me.

"Sing, M'sieu' Pelott," says Rosalin.

Oh God, yes I it is easy to sing with a vild-cat watch you on one side and a woman on the other!

"But I not know anything except boat songs."

"Sing boat songs."

So I sing like a bateau full of voyageurs, and the dark echo, and that vild-cat must be astonish. When you not care what become of you, and your head is light and your heart like a stone on the beach, you not mind vild-cats, but sing and laugh.

I cast my eye behin sometimes, and feel my knife. It make me smile to think what kind of creature come to my house in the wilderness, and I say to myself: "Hear my cat purr! This is the only time I will ever have a home of my own, and the only time the woman I want sit beside my fire."

Then I ask Rosalin to sing to me, and she sing "Malbrouck," like her father learn it in Kebec. She watch me, and I know her eyes have more danger for me than the vild-cat's. It ought to tear me to pieces if I forget maman and the children. It ought to be scare out the bushes to jump on a poor fool like me. But

I not stop entertain it— Oh God, no! I say things that I never intend to say, like they are pull out of my mouth. When your heart has ache, sometimes it break up quick like the ice.

"There is Paul Pepin," I tell her. "He is a happy man; he not trouble himself with anybody at all. His father die; he let his mother take care of herself. He marry a wife, and get tired of her and turn her off with two children. The priest not able to scare him; he smoke and take his dram and enjoy life. If I was Paul Pepin I would not be torment."

"But you are not torment," says Rosalin. "Everybody speak well of you."

"Oh God, yes," I tell her; "but a man not live on the breath of his neighbors. I am thirty years old, and I have take care of my mother and brothers and sisters since I am fifteen. I not made so I can leave them, like Paul Pepin. He marry when he please. I not able to marry at all. It is not far I can go from the island. I cannot get rich. My work must be always the same."

"But why you want to marry?" says Rosalin, as if that surprise her. And I tell her it is because I have seen Rosalin of Green Bay; and she laugh. Then I think it is time for the vild-cat to jump. I am thirty years old, and have nothing but what I can make with the boats or my traino; the children are not grown; my mother depend on me; and I have propose to a woman, and she laugh at me!

But I not see, while we sing and talk, that the fire is burn lower, and old Sauvage has crept around the camp into the bushes.

That end all my courtship. I not use to it, and not have any business to court, anyhow. I drop my head on my breast, and it is like when I am little and the measle go in. Paul Pepin he take a woman by the chin and smack her on the lips. The women not laugh at him, he is so rough. I am as strong as he is, but I am afraid to hurt; I am oblige to take care of what need me. And I am tie to things I love— even the island— so that I cannot get away.

"I not want to marry," says Rosalin, and I see her shake her head at me. "I not think about it at all."

"Mamselle," I say to her, "you have not any inducement like I have, that torment you three years."

"How you know that?" she ask me. And then her face change from laughter, and she spring up from the blanket couch, and I think the camp go around and around me— all fur and eyes and claws and teeth— and I not know what I am doing, for the dogs are all over me— yell— yell— yell; and then I am stop stabbing, because the vild-cat has let go of Sauvage, and Sauvage has let go of the vild-cat, and I am looking at them and know they are both dead, and I cannot help him any more.

You are confuse by such things where there is noise, and howling creatures sit up and put their noses in the air, like they call their mate back out of the dark. I am sick for my old dog. Then I am proud he has kill it, and wipe my knife

on its fur, but feel ashame that I have not check him driving it into camp. And then Rosalin throw her arms around my neck and kiss me.

It is many years I have tell Rosalin she did that. But a woman will deny what she know to be the trut. I have tell her the courtship had end, and she begin it again herself, and keep it up till the boats take us off Round Island. The ice not run out so quick any more now like it did then. My wife say it is a long time we waited, but when I look back it seem the shortest time I ever live— only two days.

Oh God, yes, it is three years before I marry the woman that not want to marry at all; then my brothers and sisters can take care of themselves, and she help me take care of maman.

It is when my boy Gabriel come home from the war to die that I see the skeleton on Round Island again. I am again sure it is wash out, and I go ashore to bury it, and it disappear. Nobody but me see it. Then before Rosalin die I am out on the ice-boat, and it give me warning. I know what it mean; but you cannot always escape misfortune. I cross myself when I see it; but I find good luck that first time I land; and maybe I find good luck every time, after I have land.

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7: The Stolen Romney

Edgar Wallace

1875-1932

The Weekly News, 27 Dec 1919

Collected in: *Four Square Jane,* 1929

One of 8 connected short stories featuring Four Square Jane

CHIEF SUPERINTENDENT DAWES, of Scotland Yard, was a comparatively young man, considering the important position he held. It was the boast of his department— Peter himself did very little talking about his achievements— that never once, after he had picked up a trail, was Peter ever baffled.

A clean-shaven, youngish looking man, with grey hair at his temples, Peter took a philosophical view of crime and criminals, holding neither horror towards the former, nor malice towards the latter.

If he had a passion at all it was for the crime which contained within itself a problem. Anything out of the ordinary, or anything bizarre fascinated him, and it was one of the main regrets of his life that it had never once fallen to his lot to conduct an investigation into the many Four-Square mysteries which came to the Metropolitan police.

It was after the affair at Lord Claythorpe's that Peter Dawes was turned loose to discover and apprehend this girl criminal, and he welcomed the opportunity to take charge of a case which had always interested him. To the almost hysterical telephone message Scotland Yard had received from Lord Claythorpe Peter did not pay too much attention. He realized that it was of the greatest importance that he should keep his mind unhampered and unprejudiced by the many and often contradictory "clues" which everyone who had been affected by Four-Square Jane's robberies insisted on discussing with him.

He interviewed an agitated man at four o'clock in the morning, and Lord Claythorpe was frantic.

"It's terrible, terrible," he wailed, "what are you people at Scotland Yard doing that you allow these villainies to continue? It is monstrous!"

Peter Dawes, who was not unused to outbursts on the part of the victimized, listened to the squeal with equanimity.

"As I understand it, this woman came here with two men who pretended to have her in custody—"

"Two detectives!" moaned his lordship.

"If they called themselves detectives, then you were deceived," said Peter with a smile. "They persuaded you to allow the prisoner and one of her captors

to spend ten minutes in the library where your jewels are kept. Now tell me, when the crime occurred had your guests left?"

Lord Claythorpe nodded wearily.

"They had all gone," he said, "except my friend Lewinstein."

Peter made an examination of the room, and a gleam of interest came into his eyes when he saw the curious labels. He examined the door and the window-bars, and made as careful a search of the floor as possible.

"I can't do much at this hour," he said. "At daylight I will come back and have a good look through this room. Don't allow anybody in to dust or to sweep it."

He returned at nine o'clock, and to his surprise, Lord Claythorpe, whom he had expected would be in bed and asleep, was waiting for him in the library, and wearing a dressing-gown over his pyjamas.

"Look at this," exclaimed the old man, and waved a letter wildly.

Dawes took the document and read:

You are very mean, old man! When you lost your Venetian armlet you offered a reward of ten thousand pounds. I sent that armlet to a hospital greatly in need of funds, and the doctor who presented my gift to the hospital was entitled to the full reward. I have taken your pearls because you swindled the hospital out of six thousand pounds. This time you will not get your property back.

There was no signature, but the familiar mark, roughly drawn, the four squares and the centred "J."

"This was written on a Yost typewriter," said Peter Dawes, looking at the document critically. "The paper is the common stuff you buy in penny packages— so is the envelope. How did it come?"

"It came by district messenger," said Lord Claythorpe. "Now what do you think, officer? Is there any chance of my getting those pearls back?"

"There is a chance, but it is a pretty faint one," said Peter.

He went back to Scotland Yard, and reported to his chief.

"So far as I can understand, the operations of this woman began about twelve months ago. She has been constantly robbing, not the ordinary people who are subjected to this kind of victimization but people with bloated bank balances, and so far as my investigations go, bank balances accumulated as a direct consequence of shady exploitation companies."

"What does she do with the money?" asked the Commissioner curiously.

"That's the weird thing about it," replied Dawes. "I'm fairly certain that she donates very large sums to all kinds of charities. For example, after the Lewinstein burglary a big crèche in the East End of London received from an anonymous donor the sum of four thousand pounds. Simultaneously, another sum of four thousand was given to one of the West End hospitals. After the

Talbot burglary three thousand pounds, which represented nearly the whole of the amount stolen, was left by some unknown person to the West End Maternity Hospital. I have an idea that we shall discover she is somebody who is in close touch with hospital work, and that behind these crimes there is some quixotic notion of helping the poor at the expense of the grossly rich."

"Very beautiful," said the Chief dryly, "but unfortunately her admirable intentions do not interest us. In our eyes she is a common thief."

"She is something more than that," said Peter quietly; "she is the cleverest criminal that has come my way since I have been associated with Scotland Yard. This is the one thing one has dreaded, and yet one has hoped to meet— a criminal with a brain."

"Has anybody seen this woman?" said the Commissioner, interested.

"They have, and they haven't," replied Peter Dawes. "That sounds cryptic, but it only means that she has been seen by people who could not recognize her again. Lewinstein saw her, Claythorpe saw her, but she was veiled and unrecognizable. My difficulty, of course, is to discover where she is going to strike next. Even if she is only hitting at the grossly rich she has forty thousand people to strike at. Obviously, it is impossible to protect them all. But somehow—" he hesitated.

"Yes?" said the Chief.

"Well, a careful study of her methods helps me a little," replied Dawes. "I have been looking round to discover who the next victim will be. He must be somebody very wealthy, and somebody who makes a parade of big wealth, and I have fined down the issue to about four men. Gregory Smith, Carl Sweiss, Mr Thomas Scott, and John Tresser. I am inclined to believe it is Tresser she is after. You see, Tresser has made a great fortune, not by the straightest means in the world, and he hasn't forgotten to advertise his riches. He is the fellow who bought the Duke of Haslemere's house, and his collection of pictures— you will remember the stuff that has been written about."

The Chief nodded.

"There is a wonderful Romney, isn't there?"

"That's the picture," replied Dawes. "Tresser, of course, doesn't know a picture from a gas-stove. He knows that the Romney is wonderful, but only because he has been told so. Moreover, he is the fellow who has been giving the newspapers his views on charity— told them that he never spent a penny on public institutions, and never gave away a cent that he didn't get a cent's worth of value for. A thing like that would excite Jane's mind; and then, in addition, the actual artistic and monetary value of the Romney is largely advertised— why, I should imagine that the attraction is almost irresistible!"

Mr Tresser was a difficult man to meet. His multitudinous interests in the City of London kept him busy from breakfast time until late at night. When at

last Peter ran him down in a private dining-room at the Ritz-Carlton, he found the multi-millionaire a stout, red-haired man with a long clean-shaven upper lip, and a cold blue eye.

The magic of Peter Dawes' card secured him an interview.

"Sit down— sit down," said Mr Tresser hurriedly, "what's the trouble, hey?"

Peter explained his errand, and the other listened with interest, as to a business proposition.

"I've heard all about that Jane," said Mr Tresser cheerfully, "but she's not going to get anything from me— you can take my word! As to the Rumney— is that how you pronounce it?— well, as to that picture, don't worry!"

"But I understand you are giving permission to the public to inspect your collection."

"That's right," said Mr Tresser, "but everybody who sees them must sign a visitor's book, and the pictures are guarded."

"Where do you keep the Romney at night— still hanging?" asked Peter, and Mr Tresser laughed.

"Do you think I'm a fool," he said, "no, it goes into my strong room. The Duke had a wonderful strong room which will take a bit of opening."

Peter Dawes did not share the other's confidence in the efficacy of bolts and bars. He knew that Four-Square Jane was both an artist and a strategist. Of course, she might not be bothered with pictures, and, anyway, a painting would be a difficult thing to get away unless it was stolen by night, which would be hardly likely.

He went to Haslemere House, which was off Berkeley Square, a great rambling building, with a long, modern picture-gallery, and having secured admission, signed his name and showed his card to an obvious detective, he was admitted to the long gallery. There was the Romney— a beautiful example of the master's art.

Peter was the only sightseer, but it was not alone to the picture that he gave his attention. He made a brief survey of the room in case of accidents. It was long and narrow. There was only one door— that through which he had come— and the windows at both ends were not only barred, but a close wire-netting covered the bars, and made entrance and egress impossible by that way. The windows were likewise long and narrow, in keeping with the shape of the room, and there were no curtains behind which an intruder might hide. Simple spring roller blinds were employed to exclude the sunlight by day.

Peter went out, passed the men, who scrutinized him closely, and was satisfied that if Four-Square Jane made a raid on Mr Tresser's pictures, she would have all her work cut out to get away with it. He went back to Scotland Yard, busied himself in his office, and afterwards went out for lunch. He came back to his office at three o'clock, and had dismissed the matter of Four-Square

Jane from his mind, when an urgent call came through. It was a message from the Assistant Chief Commissioner.

"Will you come down to my office at once, Dawes?" said the voice, and Peter sprinted down the long corridor to the bureau of the Chief Commissioner.

"Well, Dawes, you haven't had to wait long," he was greeted.

"What do you mean?" said Peter.

"I mean the precious Romney is stolen," said the Chief, and Peter could only stare at him.

"When did this happen?"

"Half an hour ago— you'd better get down to Berkeley Square, and make inquiries on the spot."

Two minutes later, Peter's little two-seater was nosing its way through the traffic, and within ten minutes he was in the hall of the big house interrogating the agitated attendants. The facts, as he discovered them, were simple.

At a quarter-past two, an old man wearing a heavy overcoat, and muffled up to the chin, came to the house, and asked permission to see the portrait gallery. He gave his name as "Thomas Smith."

He was an authority on Romney, and was inclined to be garrulous. He talked to all the attendants, and seemed prepared to give a long-winded account of his experience, his artistic training, and the excellence of his quality as an art critic— which meant that he was the type of bore that most attendants have to deal with, and they very gladly cut short his monotonous conversation, and showed him the way to the picture gallery.

"Was he alone in the room?" asked Peter.

"Yes, sir."

"And nobody went in with him?"

"No, sir."

Peter nodded.

"Of course, the garrulity may have been intentional, and it may have been designed to scare away attendants, but go on."

"The man went into the room, and was seen standing before the Romney in rapt contemplation. The attendants who saw him swore that at that time the Romney was in its frame. It hung on the level with the eyes; that is to say the top of the frame was about seven feet from the floor.

"Almost immediately after the attendants had looked in the old man came out talking to himself about the beauty of the execution. As he left the room, and came into the outer lobby, a little girl entered and also asked permission to go into the gallery. She signed her name 'Ellen Cole' in the visitor's book."

"What was she like?" said Peter.

"Oh, just a child," said the attendant vaguely, "a little girl."

Apparently the little girl walked into the saloon as the old man came out— he turned and looked at her, and then went on through the lobby, and out through the door. But before he got to the door, he pulled a handkerchief out of his pocket, and with it came about half a dozen silver coins, which were scattered on the marble floor of the vestibule. The attendants helped him to collect the money— he thanked them, his mind still with the picture apparently, for he was talking to himself all the time, and finally disappeared.

He had hardly left the house when the little girl came out and asked: "Which is the Romney picture?"

"In the centre of the room," they told her, "immediately facing the door."

"But there's not a picture there," she said, "there's only an empty frame, and a funny kind of little black label with four squares."

The attendants dashed into the room, and sure enough the picture had disappeared!

In the space where it had been, or rather on the wall behind the place, was the sign of Four-Square Jane.

The attendants apparently did not lose their heads. One went straight to the telephone, and called up the nearest police station— the second went on in search of the old man. But all attempts to discover him proved futile. The constable on point duty at the corner of Berkeley Square had seen him get into a taxi-cab and drive away, but had not troubled to notice the number of the taxi-cab.

"And what happened to the little girl?" asked Peter.

"Oh, she just went away," said the attendant; "she was here for some time, and then she went off. Her address was in the visitor's book. There was no chance of her carrying the picture away— none whatever," said the attendant emphatically. "She was wearing a short little skirt, and light summery things, and it was impossible to have concealed a big canvas like that."

Peter went in to inspect the frame. The picture had been cut flush with the borders. He looked around, making a careful examination of the apartment, but discovered nothing, except, immediately in front of the picture, a long, white pin. It was the sort of pin that bankers use to fasten notes together. And there was no other clue.

Mr Tressler took his loss very calmly until the newspapers came out with details of the theft. It was only then that he seemed impressed by its value, and offered a reward for its recovery.

The stolen Romney became the principal topic of conversation in clubs and in society circles. It filled columns of the newspapers, and exercised the imagination of some of the brightest young men in the amateur criminal investigation business. All the crime experts were gathered together at the

scene of the happening and their theories, elaborate and ingenious, provided interesting subject matter for the speculative reader.

Peter Dawes, armed with the two addresses he had taken from the visitor's book, the address of the old man and of the girl, went round that afternoon to make a personal investigation, only to discover that neither the learned Mr Smith nor the innocent child were known at the addresses they had given.

Peter reported to headquarters with a very definite view as to how the crime was committed.

"The old man was a blind," he said, "he was sent in to create suspicion and keep the eyes of the attendants upon himself. He purposely bored everybody with his long-winded discourse on art in order to be left alone. He went into the saloon knowing that his bulky appearance would induce the attendants to keep their eyes on him. Then he came out— the thing was timed beautifully— just as the child came in. That was the lovely plan.

"The money was dropped to direct all attention on the old man, and at that moment, probably, the picture was cut from its frame, and it was hidden. Where it was hidden, or how the girl got it out is a mystery. The attendants are most certain that she could not have had it concealed about her, and I have made experiments with a thick canvas cut to the size of the picture, and it certainly does seem that the picture would have so bulged that they could not have failed to have noticed it."

"But who was the girl?"

"Four-Square Jane!" said Peter promptly.

"Impossible!"

Peter smiled.

"It is the easiest thing in the world for a young girl to make herself look younger. Short frocks, and hair in plaits— and there you are! Four-Square Jane is something more than clever."

"One moment," said the Chief, "could she have handed it through the window to somebody else?"

Peter shook his head.

"I have thought of that," he said, "but the windows were closed and there was a wire netting which made that method of disposal impossible. No, by some means or other she got the picture out under the noses of the attendants. Then she came out and announced innocently that she could not find the Romney picture— naturally there was a wild rush to the saloon. For three minutes no notice was being taken of the 'child'."

"Do you think one of the attendants was in collusion?"

"That is also possible," said Peter, "but every man has a record of good, steady service. They're all married men and none of them has the slightest thing against him."

"And what will she do with the picture? She can't dispose of it," protested the Chief.

"She's after the reward," said Peter with a smile. "I tell you, Chief, this thing has put me on my mettle. Somehow, I don't think I've got my hand on Jane yet, but I'm living on hopes."

"After the reward," repeated the Chief; "that's pretty substantial. But surely you are going to fix her when she hands the picture over?"

"Not on your life," replied Peter, and took out of his pocket a telegram and laid it on the table before the other. It read:

THE ROMNEY WILL BE RETURNED ON CONDITION THAT MR TRESSER UNDERTAKES TO PAY THE SUM OF FIVE THOUSAND POUNDS TO THE GREAT PANTON STREET HOSPITAL FOR CHILDREN. ON HIS SIGNING AN AGREEMENT TO PAY THIS SUM, THE PICTURE WILL BE RESTORED. — JANE

"What did Tresser say about that?"

"Tresser agrees," answered Peter, "and has sent a note to the secretary of the Great Panton Street Hospital to that effect. We are advertising the fact of his agreement very widely in the newspapers."

At three o'clock that afternoon came another telegram, addressed this time to Peter Dawes— it annoyed him to know that the girl was so well informed that she was aware of the fact that he was in charge of the case.

I WILL RESTORE THE PICTURE AT EIGHT O'CLOCK TONIGHT. BE IN THE PICTURE GALLERY, AND PLEASE TAKE ALL PRECAUTIONS. DON'T LET ME ESCAPE THIS TIME— THE FOUR-SQUARE JANE.

The telegram was handed in at the General Post Office.

Peter Dawes neglected no precaution. He had really not the faintest hope that he would make the capture, but it would not be his fault if Four-Square Jane were not put under lock and key.

A small party assembled in the gloomy hall of Mr Tresser's own house.

Dawes and two detective officers, Mr Tresser himself— he sucked at a big cigar and seemed the least concerned of those present— the three attendants, and a representative of the Great Panton Street Hospital were there.

"Do you think she'll come in person?" asked Tresser. "I would rather like to see that Jane. She certainly put one over on me, but I bear her no ill-will."

"I have a special force of police within call," said Peter, "and the roads are watched by detectives, but I'm afraid I can't promise you anything exciting. She's too slippery for us."

"Anyway, the messenger— " began Tresser.

Peter shook his head.

"The messenger may be a district messenger, though here again I have taken precautions— all the district messenger offices have been warned to notify Scotland Yard in the event of somebody coming with a parcel addressed here."

Eight o'clock boomed out from the neighbouring church, but Four-Square Jane had not put in an appearance. Five minutes later there came a ring at the bell, and Peter Dawes opened the door.

It was a telegraph boy.

Peter took the buff envelope and tore it open, read the message through carefully, and laughed— a hopeless, admiring laugh.

"She's done it," he said.

"What do you mean?" asked Tresser.

"Come in here," said Peter.

He led the way into the picture gallery. There was the empty frame on the wall, and behind it the half-obliterated label which Four-Square Jane had stuck.

He walked straight to the end of the room to one of the windows.

"The picture is here," he said, "it has never left the room."

He lifted his hand, and pulled at the blind cord, and the blind slowly revolved.

There was a gasp of astonishment from the gathering. For, pinned to the blind, and rolled up with it, was the missing Romney.

"I ought to have guessed when I saw the pin," said Peter to his chief. It was quick work, but it was possible to do it.

"She cut out the picture, brought it to the end of the room, and pulled down the blind; pinned the top corners of the picture to the blind, and let it roll up again. Nobody thought of pulling that infernal thing down!"

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8: Dimoussi and the Pistol

A. E. W. Mason

1865-1948

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The Times' Red Cross Story Book, 1915

IN THE MAPS OF MOROCCO you will see, stretching southwards of the city of Mequinez, a great tract of uncharted country. It is lawless and forbidden land. Even the Sultan Mulai el Hassen, that great fighter, omitted it from his expeditions.

But certain tribes are known to inhabit it, such as the Beni M'tir, and certain villages can be assigned a locality, such as Agurai, which lies one long day's journey from the Renegade's Gate of Mequinez.

At Agurai Dimoussi was born, and lived for the first fifteen years of his life—Dimoussi the Englishman, as he was called, though in features and colour he had the look of an Arab with just a strain of Negro blood.

At the age of fifteen a desire to see the world laid hold upon Dimoussi. As far as the eye could see from any mound about the village, there stretched on every side a rolling plain, silent and empty. Hardly a bird sang in the air above it; and everywhere it was dark with bushes wherein the flowers of asphodel gleamed pale and small.

Dimoussi wearied of the plain. One thin, reddish line meandered uncertainly from north to south, a stone's throw from the village, where the feet of men and mules passing at rare intervals through many centuries had beaten down a path. Along this path Dimoussi allowed his fancies to carry him into a world of enchantment; and one spring morning his feet carried him along it, too.

For half a dozen men of the Beni M'tir carrying almonds and walnuts into Mequinez happened to pass Agurai at a moment when Dimoussi was watching, and his mother was at work on a patch of tilled ground out of sight. Dimoussi had no other parent than his mother.

He ran into the hut, with its tent roof of sacking and its sides of rough hurdles, which was his home, searched in a corner for a big brass-barrelled pistol which had long been the pride of the establishment, and, hiding it under his ragged jellaba, he ran down the track and joined himself on to the tiny caravan. The next morning he came to Mequinez, where he parted company with the tribesmen.

Dimoussi had not so much as a copper *flouss* upon him, but, on the other hand, he had a pistol and the whole world in front of him. And what reason able boy could want more? All that day he wandered about the streets, gaping at the houses, at the towers of the mosques, and at the stalls in the markets, but as

the afternoon declined, hunger got hold of him. His friends of yesterday had vanished. Somehow he must get food.

He fingered the pistol under his jellaba irresolutely. He walked along a street which he came to know afterwards as the Sûk Kubba. In the middle was built a square tent of stone with an open arch at each side and a pointed roof of fluted tiles trailed over by a vine. Just beyond this stone tent the street narrowed, and on the left-hand side a man who sold weapons squatted upon the floor of a dark booth.

"How much?" asked Dimoussi, producing his pistol, but loth to let it go.

The shopman looked at Dimoussi, and looked at the pistol. Then he tossed it carelessly behind him into the litter of his booth.

"It is no good. As sure as my name is Mustapha, it would not kill a rabbit. But see! My heart is kind. I will give you three dollars."

He counted them out. Dimoussi stolidly shook his head. "Seven," said he.

Mustapha reached behind him for the pistol, and flung it down at Dimoussi's feet.

"Take it away!" said he. I will not haggle with foolish boys who have stolen a thing of no value, and wish to sell it at a great price. Take it away! Yet, out of my charity, I will give you four dollars."

"Five," said Dimoussi.

And five he received.

He bought rice and eggs in the market, and turned under an old archway of green tiles into the Fondak Henna. There he cooked his food at a fire, ate, and proposed to sleep.

But Fate had laid her hand upon Dimoussi. He slept not at all that night. He sat with his back propped against the filigree plaster of one of the pillars, and listened to a Moor of the Sherarda tribe, who smoked keef and talked until morning.

"Yes," said the Sherarda man, "I have travelled far and wide. Now I go to my own village of Sigota, on Jebel Zarhon."

"Have you been to Fez?" asked Dimoussi eagerly.

"I have lived in Fez. I served in the army of my lord the Sultan until I was bored with it. It is a fine town and a large one. The river flows in a hundred streams underneath the houses. In every house there is running water. But it is nothing to the town of Mulai Idris."

Dimoussi clasped his hands about his knees.

"Oh, tell me! Tell me!" he cried so loudly that in the shadows of the Fondak men stirred upon their straw and cursed him.

"I have also travelled to Rabat, a great town upon the sea, whither many consools come in fireships. A great town draped with flowers and cactus. But it is nothing to Mulai Idris. There are no consools in Mulai Idris."

All through his talk the name of Mulai Idris, the sacred city on the slope of Jebel Zarhon, came and went like a shuttle of a loom.

The Sherarda Moor thought highly of the hfe in Mulai Idris, since it was possible to live there without work.

Pilgrims came to visit the shrine of the founder of the Moorish Empire, with offerings in their hands ; and the whole township lived, and lived well, upon those offerings. Moreover, there were no Europeans, or "consools," as he termed them.

The Moor spoke at length, and with hatred, of the Europeans— pale, ungainly creatures in ridiculous clothes, given over to the devil, people with a clever knack of invention, no doubt, in the matter of firearms and cameras and spy-glasses, but, man for man, no match for any Moor.

" Only three cities are safe from them now in all Morocco: Sheshawan in the north, Tafilat in the south, and Mulai Idris. But Mulai Idris is safest. Once a party of them— Englishmen— came rising up the steep road to the gate even there, but from the walls we stoned them back. God's curse on them! Let them stay at home! But they must always be pushing somewhere."

Dimoussi, recognising in himself a point of kinship with the "consools," said gravely:

"I am an Englishman."

The Sherarda man laughed, as though he had heard an excellent joke, and continued to discourse upon the splendours of Mulai Idris until the sleepers waked in their corners, and the keeper flung open the door, and the grey daylight crept into the Fondak.

"Oh, tell me!" said Dimoussi. "The city is far from here?"

"Set out now. You will be in Mulai Idris before sunset."

Dimoussi rose to his feet.

"I will go to Mulai Idris," said he, and he went out into the cool, clear air. The Sherarda Moor accompanied Dimoussi to the Bordain Gate, and there they parted company, the boy going northward, the Moor following the eastward track towards Fez. He had done his work, though what he had done he did not know.

At noon Dimoussi came out upon a high tableland, as empty as the plains which stretched about his native Agurai. Far away upon his left the dark, serrated ridge of Jebel Gerouan stood out against the sky. Nearer to him upon his right rose the high rock of Jebel Zarhon. In some fold of that mountain lay this fabulous city of Mulai Idris.

Dimoussi walked forward, a tiny figure in that vast solitude. There were no villages, there were no trees anywhere. The plateau extended ahead of him like a softly heaving sea, as far as the eye could reach. It was covered with bushes in

flower; and here and there an acre of marigolds or a field of blue lupins decked it out, as though someone had chosen to make a garden there.

Then suddenly upon Dimoussi's right the hillside opened, and in the recess he saw Mulai Idris, a city high-placed and dazzlingly white, which tumbled down the hillside like a cascade divided at its apex by a great white mosque.

The mosque was the tomb of Mulai Idris, the founder of the empire. Dimoussi dropped upon his knees and bowed his forehead to the ground.

"Mulai Idris," he whispered, in a voice of exaltation. Yesterday he had never even heard the name of the town. To-day the mere sight of it lifted him into a passion of fervour.

Those white walls masked a crowded city of filth and noisome smells. But Dimoussi walked on air; and his desire to see more of the world died away altogether.

He was in the most sacred place in all Morocco; and there he stayed. There was no need for him to work. He had the livelong day wherein to store away in his heart the sayings of his elders. And amongst those sayings there was not one that he heard more frequently than this:

"There are too many Europeans in Morocco."

Fanaticism was in the very stones of the town. Dimoussi saw it shining sombrely in the eyes of the men who paced and rode about the streets ; he felt it behind the impassivity of their faces. It came to him as an echo of their constant prayers. Dimoussi began to understand it.

Once or twice he saw the Europeans during that spring. For close by in the plain a great stone arch and some broken pillars showed where the Roman city of Volubilis had stood. And by those ruins once or twice a party of Europeans encamped.

Dimoussi visited each encampment, begged money of the "consools," and watched with curiosity the queer mechanical things they carried with them— their cameras, their weapons, their folding mirrors, their brushes and combs. But on each visit he became more certain that there were too many Europeans in Morocco.

"A *djehad* is needed," said one of the old men sitting outside the gate— "a holy war— to exterminate them."

"It is not easy to start a *djehad*," replied Dimoussi.

The elders stroked their beards and laughed superciliously.

"You are young and foolish, Dimoussi. A single shot from a gun, and all Moghrebbin is in flame."

"Yes; and he that fired the shot certain of Paradise."

Not one of them had thought to fire the shot. They were chatterers of vain words. But the words sank into Dimoussi's mind; for Dimoussi was different. He began to think, as he put it ; as a matter of fact, he began to feel.

He went up to the tomb of Mulai Idris, bribed the guardian, who sat with a wand in the court outside the shrine, to let him pass, and for the first time in his life stood within the sacred place. The shrine was dark, and the ticking of the clocks in the gloom filled Dimoussi's soul with awe and wonderment.

For the shrine was crowded with clocks: grandfather clocks with white faces, and gold faces, and enamelled faces, stood side by side along the walls, marking every kind of hour. Eight-day clocks stood upon pedestals and niches ; and the whole room whirred, and ticked, and chimed ; never had Dimoussi dreamed of anything so marvellous. There were glass balls, too, dangling from the roof on silver strings, and red baize hanging from the tomb.

Dimoussi bowed his head and prayed for the *djehad.* And as he prayed in that dark and solitary place there came to him an inspiration. It seemed that Mulai Idris himself laid his hand upon the boy's head. It needed only one man, only one shot to start the *djehad*. He raised his head and all the ticking clocks cried out to him: *Thou art the man*." Dimoussi left the shrine with his head high in the air and a proudness in his gait. For he had his mission.

Thereafter he lay in wait upon the track over the plain to Mequinez, watching the north and the south for the coming of the traveller.

During the third week of his watching he saw advancing along the track mules carrying the baggage of Europeans. Dimoussi crouched in the bushes and let them pass with the muleteers. A good way behind them the Europeans rode slowly upon horses. As they came opposite to Dimoussi, one, a dark, thin man, stretched out his arm and, turning to his companion, said:

"Challoner, there is Mulai Idris."

At once Dimoussi sprang to his feet. He did not mean to be robbed of his great privilege. He shook his head.

"*Lar, lar*!" he cried. "Bad men in Mulai Idris. They will stone you. You go to Mequinez."

The man who had already spoken laughed.

"We are not going to Mulai Idris," he replied. He was a man named Arden who had spent the greater part of many years in Morocco, going up and down that country in the guise of a Moor, and so counterfeiting accent, and tongue, and manners, that he had even prayed in their mosques and escaped detection.

"You are English?" asked Dimoussi.

"Yes. Come on, Challoner!"

And then, to his astonishment, as his horse stepped on, Dimoussi cried out actually in English:

"One, two, three, and away!"

Arden stopped his horse.

"Where did you learn that?" he asked; and he asked in English. But Dimoussi had spoken the only five words of English he knew, and even those he did not understand.

Arden repeated the question in Arabic; and Dimoussi answered with a smile: "I, too, am English."

"Oh! are you? " said Arden, with a laugh; and he rode on. "These Moors love a joke. He learned the words over there, no doubt, from the tourists at Volubilis. Do you see those blocks of stone along the track?"

"Yes," answered Challoner. "How do they come there?"

"Old Mulai Ismail, the sultan, built the great palace at Mequinez two hundred years ago from the ruins of Volubilis. These stones were dragged down by the captives of the Salee pirates."

"And by the English prisoners from Tangier?" said Challoner suddenly.

"Yes," replied Arden with some surprise, for there was a certain excitement in his companion's voice and manner. The English were prisoners until the siege ended, and we gave up Tangier and they were released. When Mulai Ismail died, all these men dragging stones just dropped them and left them where they lay by the track. There they have remained ever since. It's strange, isn't it?"

"Yes," said Challoner thoughtfully. He was a young man with the look of a student rather than a traveller. He rode slowly on, looking about him, as though at each turn of the road he expected to see some Englishman in a tattered uniform of the Tangier Foot leaning upon a block of masonry and wiping the sweat from his brow.

"Two of my ancestors were prisoners here in Mequinez," he said. They were captured together at the fall of the Henrietta Fort in 1680, and brought up here to work on Mulai Ismail's palace. It's strange to think that they dragged these stones down this very track. I don't suppose that the country has changed at all. They must have come up from the coast by the same road we followed, passed the same villages, and heard the pariah dogs bark at night just as we have done."

Arden glanced in surprise at his companion.

"I did not know that. I suppose that is the reason why you wish to visit Mequinez?"

Challoner's sudden desire to travel inland to this town had been a mystery to Arden. He knew Challoner well, and knew him for a dilettante, an amiable amateur of the arts, a man always upon the threshold of a new interest, but never by any chance on the other side of the door, and, above all, a stay-at-home. Now the reason was explained.

"Yes," Challoner admitted. "I was anxious to see Mequinez."

"Both men came home when peace was declared, I suppose?" said Arden.

"No. Only one came home, James Challoner. The other, Luke, turned renegade to escape the sufferings of slavery, and was never allowed to come back. The two men were brothers.

"I discovered the story by chance. I was looking over the papers in the library one morning, in order to classify them, and I came across a manuscript play written by a Challoner after the Restoration. Between the leaves of the play an old, faded letter was lying. It had been written by James, on his return, to Luke's wife, telling her she would never see Luke again. I will show you the letter this evening."

"That's a strange story," said Arden. "Was nothing heard of Luke afterwards?"

"Nothing. No doubt he lived and died in Mequinez."

Challoner looked back as he spoke. Dimoussi was still standing amongst the bushes watching the travellers recede from him. His plan was completely formed. There would be a *djehad* to-morrow, and the honour of it would belong to Dimoussi of Agurai.

He felt in the leathern wallet which swung at his side upon a silk orangecoloured cord. He had ten dollars in that wallet. He walked in the rear of the travellers to Mequinez, and reached the town just before sunset. He went at once to the great square by the Renegade's Gate, where the horses are brought to roll in the dust on their way to the watering fountain, There were many there at the moment ; and the square was thick with dust Uke a mist.

But, through the mist, in a corner, Dimoussi saw the tents of the travellers, and, in front of the tents, from wall to wall, a guard of soldiers sitting upon the ground in a semicircle.

Dimoussi was in no hurry. He loitered there until darkness followed upon the sunset, and the stars came out.

He saw lights burning in the tents, and, through the open doorway one, the man who had spoken to him, Arden, stretched upon a lounge-chair, reading a paper which he held in his hand.

Dimoussi went once more to the Fondak Henna, and made up for the wakeful night he had passed here with a Moor of the Sherarda tribe by sleeping until morning with a particular soundness.

ii

THE PAPER which Arden was reading was the faded letter written at "Berry Street, St. James's" on April 14, 1684, by the James Challoner who had returned to the wife of Luke Challoner who had turned renegade.

Arden took a literal copy of that latter ; and it is printed here from that copy:

Berry Street, St. James's,
April 14, 1684.
My dear Pamela,

I have just now come back from Whitehall, where I was most graciously received by his Majestic, who asked many questions about our sufferings among the Moors, and promised rewards with so fine a courtesy and condescension that my four years of slavery were all forgotten. Indeed, my joy would have been rare, but I knew that the time would come when I must go back to my lodging and write to you news that will go near to break your heart. Why did my brother not stay quietly at home with his wife, at whose deare side his place was? But he must suddenlie leave his house, and come out to his younger brother at Tangier, who was never more sorry to see any man than I was to see Luke. For we were hard pressed: the Moors had pushed their trenches close under our walls, and any night the city might fall. And now I am come safely home, though there is no deare heart to break for me, and Luke must for ever stay behind. For that is the bitter truth. We shall see noe more of Luke, and you, my deare, are widowed and yet no widow. Oh, why did you let him goe, knowing how quick he is to take fire, and how quick to cool? I, too, am to blame, for I kept him by me out of my love for him, and that was his undoing.

In May... I commanded the Henrietta Fort, and Luke was a volunteer with me. For five days we were attacked night and day, we were cut off from the town, there was no hope that way, and all our ammunition and water consumed, and most of us wounded or killed. So late on the night of the 13th we were compelled to surrender upon promise of our lives. Luke and I were carried up to Mequinez, and there set to build a wall, which was to stretch from that town to Morocco city, so that a blind man might travel all those many miles safely without a guide. I will admit that our sufferings were beyond endurance. We slept underground in close, earth dungeons, down to w^hich we must crawl on our hands and knees ; and at day we laboured in the sunlight, starved and thirsting, no man knowing when the whip of the taskmaster would fall across his back, and yet sure that it would fall. Luke was not to be blamed— to be pitied rather. He was of a finer, more delicate nature. What was pain to us was anguish and torture to him. One night I crept down into my earth alone, and the next day he walked about Mequinez with the robes of a Moor. He had turned renegade.

I was told that the Bashaw had taken him into his service, but I never had the opportunity of speech with him again, although I once heard his voice. That was six months afterwards, when peace had been re-established between his Maj. and the Emperor. Part of the terms of the peace was that the English captives should be released and sent down to the coast, but the renegade must stay behind. I pleaded with the Bashaw that Luke might be set free too, but could by no means persuade him. We departed from Mequinez one early morning, and on the city wall stood the Bashaw's house ; and as I came opposite to it I saw a hand wave farewell from a narrow window-slit, and heard Luke's voice cry, 'Farewell!' bravely, Pamela, bravely!

James Challoner.

When Arden had finished this letter he walked out of the tent, passed through the semicircle of sentinels, and stood in front of the Renegade's Gate. There Challoner joined him, and both men looked at the great arch for a while without speaking. It rose black against a violet and starlit sky. The pattern of its

coloured tiles could not be distinguished ; but even in the darkness something of its exquisite delicacy could be perceived.

"Luke Challoner very likely worked upon that arch," said Arden. "Yet, as I read that letter, it seemed so very human, very near, as though it had been written yesterday."

"I wonder what became of him?" said Challoner. From some house on the city wall he waved his hand to his brother, and cried 'Farewell!' bravely. I wonder what became of him?"

"I will take a photograph of that gate to-morrow," said Arden.

iii

THE NEXT MORNING Dimoussi came out of the Fondak Henna and walked to the little booth in the Sûk Kubba. Mustapha was squatting upon the floor, and with a throbbing heart Dimoussi noticed the famihar pistol shining against the dark wall behind. It had not been sold. " Give it to me," he said.

Mustapha took the pistol from the nail on which it hung.

"It is worth fourteen dollars," said he. "But, see, to every man his chance comes. I am in a good mind to-day. My health is excellent and my heart is light. You shall have it for twelve."

Dimoussi took the pistol in his hand. It had a flint lock and was mounted in polished brass, and a cover of brass was on the heel of the butt.

"It is not worth twelve. I will give you seven for it."

Mustapha raised his hands in a gesture of indignation.

"Seven dollars! " he cried in a shrill, angry voice. "Hear him! Seven dollars! Look, it comes from Agadhir in the Sus country where they make the best weapons."

He pointed out to Dimoussi certain letters upon the plate underneath the lock. "There it is written."

Dimoussi could not read, but he nodded his head sagely.

"Yes. It is worth seven," said he.

The shopman snatched it away from the boy,

"I will not be angry, for it is natural to boys to be foolish. But I will tell you the truth. I gave eight dollars for it after much bargaining. But it has hung in my shop for a year, and no one any more has money. Therefore, I will sell it to you for ten."

He felt behind his back and showed Dimoussi a tantalising glint of the brass barrel. Dimoussi was unshaken.

"It has hung in your shop for four months," said he.

"A year. That is why I will sell it to you at the loss of a dollar."

"Liar, and son of a liar," replied the boy, without any heat, "and grandson of a liar. I sold it to you for five dollars four months ago. I will give you eight for it to-day."

He counted out the eight dollars one by one on the raised floor of the booth, and the shopman could not resist.

"Very well," he cried furiously. "Take it, and may your children starve as mine surely will! "

"You are a pig, and the son of a pig," replied Dimoussi calmly. "Have you any powder? "

He changed his ninth dollar and bought some powder.

"You will need bullets, too," said Mustapha. "I will sell you them very cheap. Oh, you are lucky! Do you see those signs upon the barrel? The pistol is charmed and cannot miss."

Dimoussi looked at the signs engraved one above the other on the barrel. There was a crown, and a strange letter, and a lion. He had long wondered what those signs meant. He was very glad now that he understood.

"But I will not buy lead bullets," said Dimoussi wisely. "The pistol may be enchanted so that it cannot miss, but there are also enchantments against lead bullets so that they cannot hurt."

So Dimoussi walked away, and begged a lump of rock salt from another booth instead. He cut down the lump until it fitted roughly into the hexagonal barrel of his pistol. Then he loaded the pistol, and hiding the weapon in the wide sleeve of his jellaba, sauntered to the great square before the Renegade's Gate. There were groups of people standing about watching the tents, and the inevitable ring of sentries. But while Dimoussi was still loitering— he would have loitered for a fortnight if need be, for there were no limits to Dimoussi's patience— Arden came out of the tent with his camera, and Challoner followed with a tripod stand.

The two consools passed the line of guards and set up the camera in front of the Renegade's Gate. Dimoussi was quite impartial which of the two should be sacrificed to begin the d jehad, but again an ironical fate laid its hand upon him. It was Arden who was to work the camera. It was Arden, therefore, who was surrounded by the idlers, and was safe. Challoner, on the other hand, had to stand quite apart, so as to screen the lens from the direct rays of the sun.

"A little more to the right, Challoner," said Arden. "That'll do."

He put his head under the focussing cloth, and the next instant he heard a loud report, followed by shouts and screams and the rush of feet; and when he tore the focussing cloth away he saw Challoner lying upon the ground, the sentries agitatedly rushing this way and that, and the bystanders to a man in full fiight.

Dimoussi had chosen his opportunity well. He stood between two men, and rather behind them, and exactly opposite Challoner. All eyes were fixed upon the camera, even Challoner's. It was true that he did see the sun glitter suddenly upon something bright, that he did turn, that he did realise that the bright thing was the brass barrel of a big flintlock pistol. But before he could move or shout, the pistol was fired, and a heavy blow like a blow from a cudgel struck him full on the chest.

Challoner spoke no more than a few words afterwards. The lump of rock salt had done the work of an explosive bullet. He was just able to answer a question of Arden's.

"Did you see who fired?"

"The boy who came from Mulai Idris," whispered Challoner. "He shot me with a brass-barrelled pistol." That seemed to have made a most vivid impression upon his mind, for more than once he repeated it.

But Dimoussi was by this time out of the Renegade's Gate, and running with all his might through the olive grove towards the open, lawless country south of Mequinez. By the evening he was safe from capture, and lifted up with pride.

Certainly no *djehad* had followed upon the murder, and that was disappointing. But it was not Dimoussi's fault. He had done his best according to his lights. Meanwhile, it seemed prudent to him to settle down quietly at Agurai. He was nearly sixteen now. Dimoussi thought that he would settle down and marry.

Here the episode would have ended but for two circumstances. In the firstplace Dimoussi carried back with him from Mequinez the brass-barrelled pistol ; and in the second place Arden, two years later, acted upon a long-cherished desire to penetrate the unmapped country south of Mequinez.

He travelled with a mule as a Jew pedlar, knowing that such a man, for the sake of his wares, may go where a Moor may not. Of his troubles during his six months' wanderings now is not the time to speak. It is enough that at the end of the six months he set up his canvas shelter one evening by the village of Agurai.

The men came at once and squatted, chattering, about his shelter.

"Is there a woman in the village," asked Arden, " who will wash some clothes for me? "

And the sheikh of the village rose up and replied:

"Yes; the Frenchwoman. I will send her to you."

Arden was perplexed. It seemed extraordinary that in a little village in a remote and unusually lawless district of Morocco there should be a French blanchisseuse. But he made no comment, and spread out his wares upon the ground. In a few moments a woman appeared. She had the Arab face, the Arab colour. But she stood unconcernedly before Arden, and said in Arabic:

"I am the Frenchwoman. Give me the clothes you want washing."

Arden reached behind him for the bundle. He addressed her in French, but she shook her head and carried the bundle away. Her place was taken by another, a very old, dark woman, who was accompanied by a youth carrying a closed basket.

"Pigeons," said the old woman. "Good, fat, live pigeons."

Arden was fairly tired of that national food by this time, and waved her away.

"Very well," said she. She took the basket from the youth, placed it on the ground, and opened the lid. Then she clapped her hands and the pigeons flew out. As they rose into the air she laughed, and cried out in English— "One, two, three, and away! "

Arden was fairly startled.

"What words are those? " he exclaimed.

"English," the old woman replied in Arabic. "I am the Englishwoman."

And the men of the village who were clustered round the shelter agreed, as though nothing could be more natural:

"Yes, she is the Englishwoman."

"And what do the words mean? "

The old woman shrugged her shoulders. "My father used them just as I did," she said. She spoke with a certain pride in the possession of those five uncomprehended words. " He learned them from his father. I do not know what they mean."

It was mystifying enough to Arden that, in a country where hardly a Moor of a foreign tribe, and certainly no Europeans, had ever been known to pene-trate, there should be a Frenchwoman who knew no French, and an Englishwoman with five words of English she did not understand.

But there was more than this to startle Arden. He had heard those same words spoken once before, by a Moorish boy who had declared himself to be an Englishman, and that Moorish boy had murdered his friend Challoner.

Arden glanced carelessly at the youth who stood by the old woman's side.

"That is your son?" said he. "Yes. That is Dimoussi."

Dimoussi's cheeks wore the shadow of a beard. He had grown.

Arden could not pretend to himself that he recognised the boy who had sprung up from the asphodel-bushes a few miles from Mulai Idris.

He bethought himself of a way to test his suspicions. He took from his wares an old rusty pistol and began to polish it. A firearm he knew to be a lure to any Moor. Dimoussi drew nearer. Arden paid no attention, but continued to polish his pistol. A keen excitement was gaining on him, but he gave no sign. At last Dimoussi reached out his hand. Arden placed the pistol in it. Dimoussi turned the pistol over, and gave it back.

"It is no good."

Arden laughed.

"There is no better pistol in Agurai," said he contemptuously. In his ears there was the sound of Challoner's voice repeating and repeating: "He shot me with a brass-barrelled pistol— a brass-barrelled pistol."

The contempt in his tone stung Dimoussi.

"I have a better," said he, and at that the old woman touched him warningly on the arm. Dimoussi stopped at once, and the couple moved away.

Arden wondered whether this was the end. There was a chance that it was not. Dimoussi might return to compare his pistol with Arden's, and to establish its superiority. Arden waited all the evening in a strong suspense ; and at ten o'clock, when he was alone, Dimoussi stepped noiselessly into the shelter, and laid his brass-barrelled pistol on the ground in the light of the lamp.

"It is better than yours. It comes from Agadhir, in the Sus country, where the best pistols are made. See, those letters prove it."

Arden had no doubt that he had now Challoner's murderer sitting at his side. But he looked at the letters on the pistol-barrel to which Dimoussi pointed. The letters were in English, and made up the name "Bennett." There was also engraved upon the brass of the barrel "London." The pistol was an old horse-pistol of English make. Even its period was clear to Arden. For above the lion and the crown was the letter C. Arden pointed to those marks.

"What do they mean? "

"They are charms to prevent it missing."

Arden said nothing. His thoughts were busy on other matters. This pistol was a pistol of the time of Charles II, of the time of the Tangier siege. " How long have you had it? " he asked. "My father owned it before me."

"And his father before him?"

"Very likely. I do not know."

Arden's excitement was increasing. He began to see dim, strange possibilities. Suppose, he reasoned, that this pistol had travelled up to Mequinez in the possession of an English prisoner. Suppose that by some chance the prisoner had escaped and wandered ; and suddenly he saw something which caught his breath away. He bent down and examined the brass covering to the heel of the butt. Upon that plate there was an engraved crest. Yes! and the crest was Challoner's!

Arden kept his face bent over the pistol. Questions raced through his mind. Had that pistol belonged to Luke Challoner, who had turned renegade two hundred years ago? Had he married in his captivity? Had his descendants married again, until all trace of their origin was lost except this pistol and five words of English, and the name "Englishwoman"? Ah! but if so, who was the Frenchwoman?

It was quite intelligible to Arden why Dimoussi had slain Challoner. Fanaticism was sufficient reason. But supposing Dimoussi were a descendant of Luke! It was all very strange. Challoner was the last of his family, the last of his name. Had the family name been extinguished by a Challoner?

Arden returned to Mequinez the next day, and, making search, through the help of the Bashaw, who was his friend, amongst documents which existed, he at last came upon the explanation.

The renegades, who were made up not merely of English prisoners of Tangier, but of captives of many nationalities taken by the Salee pirates, had, about the year 1700, become numerous enough to threaten Mequinez. Consequently the Sultan had one fine morning turned them all out of the town through the Renegade's Gate and bidden them go south and found a city for themselves.

They had founded Aguari, they had been attacked by the Beni M'tir; with diminishing numbers they had held their own; they had intermarried with the natives; and now, two hundred years later, all that remained of them were the Frenchwoman, Dimoussi, and his mother.

There could be no doubt that Challoner had been murdered because he was a European, by one of his own race.

There could be no doubt that the real owner of the Challoner property, which went to a distant relation on the female side, was a Moorish youth living at the village of Agurai.

But Arden kept silence for a long while.

9: Basil and Cleopatra

F. Scott Fitzgerald

1896-1940

Saturday Evening Post, 27 April 1929

WHEREVER she was, became a beautiful and enchanted place to Basil, but he did not think of it that way. He thought the fascination was inherent in the locality, and long afterward a commonplace street or the mere name of a city would exude a peculiar glow, a sustained sound, that struck his soul alert with delight. In her presence he was too absorbed to notice his surroundings; so that her absence never made them empty, but, rather, sent him seeking for her through haunted rooms and gardens that he had never really seen before.

This time, as usual, he saw only the expression of her face, the mouth that gave an attractive interpretation of any emotion she felt or pretended to feel— oh, invaluable mouth— and the rest of her, new as a peach and old as sixteen. He was almost unconscious that they stood in a railroad station and entirely unconscious that she had just glanced over his shoulder and fallen in love with another young man. Turning to walk with the rest to the car, she was already acting for the stranger; no less so because her voice was pitched for Basil and she clung to him, squeezing his arm.

Had Basil noticed this other young man that the train discharged he would merely have been sorry for him— as he had been sorry for the wretched people in the villages along the railroad and for his fellow travelers— they were not entering Yale in a fortnight nor were they about to spend three days in the same town with Miss Erminie Gilberte Labouisse Bibble. There was something dense, hopeless and a little contemptible about them all.

Basil had come to visit here because Erminie Bibble was visiting here.

On the sad eve of her departure from his native Western city a month before, she had said, with all the promise one could ask in her urgent voice:

"If you know a boy in Mobile, why don't you make him invite you down when I'll be there?"

He had followed this suggestion. And now with the soft, unfamiliar Southern city actually flowing around him, his excitement led him to believe that Fat Gaspar's car floated off immediately they entered it. A voice from the curb came as a surprise:

"Hi, Bessie Belle. Hi, William. How you all?"

The newcomer was tall and lean and a year or so older than Basil. He wore a white linen suit and a panama hat, under which burned fierce, undefeated Southern eyes.

"Why, Littleboy Le Moyne!" exclaimed Miss Cheever. "When did you get home?"

"Jus' now, Bessie Belle. Saw you lookin' so fine and pretty, had to come and see closer."

He was introduced to Minnie and Basil.

"Drop you somewhere, Littleboy?" asked Fat— on his native heath, William.

"Why—" Le Moyne hesitated. "You're very kind, but the man ought to be here with the car."

"Jump in."

Le Moyne swung his bag on top of Basil's and with courteous formality got in the back seat beside them. Basil caught Minnie's eye and she smiled quickly back, as if to say, "This is too bad, but it'll soon be over."

"Do you happen to come from New Orleans, Miss Bibble?" asked Le Moyne.

"Sure do."

"'Cause I just came from there and they told me one of their mos' celebrated heartbreakers was visiting up here, and meanwhile her suitors were shooting themselves all over the city. That's the truth. I used to help pick 'em up myself sometimes when they got littering the streets."

"This must be Mobile Bay on the left," Basil thought; "Down Mobile," and the Dixie moonlight and darky stevedores singing. The houses on either side of the street were gently faded behind proud, protecting vines; there had been crinolines on these balconies, and guitars by night in these broken gardens.

It was so warm; the voices were so sure they had time to say everything— even Minnie's voice, answering the banter of the youth with the odd nickname, seemed slower and lazier— he had scarcely ever thought of her as a Southern girl before. They stopped at a large gate where flickers of a yellow house showed through luscious trees. Le Moyne got out.

"I certainly hope you both enjoy your visit here. If you'll permit me I'll call around and see if there's anything I can do to add to your pleasure." He swooped his panama. "I bid you good day."

As they started off, Bessie Belle turned around and smiled at Minnie.

"Didn't I tell you?" she demanded.

"I guessed it in the station, before he came up to the car," said Minnie. "Something told me that was him."

"Did you think he was good-looking?"

"He was divine," Minnie said.

"Of course he's always gone with an older crowd."

To Basil, this prolonged discussion seemed a little out of place. After all, the young man was simply a local Southerner who lived here; add to that, that he went with an older crowd, and it seemed that his existence was being unnecessarily insisted upon.

But now Minnie turned to him, said, "Basil," wriggled invitingly and folded her hands in a humble, expectant way that invariably caused disturbances in his heart.

"I loved your letters," she said.

"You might have answered them."

"I haven't had a minute, Basil. I visited in Chicago and then in Nashville. I haven't even been home." She lowered her voice. "Father and mother are getting a divorce, Basil. Isn't that awful?"

He was startled; then, after a moment, he adjusted the idea to her and she became doubly poignant; because of its romantic connection with her, the thought of divorce would never shock him again.

"That's why I didn't write. But I've thought of you so much. You're the best friend I have, Basil. You always understand."

This was decidedly not the note upon which they had parted in St. Paul. A dreadful rumor that he hadn't intended to mention rose to his lips.

"Who is this fellow Bailey you met at Lake Forest?" he inquired lightly.

"Buzz Bailey!" Her big eyes opened in surprise. "He's very attractive and a divine dancer, but we're just friends." She frowned. "I bet Connie Davies has been telling tales in St. Paul. Honestly, I'm so sick of girls that, just out of jealousy or nothing better to do, sit around and criticize you if you have a good time."

He was convinced now that something had occurred in Lake Forest, but he concealed the momentary pang from Minnie.

"Anyhow, you're a fine one to talk." She smiled suddenly. "I guess everybody knows how fickle you are, Mr. Basil Duke Lee."

Generally such an implication is considered flattering, but the lightness, almost the indifference, with which she spoke increased his alarm— and then suddenly the bomb exploded.

"You needn't worry about Buzz Bailey. At present I'm absolutely heart-whole and fancy free."

Before he could even comprehend the enormity of what she had said, they stopped at Bessie Belle Cheever's door and the two girls ran up the steps, calling back, "We'll see you this afternoon."

Mechanically Basil climbed into the front seat beside his host.

"Going out for freshman football, Basil?" William asked.

"What? Oh, sure. If I can get off my two conditions." There was no if in his heart; it was the greatest ambition of his life.

"You'll probably make the freshman team easy. That fellow Littleboy Le Moyne you just met is going to Princeton this fall. He played end at V. M. I."

"Where'd he get that crazy name?"

"Why, his family always called him that and everybody picked it up." After a moment he added, "He asked them to the country-club dance with him tonight."

"When did he?" Basil demanded in surprise.

"Right then. That's what they were talking about. I meant to ask them and I was just leading up to it gradually, but he stepped in before I could get a chance." He sighed, blaming himself. "Well, anyhow, we'll see them there."

"Sure; it doesn't matter," said Basil. But was it Fat's mistake? Couldn't Minnie have said right out: "But Basil came all this way to see me and I ought to go with him on his first night here."

What had happened? One month ago, in the dim, thunderous Union Station at St. Paul, they had gone behind a baggage truck and he had kissed her, and her eyes had said: "Again." Up to the very end, when she disappeared in a swirl of vapor at the car window, she had been his— those weren't things you thought; they were things you knew. He was bewildered. It wasn't like Minnie, who, for all her glittering popularity, was invariably kind. He tried to think of something in his letters that might have offended her, and searched himself for new shortcomings. Perhaps she didn't like him the way he was in the morning. The joyous mood in which he had arrived was vanishing into air.

She was her familiar self when they played tennis that afternoon; she admired his strokes and once, when they were close at the net, she suddenly patted his hand. But later, as they drank lemonade on the Cheevers' wide, shady porch, he couldn't seem to be alone with her even for a minute. Was it by accident that, coming back from the courts, she had sat in front with Fat? Last summer she had made opportunities to be alone with him— made them out of nothing. It was in a state that seemed to border on some terrible realization that he dressed for the country-club dance.

The club lay in a little valley, almost roofed over by willows, and down through their black silhouettes, in irregular blobs and patches, dripped the light of a huge harvest moon. As they parked the car, Basil's tune of tunes, Chinatown, drifted from the windows and dissolved into its notes which thronged like elves through the glade. His heart quickened, suffocating him; the throbbing tropical darkness held a promise of such romance as he had dreamed of; but faced with it, he felt himself too small and impotent to seize the felicity he desired. When he danced with Minnie he was ashamed of inflicting his merely mortal presence on her in this fairyland whose unfamiliar figures reached towering proportions of magnificence and beauty. To make him king here, she would have to reach forth and draw him close to her with soft words; but she only said, "Isn't it wonderful, Basil? Did you ever have a better time?"

Talking for a moment with Le Moyne in the stag line, Basil was hesitantly jealous and oddly shy. He resented the tall form that stooped down so fiercely

over Minnie as they danced, but he found it impossible to dislike him or not to be amused by the line of sober-faced banter he kept up with passing girls. He and William Gasper were the youngest boys here, as Bessie Belle and Minnie were the youngest girls, and for the first time in his life he wanted passionately to be older, less impressionable, less impressed. Quivering at every scent, sight or tune, he wanted to be blasé and calm. Wretchedly he felt the whole world of beauty pour down upon him like moonlight, pressing on him, making his breath now sighing, now short, as he wallowed helplessly in a superabundance of youth for which a hundred adults present would have given years of life.

Next day, meeting her in a world that had shrunk back to reality, things were more natural, but something was gone and he could not bring himself to be amusing and gay. It would be like being brave after the battle. He should have been all that the night before. They went downtown in an unpaired foursome and called at a photographer's for some pictures of Minnie. Basil liked one proof that no one else liked— somehow, it reminded him of her as she had been in St. Paul— so he ordered two— one for her to keep and one to send after him to Yale. All afternoon she was distracted and vaguely singing, but back at the Cheevers' she sprang up the steps at the sound of the phone inside. Ten minutes later she appeared, sulky and lowering, and Basil heard a quick exchange between the two girls:

"He can't get out of it."

"—a pity."

"—back Friday."

It could only be Le Moyne who had gone away, and to Minnie it mattered. Presently, unable to endure her disappointment, he got up wretchedly and suggested to William that they go home. To his surprise, Minnie's hand on his arm arrested him.

"Don't go, Basil. It doesn't seem as if I've seen you a minute since you've been here."

He laughed unhappily.

"As if it mattered to you."

"Basil, don't be silly." She bit her lip as if she were hurt. "Let's go out to the swing."

He was suddenly radiant with hope and happiness. Her tender smile, which seemed to come from the heart of freshness, soothed him and he drank down her lies in grateful gulps like cool water. The last sunshine touched her cheeks with the unearthly radiance he had seen there before, as she told him how she hadn't wanted to accept Le Moyne's invitation, and how surprised and hurt she had been when he hadn't come near her last night.

"Then do one thing, Minnie," he pleaded: "Won't you let me kiss you just once?"

"But not here," she exclaimed, "you silly!"

"Let's go in the summerhouse, for just a minute."

"Basil, I can't. Bessie Belle and William are on the porch. Maybe some other time."

He looked at her distraught, unable to believe or disbelieve in her, and she changed the subject quickly:

"I'm going to Miss Beecher's school, Basil. It's only a few hours from New Haven. You can come up and see me this fall. The only thing is, they say you have to sit in glass parlors. Isn't that terrible?"

"Awful," he agreed fervently.

William and Bessie Belle had left the veranda and were out in front, talking to some people in a car.

"Minnie, come into the summerhouse now— for just a minute. They're so far away."

Her face set unwillingly.

"I can't, Basil. Don't you see I can't?"

"Why not? I've got to leave tomorrow."

"Oh, no."

"I have to. I only have four days to get ready for my exams. Minnie— "

He took her hand. It rested calmly enough in his, but when he tried to pull her to her feet she plucked it sharply away. The swing moved with the little struggle and Basil put out his foot and made it stop. It was terrible to swing when one was at a disadvantage.

She laid the recovered hand on his knee.

"I've stopped kissing people, Basil. Really. I'm too old; I'll be seventeen next May."

"I'll bet you kissed Le Moyne," he said bitterly.

"Well, you're pretty fresh— "

Basil got out of the swing.

"I think I'll go."

Looking up, she judged him dispassionately, as she never had before— his sturdy graceful figure; the high, warm color through his tanned skin; his black, shining hair that she had once thought so romantic. She felt, too— as even those who disliked him felt— that there was something else in his face— a mark, a hint of destiny, a persistence that was more than will, that was rather a necessity of pressing its own pattern on the world, of having its way. That he would most probably succeed at Yale, that it would be nice to go there this year as his girl, meant nothing to her. She had never needed to be calculating. Hesitating, she alternatingly drew him toward her in her mind and let him go. There were so many men and they wanted her so much. If Le Moyne had been here at hand she wouldn't have hesitated, for nothing must interfere with the

mysterious opening glory of that affair; but he was gone for three days and she couldn't decide quite yet to let Basil go.

"Stay over till Wednesday and I'll— I'll do what you want," she said.

"But I can't. I've got these exams to study for. I ought to have left this afternoon."

"Study on the train."

She wriggled, dropped her hands in her lap and smiled at him. Taking her hand suddenly, he pulled her to her feet and toward the summerhouse and the cool darkness behind its vines.

2.

THE FOLLOWING Friday Basil arrived in New Haven and set about crowding five days' work into two. He had done no studying on the train; instead he sat in a trance and concentrated upon Minnie, wondering what was happening now that Le Moyne was there. She had kept her promise to him, but only literally—kissed him once in the playhouse, once, grudgingly, the second evening; but the day of his departure there had been a telegram from Le Moyne, and in front of Bessie Belle she had not even dared to kiss him good-by. As a sort of amend she had given him permission to call on the first day permitted by Miss Beecher's school.

The opening of college found him rooming with Brick Wales and George Dorsey in a suite of two bedrooms and a study in Wright Hall. Until the result of his trigonometry examination was published he was ineligible to play football, but watching the freshmen practice on Yale field, he saw that the quarterback position lay between Cullum, last year's Andover captain, and a man named Danziger from a New Bedford high school. There was a rumor that Cullum would be moved to halfback. The other quarterbacks did not appear formidable and Basil felt a great impatience to be out there with a team in his hands to move over the springy turf. He was sure he could at least get in some of the games.

Behind everything, as a light showing through, was the image of Minnie; he would see her in a week, three days, tomorrow. On the eve of the occasion he ran into Fat Gaspar, who was in Sheff, in the oval by Haughton Hall. In the first busy weeks they had scarcely met; now they walked along for a little way together.

"We all came North together," Fat said. "You ought to have been along. We had some excitement. Minnie got in a jam with Littleboy Le Moyne."

Basil's blood ran cold.

"It was funny afterward, but she was pretty scared for a while," continued Fat. "She had a compartment with Bessie Belle, but she and Littleboy wanted to be alone; so in the afternoon Bessie Belle came and played cards in ours. Well,

after about two hours Bessie Belle and I went back, and there were Minnie and Littleboy standing in the vestibule arguing with the conductor; Minnie white as a sheet. Seems they locked the door and pulled down the blinds, and I guess there was a little petting going on. When he came along after the tickets and knocked on the door, they thought it was us kidding them, and wouldn't let him in at first, and when they did, he was pretty upset. He asked Littleboy if that was his compartment, and whether he and Minnie were married that they locked the door, and Littleboy lost his temper trying to explain that there was nothing wrong. He said the conductor had insulted Minnie and he wanted him to fight. But that conductor could have made trouble, and believe me, I had an awful time smoothing it all over."

With every detail imagined, with every refinement of jealousy beating in his mind, including even envy for their community of misfortune as they stood together in the vestibule, Basil went up to Miss Beecher's next day. Radiant and glowing, more mysteriously desirable than ever, wearing her very sins like stars, she came down to him in her plain white uniform dress, and his heart turned over at the kindness of her eyes.

"You were wonderful to come up, Basil. I'm so excited having a beau so soon. Everybody's jealous of me."

The glass doors hinged like French windows, shutting them in on all sides. It was hot. Down through three more compartments he could see another couple— a girl and her brother, Minnie said— and from time to time they moved and gestured soundlessly, as unreal in these tiny human conservatories as the vase of paper flowers on the table. Basil walked up and down nervously.

"Minnie, I want to be a great man some day and I want to do everything for you. I understand you're tired of me now. I don't know how it happened, but somebody else came along— it doesn't matter. There isn't any hurry. But I just want you to— oh, remember me in some different way— try to think of me as you used to, not as if I was just another one you threw over. Maybe you'd better not see me for a while— I mean at the dance this fall. Wait till I've accomplished some big scene or deed, you know, and I can show it to you and say I did that all for you."

It was very futile and young and sad. Once, carried away by the tragedy of it all, he was on the verge of tears, but he controlled himself to that extent. There was sweat on his forehead. He sat across the room from her, and Minnie sat on the couch, looking at the floor, and said several times: "Can't we be friends, Basil? I always think of you as one of my best friends."

Toward the end she rose patiently.

"Don't you want to see the chapel?"

They walked upstairs and he glanced dismally into a small dark space, with her living, sweet-smelling presence half a yard from his shoulder. He was almost

glad when the funereal business was over and he walked out of the school into the fresh autumn air.

Back in New Haven he found two pieces of mail on his desk. One was a notice from the registrar telling him that he had failed his trigonometry examination and would be ineligible for football. The second was a photograph of Minnie— the picture that he had liked and ordered two of in Mobile. At first the inscription puzzled him: "L. L. from E. G. L. B. Trains are bad for the heart." Then suddenly he realized what had happened, and threw himself on his bed, shaken with wild laughter.

3.

THREE WEEKS later, having requested and passed a special examination in trigonometry, Basil began to look around him gloomily to see if there was anything left in life. Not since his miserable first year at school had he passed through such a period of misery; only now did he begin for the first time to be aware of Yale. The quality of romantic speculation reawoke, and, listlessly at first, then with growing determination, he set about merging himself into this spirit which had fed his dreams so long.

"I want to be chairman of the News or the Record," thought his old self one October morning, "and I want to get my letter in football, and I want to be in Skull and Bones."

Whenever the vision of Minnie and Le Moyne on the train occurred to him, he repeated this phrase like an incantation. Already he thought with shame of having stayed over in Mobile, and there began to be long strings of hours when he scarcely brooded about her at all.

He had missed half of the freshman football season, and it was with scant hope that he joined the squad on Yale field. Dressed in his black and white St. Regis jersey, amid the motley of forty schools, he looked enviously at the proud two dozen in Yale blue. At the end of four days he was reconciling himself to obscurity for the rest of the season when the voice of Carson, assistant coach, singled him suddenly out of a crowd of scrub backs.

"Who was throwing those passes just now?"

"I was, sir."

"I haven't seen you before, have I?"

"I just got eligible."

"Know the signals?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, you take this team down the field— ends, Krutch and Bispam; tackles— "

A moment later he heard his own voice snapping out on the crisp air: "Thirty-two, sixty-five, sixty-seven, twenty-two— "

There was a ripple of laughter.

"Wait a minute! Where'd you learn to call signals like that?" said Carson.

"Why, we had a Harvard coach, sir."

"Well, just drop the Haughton emphasis. You'll get everybody too excited."

After a few minutes they were called in and told to put on headgears.

"Where's Waite?" Carson asked. "Test, eh? Well, you then— what's your name?— in the black and white sweater?"

"Lee."

"You call signals. And let's see you get some life into this outfit. Some of you guards and tackles are big enough for the varsity. Keep them on their toes, you— what's your name?"

"Lee."

They lined up with possession of the ball on the freshmen's twenty-yard line. They were allowed unlimited downs, but when, after a dozen plays, they were in approximately that same place, the ball was given to the first team.

"That's that!" thought Basil. "That finishes me."

But an hour later, as they got out of the bus, Carson spoke to him:

"Did you weigh this afternoon?"

"Yes. Hundred and fifty-eight."

"Let me give you a tip— you're still playing prep-school football. You're still satisfied with stopping them. The idea here is that if you lay them down hard enough you wear them out. Can you kick?"

"No, sir."

"Well, it's too bad you didn't get out sooner."

A week later his name was read out as one of those to go to Andover. Two quarterbacks ranked ahead of him, Danziger and a little hard rubber ball of a man, named Appleton, and Basil watched the game from the sidelines, but when, the following Tuesday, Danziger splintered his arm in practice, Basil was ordered to report to training table.

On the eve of the game with the Princeton freshmen, the egress of the student body to Princeton for the Varsity encounter left the campus almost deserted. Deep autumn had set in, with a crackling wind from the west, and walking back to his room after final skull practice, Basil felt the old lust for glory sweep over him. Le Moyne was playing end on the Princeton freshman and it was probable that Minnie would be in the stands, but now, as he ran along the springy grass in front of Osborne, swaying to elude imaginary tacklers, the fact seemed of less importance than the game. Like most Americans, he was seldom able really to grasp the moment, to say: "This, for me, is the great equation by which everything else will be measured; this is the golden time," but for once

the present was sufficient. He was going to spend two hours in a country where life ran at the pace he demanded of it.

The day was fair and cool; an unimpassioned crowd, mostly townsmen, was scattered through the stands. The Princeton freshmen looked sturdy and solid in their diagonal stripes, and Basil picked out Le Moyne, noting coldly that he was exceptionally fast, and bigger than he had seemed in his clothes. On an impulse Basil turned and searched for Minnie in the crowd, but he could not find her. A minute later the whistle blew; sitting at the coach's side, he concentrated all his faculties on the play.

The first half was played between the thirty-yard lines. The main principles of Yale's offense seemed to Basil too simple; less effective than the fragments of the Haughton system he had learned at school, while the Princeton tactics, still evolved in Sam White's long shadow, were built around a punter and the hope of a break. When the break came, it was Yale's. At the start of the second half Princeton fumbled and Appleton sent over a drop kick from the thirty-yard line.

It was his last act of the day. He was hurt on the next kick-off and, to a burst of freshmen cheering, assisted from the game.

With his heart in a riot, Basil sprinted out on the field. He felt an overpowering strangeness, and it was someone else in his skin who called the first signals and sent an unsuccessful play through the line. As he forced his eyes to take in the field slowly, they met Le Moyne's, and Le Moyne grinned at him. Basil called for a short pass over the line, throwing it himself for a gain of seven yards. He sent Cullum off tackle for three more and a first down. At the forty, with more latitude, his mind began to function smoothly and surely. His short passes worried the Princeton fullback, and, in consequence, the running gains through the line were averaging four yards instead of two.

At the Princeton forty he dropped back to kick formation and tried Le Moyne's end, but Le Moyne went under the interfering halfback and caught Basil by a foot. Savagely Basil tugged himself free, but too late— the halfback bowled him over. Again Le Moyne's face grinned at him, and Basil hated it. He called the same end and, with Cullum carrying the ball, they rolled over Le Moyne six yards, to Princeton's thirty-two. He was slowing down, was he? Then run him ragged! System counseled a pass, but he heard himself calling the end again. He ran parallel to the line, saw his interference melt away and Le Moyne, his jaw set, coming for him. Instead of cutting in, Basil turned full about and tried to reverse his field. When he was trapped he had lost fifteen yards.

A few minutes later the ball changed hands and he ran back to the safety position thinking: "They'd yank me if they had anybody to put in my place."

The Princeton team suddenly woke up. A long pass gained thirty yards. A fast new back dazzled his way through the line for another first down. Yale was on the defensive, but even before they had realized the fact, the disaster had

happened. Basil was drawn on an apparently developed play; too late he saw the ball shoot out of scrimmage to a loose end; saw, as he was neatly blocked, that the Princeton substitutes were jumping around wildly, waving their blankets. They had scored.

He got up with his heart black, but his brain cool. Blunders could be atoned for— if they only wouldn't take him out. The whistle blew for the quarter, and squatting on the turf with the exhausted team, he made himself believe that he hadn't lost their confidence, kept his face intent and rigid, refusing no man's eye. He had made his errors for today.

On the kick-off he ran the ball back to the thirty-five, and a steady rolling progress began. The short passes, a weak spot inside tackle, Le Moyne's end. Le Moyne was tired now. His face was drawn and dogged as he smashed blindly into the interference; the ball carrier eluded him— Basil or another.

Thirty more to go— twenty— over Le Moyne again. Disentangling himself from the pile, Basil met the Southerner's weary glance and insulted him in a crisp voice:

"You've quit, Littleboy. They better take you out."

He started the next play at him and, as Le Moyne charged in furiously, tossed a pass over his head for the score. Yale 10, Princeton 7. Up and down the field again, with Basil fresher every minute and another score in sight, and suddenly the game was over.

Trudging off the field, Basil's eye ranged over the stands, but he could not see her.

"I wonder if she knows I was pretty bad," he thought, and then bitterly: "If I don't, he'll tell her."

He could hear him telling her in that soft Southern voice— the voice that had wooed her so persuasively that afternoon on the train. As he emerged from the dressing room an hour later he ran into Le Moyne coming out of the visitors' quarters next door. He looked at Basil with an expression at once uncertain and angry.

"Hello, Lee." After a momentary hesitation he added: "Good work."

"Hello, Le Moyne," said Basil, clipping his words.

Le Moyne turned away, turned back again.

"What's the matter?" he demanded. "Do you want to carry this any further?"

Basil didn't answer. The bruised face and the bandaged hand assuaged his hatred a little, but he couldn't bring himself to speak. The game was over, and now Le Moyne would meet Minnie somewhere, make the defeat negligible in the victory of the night.

"If it's about Minnie, you're wasting your time being sore," Le Moyne exploded suddenly. "I asked her to the game, but she didn't come."

"Didn't she?" Basil was startled.

"That was it, eh? I wasn't sure. I thought you were just trying to get my goat in there." His eyes narrowed. "The young lady kicked me about a month ago."

"Kicked you?"

"Threw me over. Got a little weary of me. She runs through things quickly."

Basil perceived that his face was miserable.

"Who is it now?" he asked in more civil tone.

"It seems to be a classmate of yours named Jubal— and a mighty sad bird, if you ask me. She met him in New York the day before her school opened, and I hear it's pretty heavy. She'll be at the Lawn Club Dance tonight."

4.

BASIL had dinner at the Taft with Jobena Dorsey and her brother George. The Varsity had won at Princeton and the college was jubilant and enthusiastic; as they came in, a table of freshmen by the door gave Basil a hand.

"You're getting very important," Jobena said.

A year ago Basil had thought for a few weeks that he was in love with Jobena; when they next met he knew immediately that he was not.

"And why was that?" he asked her now, as they danced. "Why did it all go so quick?"

"Do you really want to know?"

"Yes."

"Because I let it go."

"You let it go?" he repeated. "I like that!"

"I decided you were too young."

"Didn't I have anything to do with it?"

She shook her head.

"That's what Bernard Shaw says," Basil admitted thoughtfully. "But I thought it was just about older people. So you go after the men."

"Well, I should say not!" Her body stiffened indignantly in his arms. "The men are usually there, and the girl blinks at them or something. It's just instinct."

"Can't a man make a girl fall for him?"

"Some men can— the ones who really don't care."

He pondered this awful fact for a moment and stowed it away for future examination. On the way to the Lawn Club he brought forth more questions.

If a girl who had been "crazy about a boy" became suddenly infatuated with another, what ought the first boy to do?

"Let her go," said Jobena.

"Supposing he wasn't willing to do that. What ought he to do?"

"There isn't anything to do."

"Well, what's the best thing?"

Laughing, Jobena laid her head on his shoulder.

"Poor Basil," she said, "I'll be Laura Jean Libbey and you tell me the whole story."

He summarized the affair. "You see," he concluded, "if she was just anybody I could get over it, no matter how much I loved her. But she isn't — she's the most popular, most beautiful girl I've ever seen. I mean she's like Messalina and Cleopatra and Salome and all that."

"Louder," requested George from the front seat.

"She's sort of an immortal woman," continued Basil in a lower voice. "You know, like Madame du Barry and all that sort of thing. She's not just— "

"Not just like me."

"No. That is, you're sort of like her— all the girls I've cared about are sort of the same. Oh, Jobena, you know what I mean."

As the lights of the New Haven Lawn Club loomed up she became obligingly serious:

"There's nothing to do. I can see that. She's more sophisticated than you. She staged the whole thing from the beginning, even when you thought it was you. I don't know why she got tired, but evidently she is, and she couldn't create it again, even if she wanted to, and you couldn't because you're — "

"Go on. What?"

"You're too much in love. All that's left for you to do is to show her you don't care. Any girl hates to lose an old beau; so she may even smile at you — but don't go back. It's all over."

In the dressing room Basil stood thoughtfully brushing his hair. It was all over. Jobena's words had taken away his last faint hope, and after the strain of the afternoon the realization brought tears to his eyes. Hurriedly filling the bowl, he washed his face. Someone came in and slapped him on the back.

"You played a nice game, Lee."

"Thanks, but I was rotten."

"You were great. That last quarter— "

He went into the dance. Immediately he saw her, and in the same breath he was dizzy and confused with excitement. A little dribble of stags pursued her wherever she went, and she looked up at each one of them with the bright-eyed, passionate smile he knew so well. Presently he located her escort and indignantly discovered it was a flip, blatant boy from Hill School he had already noticed and set down as impossible. What quality lurked behind those watery eyes that drew her? How could that raw temperament appreciate that she was one of the immortal sirens of the world?

Having examined Mr. Jubal desperately and in vain for the answers to these questions, he cut in and danced all of twenty feet with her, smiling with cynical melancholy when she said:

"I'm so proud to know you, Basil. Everybody says you were wonderful this afternoon."

But the phrase was precious to him and he stood against the wall repeating it over to himself, separating it into its component parts and trying to suck out any lurking meaning. If enough people praised him it might influence her. "I'm proud to know you, Basil. Everybody says you were wonderful this afternoon."

There was a commotion near the door and someone said, "By golly, they got in after all!"

"Who?" another asked.

"Some Princeton freshmen. Their football season's over and three or four of them broke training at the Hofbrau."

And now suddenly the curious specter of a young man burst out of the commotion, as a back breaks through a line, and neatly straight-arming a member of the dance committee, rushed unsteadily onto the floor. He wore no collar with his dinner coat, his shirt front had long expelled its studs, his hair and eyes were wild. For a moment he glanced around as if blinded by the lights; then his glance fell on Minnie Bibble and an unmistakable love light came into his face. Even before he reached her he began to call her name aloud in a strained, poignant Southern voice.

Basil sprang forward, but others were before him, and Littleboy Le Moyne, fighting hard, disappeared into the coatroom in a flurry of legs and arms, many of which were not his own. Standing in the doorway. Basil found his disgust tempered with a monstrous sympathy; for Le Moyne, each time his head emerged from under the faucet, spoke desperately of his rejected love.

But when Basil danced with Minnie again, he found her frightened and angry; so much so that she seemed to appeal to Basil for support, made him sit down.

"Wasn't he a fool?" she cried feelingly. "That sort of thing gives a girl a terrible reputation. They ought to have put him in jail."

"He didn't know what he was doing. He played a hard game and he's all in, that's all."

But her eyes filled with tears.

"Oh, Basil," she pleaded, "am I just perfectly terrible? I never want to be mean to anybody; things just happen."

He wanted to put his arm around her and tell her she was the most romantic person in the world, but he saw in her eyes that she scarcely perceived him; he was a lay figure— she might have been talking to another girl. He remembered what Jobena had said— there was nothing left except to escape with his pride.

"You've got more sense." Her soft voice flowed around him like an enchanted river. "You know that when two people aren't— aren't crazy about each other any more, the thing is to be sensible."

"Of course," he said, and forced himself to add lightly: "When a thing's over, it's over."

"Oh, Basil, you're so satisfactory. You always understand." And now suddenly, for the first time in months, she was actually thinking of him. He would be an invaluable person in any girl's life, she thought, if that brain of his, which was so annoying sometimes, was really used "to sort of understand."

He was watching Jobena dance, and Minnie followed his eyes.

"You brought a girl, didn't you? She's awfully pretty."

"Not as pretty as you."

"Basil."

Resolutely he refused to look at her, guessing that she had wriggled slightly and folded her hands in her lap. And as he held on to himself an extraordinary thing happened— the world around, outside of her, brightened a little. Presently more freshmen would approach him to congratulate him on the game, and he would like it— the words and the tribute in their eyes. There was a good chance he would start against Harvard next week.

"Basil!"

His heart made a dizzy tour of his chest. Around the corner of his eyes he felt her eyes waiting. Was she really sorry? Should he seize the opportunity to turn to her and say: "Minnie, tell this crazy nut to go jump in the river, and come back to me." He wavered, but a thought that had helped him this afternoon returned: He had made all his mistakes for this time. Deep inside of him the plea expired slowly.

Jubal the impossible came up with an air of possession, and Basil's heart went bobbing off around the ballroom in a pink silk dress. Lost again in a fog of indecision, he walked out on the veranda. There was a flurry of premature snow in the air and the stars looked cold. Staring up at them he saw that they were his stars as always— symbols of ambition, struggle and glory. The wind blew through them, trumpeting that high white note for which he always listened, and the thin-blown clouds, stripped for battle, passed in review. The scene was of an unparalleled brightness and magnificence, and only the practiced eye of the commander saw that one star was no longer there.

———————

10: The Monkey's Paw

W. W. Jacobs

1863-1943

Harper's Monthly Magazine Sep 1902

Collected in: *The Lady of the Barge, and other stories*, 1902

Famous creepy tale, endlessly reprinted.

WITHOUT, the night was cold and wet, but in the small parlour of Laburnam Villa the blinds were drawn and the fire burned brightly. Father and son were at chess, the former, who possessed ideas about the game involving radical changes, putting his king into such sharp and unnecessary perils that it even provoked comment from the white-haired old lady knitting placidly by the fire.

"Hark at the wind," said Mr. White, who, having seen a fatal mistake after it was too late, was amiably desirous of preventing his son from seeing it.

"I'm listening," said the latter, grimly surveying the board as he stretched out his hand. "Check."

"I should hardly think that he'd come to-night," said his father, with his hand poised over the board.

"Mate," replied the son.

"That's the worst of living so far out," bawled Mr. White, with sudden and unlooked-for violence; "of all the beastly, slushy, out-of-the-way places to live in, this is the worst. Pathway's a bog, and the road's a torrent. I don't know what people are thinking about. I suppose because only two houses in the road are let, they think it doesn't matter."

"Never mind, dear," said his wife, soothingly; "perhaps you'll win the next one."

Mr. White looked up sharply, just in time to intercept a knowing glance between mother and son. The words died away on his lips, and he hid a guilty grin in his thin grey beard.

"There he is," said Herbert White, as the gate banged to loudly and heavy footsteps came toward the door.

The old man rose with hospitable haste, and opening the door, was heard condoling with the new arrival. The new arrival also condoled with himself, so that Mrs. White said, "Tut, tut!" and coughed gently as her husband entered the room, followed by a tall, burly man, beady of eye and rubicund of visage.

"Sergeant-Major Morris," he said, introducing him.

The sergeant-major shook hands, and taking the proffered seat by the fire, watched contentedly while his host got out whiskey and tumblers and stood a small copper kettle on the fire.

At the third glass his eyes got brighter, and he began to talk, the little family circle regarding with eager interest this visitor from distant parts, as he squared his broad shoulders in the chair and spoke of wild scenes and doughty deeds; of wars and plagues and strange peoples.

"Twenty-one years of it," said Mr. White, nodding at his wife and son. "When he went away he was a slip of a youth in the warehouse. Now look at him."

"He don't look to have taken much harm," said Mrs. White, politely.

"I'd like to go to India myself," said the old man, "just to look round a bit, you know."

"Better where you are," said the sergeant-major, shaking his head. He put down the empty glass, and sighing softly, shook it again.

"I should like to see those old temples and fakirs and jugglers," said the old man. "What was that you started telling me the other day about a monkey's paw or something, Morris?"

"Nothing," said the soldier, hastily. "Leastways nothing worth hearing."

"Monkey's paw?" said Mrs. White, curiously.

"Well, it's just a bit of what you might call magic, perhaps," said the sergeant-major, offhandedly.

His three listeners leaned forward eagerly. The visitor absent-mindedly put his empty glass to his lips and then set it down again. His host filled it for him.

"To look at," said the sergeant-major, fumbling in his pocket, "it's just an ordinary little paw, dried to a mummy."

He took something out of his pocket and proffered it. Mrs. White drew back with a grimace, but her son, taking it, examined it curiously.

"And what is there special about it?" inquired Mr. White as he took it from his son, and having examined it, placed it upon the table.

"It had a spell put on it by an old fakir," said the sergeant-major, "a very holy man. He wanted to show that fate ruled people's lives, and that those who interfered with it did so to their sorrow. He put a spell on it so that three separate men could each have three wishes from it."

His manner was so impressive that his hearers were conscious that their light laughter jarred somewhat.

"Well, why don't you have three, sir?" said Herbert White, cleverly.

The soldier regarded him in the way that middle age is wont to regard presumptuous youth. "I have," he said, quietly, and his blotchy face whitened.

"And did you really have the three wishes granted?" asked Mrs. White.

"I did," said the sergeant-major, and his glass tapped against his strong teeth.

"And has anybody else wished?" persisted the old lady.

"The first man had his three wishes. Yes," was the reply; "I don't know what the first two were, but the third was for death. That's how I got the paw."

His tones were so grave that a hush fell upon the group.

"If you've had your three wishes, it's no good to you now, then, Morris," said the old man at last. "What do you keep it for?"

The soldier shook his head. "Fancy, I suppose," he said, slowly. "I did have some idea of selling it, but I don't think I will. It has caused enough mischief already. Besides, people won't buy. They think it's a fairy tale; some of them, and those who do think anything of it want to try it first and pay me afterward."

"If you could have another three wishes," said the old man, eyeing him keenly, "would you have them?"

"I don't know," said the other. "I don't know."

He took the paw, and dangling it between his forefinger and thumb, suddenly threw it upon the fire. White, with a slight cry, stooped down and snatched it off.

"Better let it burn," said the soldier, solemnly.

"If you don't want it, Morris," said the other, "give it to me."

"I won't," said his friend, doggedly. "I threw it on the fire. If you keep it, don't blame me for what happens. Pitch it on the fire again like a sensible man."

The other shook his head and examined his new possession closely. "How do you do it?" he inquired.

"Hold it up in your right hand and wish aloud," said the sergeant-major, "but I warn you of the consequences."

"Sounds like the *Arabian Nights*," said Mrs. White, as she rose and began to set the supper. "Don't you think you might wish for four pairs of hands for me?"

Her husband drew the talisman from pocket, and then all three burst into laughter as the sergeant-major, with a look of alarm on his face, caught him by the arm.

"If you must wish," he said, gruffly, "wish for something sensible."

Mr. White dropped it back in his pocket, and placing chairs, motioned his friend to the table. In the business of supper the talisman was partly forgotten, and afterward the three sat listening in an enthralled fashion to a second instalment of the soldier's adventures in India.

"If the tale about the monkey's paw is not more truthful than those he has been telling us," said Herbert, as the door closed behind their guest, just in time for him to catch the last train, "we sha'nt make much out of it."

"Did you give him anything for it, father?" inquired Mrs. White, regarding her husband closely.

"A trifle," said he, colouring slightly. "He didn't want it, but I made him take it. And he pressed me again to throw it away."

"Likely," said Herbert, with pretended horror. "Why, we're going to be rich, and famous and happy. Wish to be an emperor, father, to begin with; then you can't be henpecked."

He darted round the table, pursued by the maligned Mrs. White armed with an antimacassar.

Mr. White took the paw from his pocket and eyed it dubiously. "I don't know what to wish for, and that's a fact," he said, slowly. "It seems to me I've got all I want."

"If you only cleared the house, you'd be quite happy, wouldn't you?" said Herbert, with his hand on his shoulder. "Well, wish for two hundred pounds, then; that 'll just do it."

His father, smiling shamefacedly at his own credulity, held up the talisman, as his son, with a solemn face, somewhat marred by a wink at his mother, sat down at the piano and struck a few impressive chords.

"I wish for two hundred pounds," said the old man distinctly.

A fine crash from the piano greeted the words, interrupted by a shuddering cry from the old man. His wife and son ran toward him.

"It moved," he cried, with a glance of disgust at the object as it lay on the floor.

"As I wished, it twisted in my hand like a snake."

"Well, I don't see the money," said his son as he picked it up and placed it on the table, "and I bet I never shall."

"It must have been your fancy, father," said his wife, regarding him anxiously.

He shook his head. "Never mind, though; there's no harm done, but it gave me a shock all the same."

They sat down by the fire again while the two men finished their pipes. Outside, the wind was higher than ever, and the old man started nervously at the sound of a door banging upstairs. A silence unusual and depressing settled upon all three, which lasted until the old couple rose to retire for the night.

"I expect you'll find the cash tied up in a big bag in the middle of your bed," said Herbert, as he bade them good-night, "and something horrible squatting up on top of the wardrobe watching you as you pocket your ill-gotten gains."

He sat alone in the darkness, gazing at the dying fire, and seeing faces in it. The last face was so horrible and so simian that he gazed at it in amazement.' It got so vivid that, with a little uneasy laugh, he felt on the table for a glass containing a little water to throw over it. His hand grasped the monkey's paw, and with a little shiver he wiped his hand on his coat and went up to bed.

IN THE BRIGHTNESS of the wintry sun next morning as it streamed over the breakfast table he laughed at his fears. There was an air of prosaic wholesomeness about the room which it had lacked on the previous night, and the dirty, shrivelled little paw was pitched on the sideboard with a carelessness which betokened no great belief in its virtues.

"I suppose all old soldiers are the same," said Mrs. White. "The idea of our listening to such nonsense! How could wishes be granted in these days? And if they could, how could two hundred pounds hurt you, father?"

"Might drop on his head from the sky," said the frivolous Herbert.

"Morris said the things happened so naturally," said' his father, "that you might if you so wished attribute it to coincidence."

"Well, don't break into the money before I come back," said Herbert as he rose from the table. "I'm afraid it'll turn you into a mean, avaricious man, and we shall have to disown you."

His mother laughed, and following him to the door, watched him down the road; and returning to the breakfast table, was very happy at the expense of her husband's credulity. All of which did not prevent her from scurrying to the door at the postman's knock, nor prevent her from referring somewhat shortly to retired sergeant-majors of bibulous habits when she found that the post brought a tailor's bill.

"Herbert will have some more of his funny remarks, I expect, when he comes home," she said, as they sat at dinner.

"I dare say," said Mr. White, pouring himself out some beer; "but for all that, the thing moved in my hand; that I'll swear to."

"You thought it did," said the old lady soothingly.

"I say it did," replied the other. "There was no thought about it; I had just—What's the matter?"

His wife made no reply. She was watching the mysterious movements of a man outside, who, peering in an undecided fashion at the house, appeared to be trying to make up his mind to enter. In mental connection with the two hundred pounds, she noticed that the stranger was well dressed, and wore a silk hat of glossy newness. Three times he paused at the gate, and then walked on again. The fourth time he stood with his hand upon it, and then with sudden resolution flung it open and walked up the path. Mrs. White at the same moment placed her hands behind her, and hurriedly unfastening the strings of her apron, put that useful article of apparel beneath the cushion of her chair.

She brought the stranger, who seemed ill at ease, into the room. He gazed at her furtively, and listened in a preoccupied fashion as the old lady apologized for the appearance of the room, and her husband's coat, a garment which he usually reserved for the garden. She then waited as patiently as her sex would permit, for him to broach his business, but he was at first strangely silent.

"I was asked to call," he said at last, and stooped and picked a piece of cotton from his trousers. "I come from 'Maw and Meggins.'"

The old lady started. "Is anything the matter?" she asked, breathlessly. "Has anything happened to Herbert? What is it? What is it?"

Her husband interposed. "There, there, mother," he said, hastily. "Sit down, and don't jump to conclusions. You've not brought bad news, I'm sure, sir;" and he eyed the other wistfully.

"I'm sorry—" began the visitor.

"Is he hurt?" demanded the mother, wildly.

The visitor bowed in assent. "Badly hurt," he said, quietly, "but he is not in any pain."

"Oh, thank God!" said the old woman, clasping her hands. "Thank God for that! Thank—"

She broke off suddenly as the sinister meaning of the assurance dawned upon her and she saw the awful confirmation of her fears in the other's perverted face. She caught her breath, and turning to her slower-witted husband, laid her trembling old hand upon his. There was a long silence.

"He was caught in the machinery," said the visitor at length in a low voice.

"Caught in the machinery," repeated Mr. White, in a dazed fashion, "yes."

He sat staring blankly out at the window, and taking his wife's hand between his own, pressed it as he had been wont to do in their old courting-days nearly forty years before.

"He was the only one left to us," he said, turning gently to the visitor. "It is hard."

The other coughed, and rising, walked slowly to the window. "The firm wished me to convey their sincere sympathy with you in your great loss," he said, without looking round. "I beg that you will understand I am only their servant and merely obeying orders."

There was no reply; the old woman's face was white, her eyes staring, and her breath inaudible; on the husband's face was a look such as his friend the sergeant might have carried into his first action.

"I was to say that Maw and Meggins disclaim all responsibility," continued the other. "They admit no liability at all, but in consideration of your son's services, they wish to present you with a certain sum as compensation."

Mr. White dropped his wife's hand, and rising to his feet, gazed with a look of horror at his visitor. His dry lips shaped the words, "How much?"

"Two hundred pounds," was the answer.

Unconscious of his wife's shriek, the old man smiled faintly, put out his hands like a sightless man, and dropped, a senseless heap, to the floor.

IN THE huge new cemetery, some two miles distant, the old people buried their dead, and came back to a house steeped in shadow and silence. It was all over so quickly that at first they could hardly realize it, and remained in a state of expectation as though of something else to happen— something else which was to lighten this load, too heavy for old hearts to bear.

But the days passed, and expectation gave place to resignation— the hopeless resignation of the old, sometimes miscalled, apathy. Sometimes they hardly exchanged a word, for now they had nothing to talk about, and their days were long to weariness.

It was about a week after that the old man, waking suddenly in the night, stretched out his hand and found himself alone. The room was in darkness, and the sound of subdued weeping came from the window. He raised himself in bed and listened.

"Come back," he said, tenderly. "You will be cold."

"It is colder for my son," said the old woman, and wept afresh.

The sound of her sobs died away on his ears. The bed was warm, and his eyes heavy with sleep. He dozed fitfully, and then slept until a sudden wild cry from his wife awoke him with a start.

"The paw!" she cried wildly. "The monkey's paw!"

He started up in alarm. "Where? Where is it? What's the matter?"

She came stumbling across the room toward him. "I want it," she said, quietly. "You've not destroyed it?"

"It's in the parlour, on the bracket," he replied, marvelling. "Why?"

She cried and laughed together, and bending over, kissed his cheek.

"I only just thought of it," she said, hysterically. "Why didn't I think of it before? Why didn't you think of it?"

"Think of what?" he questioned.

"The other two wishes," she replied, rapidly.

"We've only had one."

"Was not that enough?" he demanded, fiercely.

"No," she cried, triumphantly; "we'll have one more. Go down and get it quickly, and wish our boy alive again."

The man sat up in bed and flung the bedclothes from his quaking limbs. "Good God, you are mad!" he cried, aghast.

"Get it," she panted; "get it quickly, and wish— Oh, my boy, my boy!"

Her husband struck a match and lit the candle. "Get back to bed," he said, unsteadily. "You don't know what you are saying."

"We had the first wish granted," said the old woman, feverishly; "why not the second?"

"A coincidence," stammered the old man.

"Go and get it and wish," cried his wife, quivering with excitement.

The old man turned and regarded her, and his voice shook. "He has been dead ten days, and besides he— I would not tell you else, but— I could only recognize him by his clothing. If he was too terrible for you to see then, how now?"

"Bring him back," cried the old woman, and dragged him toward the door. "Do you think I fear the child I have nursed?"

He went down in the darkness, and felt his way to the parlour, and then to the mantelpiece. The talisman was in its place, and a horrible fear that the unspoken wish might bring his mutilated son before him ere he could escape from the room seized upon him, and he caught his breath as he found that he had lost the direction of the door. His brow cold with sweat, he felt his way round the table, and groped along the wall until he found himself in the small passage with the unwholesome thing in his hand.

Even his wife's face seemed changed as he entered the room. It was white and expectant, and to his fears seemed to have an unnatural look upon it. He was afraid of her.

"Wish!" she cried, in a strong voice.

"It is foolish and wicked," he faltered.

"Wish!" repeated his wife.

He raised his hand. "I wish my son alive again."

The talisman fell to the floor, and he regarded it fearfully. Then he sank trembling into a chair as the old woman, with burning eyes, walked to the window and raised the blind.

He sat until he was chilled with the cold, glancing occasionally at the figure of the old woman peering through the window. The candle-end, which had burned below the rim of the china candlestick, was throwing pulsating shadows on the ceiling and walls, until, with a flicker larger than the rest, it expired. The old man, with an unspeakable sense of relief at the failure of the talisman, crept back to his bed, and a minute or two afterward the old woman came silently and apathetically beside him.

Neither spoke, but lay silently listening to the ticking of the clock. A stair creaked, and a squeaky mouse scurried noisily through the wall. The darkness was oppressive, and after lying for some time screwing up his courage, he took the box of matches, and striking one, went downstairs for a candle.

At the foot of the stairs the match went out, and he paused to strike another; and at the same moment a knock, so quiet and stealthy as to be scarcely audible, sounded on the front door.

The matches fell from his hand and spilled in the passage. He stood motionless, his breath suspended until the knock was repeated. Then he turned

and fled swiftly back to his room, and closed the door behind him. A third knock sounded through the house.

"What's that?" cried the old woman, starting up.

"A rat," said the old man in shaking tones— "a rat. It passed me on the stairs."

His wife sat up in bed listening. A loud knock resounded through the house.

"It's Herbert!" she screamed. "It's Herbert!"

She ran to the door, but her husband was before her, and catching her by the arm, held her tightly.

"What are you going to do?" he whispered hoarsely.

"It's my boy; it's Herbert!" she cried, struggling mechanically. "I forgot it was two miles away. What are you holding me for? Let go. I must open the door.

"For God's sake don't let it in," cried the old man, trembling.

"You're afraid of your own son," she cried, struggling. "Let me go. I'm coming, Herbert; I'm coming."

There was another knock, and another. The old woman with a sudden wrench broke free and ran from the room. Her husband followed to the landing, and called after her appealingly as she hurried downstairs. He heard the chain rattle back and the bottom bolt drawn slowly and stiffly from the socket. Then the old woman's voice, strained and panting.

"The bolt," she cried, loudly. "Come down. I can't reach it."

But her husband was on his hands and knees groping wildly on the floor in search of the paw. If he could only find it before the thing outside got in. A perfect fusillade of knocks reverberated through the house, and he heard the scraping of a chair as his wife put it down in the passage against the door. He heard the creaking of the bolt as it came slowly back, and at the same moment he found the monkey's paw, and frantically breathed his third and last wish.

The knocking ceased suddenly, although the echoes of it were still in the house. He heard the chair drawn back, and the door opened. A cold wind rushed up the staircase, and a long loud wail of disappointment and misery from his wife gave him courage to run down to her side, and then to the gate beyond. The street lamp flickering opposite shone on a quiet and deserted road.

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11: The Ill-Regulated Destiny of Kin Yen, The Picture-Maker

Ernest Bramah

Ernest Brammah Smith, 1868-1942
In: *The Wallet of Kai Lung*, 1900

AS RECORDED by himself before his sudden departure from Peking, owing to circumstances which are made plain in the following narrative.

THERE ARE MOMENTS in the life of a person when the saying of the wise Ni-Hyu that "Misfortune comes to all men and to most women" is endowed with double force. At such times the faithful child of the Sun is a prey to the whitest and most funereal thoughts, and even the inspired wisdom of his illustrious ancestors seems more than doubtful, while the continued inactivity of the Sacred Dragon appears for the time to give colour to the scoffs of the Western barbarian. A little while ago these misgivings would have found no resting-place in the bosom of the writer. Now, however— but the matter must be made clear from the beginning.

The name of the despicable person who here sets forth his immature story is Kin Yen, and he is a native of Kia-Lu in the Province of Che-Kiang. Having purchased from a very aged man the position of Hereditary Instructor in the Art of Drawing Birds and Flowers, he gave lessons in these accomplishments until he had saved sufficient money to journey to Peking. Here it was his presumptuous intention to learn the art of drawing figures in order that he might illustrate printed leaves of a more distinguished class than those which would accept what true politeness compels him to call his exceedingly unsymmetrical pictures of birds and flowers. Accordingly, when the time arrived, he disposed of his Hereditary Instructorship, having first ascertained in the interests of his pupils that his successor was a person of refined morals and great filial piety.

Alas! it is well written, "The road to eminence lies through the cheap and exceedingly uninviting eating-houses." In spite of this person's great economy, and of his having begged his way from Kia-Lu to Peking in the guise of a pilgrim, journeying to burn incense in the sacred Temple of Truth near that city, when once within the latter place his taels melted away like the smile of a person of low class when he discovers that the mandarin's stern words were not intended as a jest. Moreover, he found that the story-makers of Peking, receiving higher rewards than those at Kia-Lu, considered themselves bound to introduce living characters into all their tales, and in consequence the very ornamental drawings of birds and flowers which he had entwined into a legend entitled "The Last Fight of the Heaven-sent Tcheng"— a story which had been entrusted to him for illustration as a test of his skill— was returned to him with a communication in which the writer revealed his real meaning by stating contrary facts. It therefore

became necessary that he should become competent in the art of drawing figures without delay, and with this object he called at the picture-room of Tieng Lin, a person whose experience was so great that he could, without discomfort to himself, draw men and women of all classes, both good and bad. When the person who is setting forth this narrative revealed to Tieng Lin the utmost amount of money he could afford to give for instruction in the art of drawing living figures, Tieng Lin's face became as overcast as the sky immediately before the Great Rains, for in his ignorance of this incapable person's poverty he had treated him with equality and courtesy, nor had he kept him waiting in the mean room on the plea that he was at that moment closeted with the Sacred Emperor. However, upon receiving an assurance that a rumour would be spread in which the number of taels should be multiplied by ten, and that the sum itself should be brought in advance, Tieng Lin promised to instruct this person in the art of drawing five characters, which, he said, would be sufficient to illustrate all stories except those by the most expensive and highly-rewarded story-tellers—men who have become so proficient that they not infrequently introduce a score or more of living persons into their tales without confusion.

After considerable deliberation, this unassuming person selected the following characters, judging them to be the most useful, and the most readily applicable to all phases and situations of life:

1. A bad person, wearing a long dark pigtail and smoking an opium pipe. His arms to be folded, and his clothes new and very expensive.
2. A woman of low class. One who removes dust and useless things from the rooms of the over-fastidious and of those who have long nails; she to be carrying her trade-signs.
3. A person from Pe-ling, endowed with qualities which cause the beholder to be amused. This character to be especially designed to go with the short sayings which remove gravity.
4. One who, having incurred the displeasure of the sublime Emperor, has been decapitated in consequence.
5. An ordinary person of no striking or distinguished appearance. One who can be safely introduced in all places and circumstances without great fear of detection.

After many months spent in constant practice and in taking measurements, this unenviable person attained a very high degree of proficiency, and could draw any of the five characters without hesitation. With renewed hope, therefore, he again approached those who sit in easy-chairs, and concealing his identity (for they are stiff at bending, and when once a picture-maker is classed as "of no good" he remains so to the end, in spite of change), he succeeded in

getting entrusted with a story by the elegant and refined Kyen Tal. This writer, as he remembered with distrust, confines his distinguished efforts entirely to the doings of sailors and of those connected with the sea, and this tale, indeed, he found upon reading to be the narrative of how a Hang-Chow junk and its crew, consisting mostly of aged persons, were beguiled out of their course by an exceedingly ill-disposed dragon, and wrecked upon an island of naked barbarians. It was, therefore, with a somewhat heavy stomach that this person set himself the task of arranging his five characters as so to illustrate the words of the story.

The sayings of the ancient philosopher Tai Loo are indeed very subtle, and the truth of his remark, "After being disturbed in one's dignity by a mandarin's foot it is no unusual occurrence to fall flat on the face in crossing a muddy street," was now apparent. Great as was the disadvantage owing to the nature of the five characters, this became as nothing when it presently appeared that the avaricious and clay-souled Tieng Lin, taking advantage of the blindness of this person's enthusiasm, had taught him the figures so that they all gazed in the same direction. In consequence of this it would have been impossible that two should be placed as in the act of conversing together had not the noble Kyen Tal been inspired to write that "his companions turned from him in horror." This incident the ingenious person who is recording these facts made the subject of three separate drawings, and having in one or two other places effected skilful changes in the writing, so similar in style to the strokes of the illustrious Kyen Tal as to be undetectable, he found little difficulty in making use of all his characters. The risks of the future, however, were too great to be run with impunity; therefore it was arranged, by means of money— for this person was fast becoming acquainted with the ways of Peking— that an emissary from one who sat in an easy-chair should call upon him for a conference, the narrative of which appeared in this form in the Peking Printed Leaves of Thrice-distilled Truth:

The brilliant and amiable young picture-maker Kin Yen, in spite of the immediate and universal success of his accomplished efforts, is still quite rotund in intellect, nor is he, if we may use a form of speaking affected by our friends across the Hoang Hai, "suffering from swollen feet." A person with no recognized position, but one who occasionally does inferior work of this nature for us, recently surprised Kin Yen without warning, and found him in his sumptuously appointed picture-room, busy with compasses and tracing-paper. About the place were scattered in elegant confusion several of his recent masterpieces. From the subsequent conversation we are in a position to make it known that in future this refined and versatile person will confine himself entirely to illustrations of processions, funerals, armies on the march, persons pursued by others, and kindred subjects which appeal strongly to his

imagination. Kin Yen has severe emotions on the subject of individuality in art, and does not hesitate to express himself forcibly with reference to those who are content to degrade the names of their ancestors by turning out what he wittily describes as "so much of varied mediocrity."

The prominence obtained by this pleasantly-composed notice— for it was copied by others who were unaware of the circumstance of its origin— had the desired effect. In future, when one of those who sit in easy-chairs wished for a picture after the kind mentioned, he would say to his lesser one: "Oh, send to the graceful and versatile Kin Yen; he becomes inspired on the subject of funerals," or persons escaping from prison, or families walking to the temple, or whatever it might be. In that way this narrow-minded and illiterate person was soon both looked at and rich, so that it was his daily practice to be carried, in silk garments, past the houses of those who had known him in poverty, and on these occasions he would puff out his cheeks and pull his moustaches, looking fiercely from side to side.

True are the words written in the elegant and distinguished Book of Verses: "Beware lest when being kissed by the all-seeing Emperor, you step upon the elusive banana-peel." It was at the height of eminence in this altogether degraded person's career that he encountered the being who led him on to his present altogether too lamentable condition.

Tien Nung is the earthly name by which is known she who combines all the most illustrious attributes which have been possessed of women since the days of the divine Fou-Hy. Her father is a person of very gross habits, and lives by selling inferior merchandise covered with some of good quality. Upon past occasions, when under the direct influence of Tien, and in the hope of gaining some money benefit, this person may have spoken of him in terms of praise, and may even have recommended friends to entrust articles of value to him, or to procure goods on his advice. Now, however, he records it as his unalterable decision that the father of Tien Nung is by profession a person who obtains goods by stratagem, and that, moreover, it is impossible to gain an advantage over him on matters of exchange.

The events that have happened prove the deep wisdom of Li Pen when he exclaimed "The whitest of pigeons, no matter how excellent in the silk-hung chamber, is not to be followed on the field of battle." Tien herself was all that the most exacting of persons could demand, but her opinions on the subject of picture-making were not formed by heavy thought, and it would have been well if this had been borne in mind by this person. One morning he chanced to meet her while carrying open in his hands four sets of printed leaves containing his pictures.

"I have observed," said Tien, after the usual personal inquiries had been exchanged, "that the renowned Kin Yen, who is the object of the keenest envy

among his brother picture-makers, so little regards the sacredness of his accomplished art that never by any chance does he depict persons of the very highest excellence. Let not the words of an impetuous maiden disarrange his digestive organs if they should seem too bold to the high-souled Kin Yen, but this matter has, since she has known him, troubled the eyelids of Tien. Here," she continued, taking from this person's hand one of the printed leaves which he was carrying, "in this illustration of persons returning from extinguishing a fire, is there one who appears to possess those qualities which appeal to all that is intellectual and competitive within one? Can it be that the immaculate Kin Yen is unacquainted with the subtle distinction between the really select and the vastly ordinary? Ah, undiscriminating Kin Yen! are not the eyelashes of the person who is addressing you as threads of fine gold to junk's cables when compared with those of the extremely commonplace female who is here pictured in the art of carrying a bucket? Can the most refined lack of vanity hide from you the fact that your own person is infinitely rounder than this of the evilly-intentioned-looking individual with the opium pipe? O blind Kin Yen!"

Here she fled in honourable confusion, leaving this person standing in the street, astounded, and a prey to the most distinguished emotions of a complicated nature.

"Oh, Tien," he cried at length, "inspired by those bright eyes, narrower than the most select of the three thousand and one possessed by the sublime Buddha, the almost fallen Kin Yen will yet prove himself worthy of your esteemed consideration. He will, without delay, learn to draw two new living persons, and will incorporate in them the likenesses which you have suggested."

Returning swiftly to his abode, he therefore inscribed and despatched this letter, in proof of his resolve:

"To the Heaven-sent human chrysanthemum, in whose body reside the Celestial Principles and the imprisoned colours of the rainbow.

"From the very offensive and self-opinionated picture-maker.

"Henceforth this person will take no rest, nor eat any but the commonest food, until he shall have carried out the wishes of his one Jade Star, she whose teeth he is not worthy to blacken.

"When Kin Yen has been entrusted with a story which contains a being in some degree reflecting the character of Tien, he will embellish it with her irreproachable profile and come to hear her words. Till then he bids her farewell."

From that moment most of this person's time was necessarily spent in learning to draw the two new characters, and in consequence of this he lost much work, and, indeed, the greater part of the connexion which he had been

at such pains to form gradually slipped away from him. Many months passed before he was competent to reproduce persons resembling Tien and himself, for in this he was unassisted by Tieng Lin, and his progress was slow.

At length, being satisfied, he called upon the least fierce of those who sit in easy-chairs, and requested that he might be entrusted with a story for picture-making.

"We should have been covered with honourable joy to set in operation the brush of the inspired Kin Yen," replied the other with agreeable condescension; "only at the moment, it does not chance that we have before us any stories in which funerals, or beggars being driven from the city, form the chief incidents. Perhaps if the polished Kin Yen should happen to be passing this ill-constructed office in about six months' time— "

"The brush of Kin Yen will never again depict funerals, or labourers arranging themselves to receive pay or similar subjects," exclaimed this person impetuously, "for, as it is well said, 'The lightning discovers objects which the paper-lantern fails to reveal.' In future none but tales dealing with the most distinguished persons shall have his attention."

"If this be the true word of the dignified Kin Yen, it is possible that we may be able to animate his inspired faculties," was the response. "But in that case, as a new style must be in the nature of an experiment, and as our public has come to regard Kin Yen as the great exponent of Art Facing in One Direction, we cannot continue the exceedingly liberal payment with which we have been accustomed to reward his elegant exertions."

"Provided the story be suitable, that is a matter of less importance," replied this person.

"The story," said the one in the easy-chair, "is by the refined Tong-king, and it treats of the high-minded and conscientious doubts of one who would become a priest of Fo. When preparing for this distinguished office he discovers within himself leanings towards the religion of Lao-Tse. His illustrious scruples are enhanced by his affection for Wu Ping, who now appears in the story."

"And the ending?" inquired this person, for it was desirable that the two should marry happily.

"The inimitable stories of Tong-king never have any real ending, and this one, being in his most elevated style, has even less end than most of them. But the whole narrative is permeated with the odour of joss-sticks and honourable high-mindedness, and the two characters are both of noble birth."

As it might be some time before another story so suitable should be offered, or one which would afford so good an opportunity of wafting incense to Tien, and of displaying her incomparable outline in dignified and magnanimous attitudes, this was eagerly accepted, and for the next week this obscure person spent all his days and nights in picturing the lovely Tien and his debased self in

the characters of the nobly-born young priest of Fo and Wu Ping. The pictures finished, he caused them to be carefully conveyed to the office, and then, sitting down, spent many hours in composing the following letter, to be sent to Tien, accompanying a copy of the printed leaves wherein the story and his drawing should appear:

"When the light has for a period been hidden from a person, it is no uncommon thing for him to be struck blind on gazing at the sun; therefore, if the sublime Tien values the eyes of Kin Yen, let her hide herself behind a gauze screen on his approach.

"The trembling words of Tien have sunk deep into the inside of Kin Yen and become part of his being. Never again can he depict persons of the quality and in the position he was wont to do.

"With this he sends his latest efforts. In each case he conceives his drawings to be the pictures of the written words; in the noble Tien's case it is undoubtedly so, in his own he aspires to it. Doubtless the unobtrusive Tien would make no claim to the character and manner of behaving of the one in the story, yet Kin Yen confidently asserts that she is to the other as the glove is to the hand, and he is filled with the most intelligent delight at being able to exhibit her in her true robes, by which she will be known to all who see her, in spite of her dignified protests. Kin Yen hopes; he will come this evening after sunset."

The week which passed between the finishing of the pictures and the appearance of the eminent printed leaves containing them was the longest in this near-sighted person's ill-spent life. But at length the day arrived, and going with exceedingly mean haste to the place of sale, he purchased a copy and sent it, together with the letter of his honourable intention, on which he had bestowed so much care, to Tien.

Not till then did it occur to this inconsiderable one that the impetuousness of his action was ill-judged; for might it not be that the pictures were evilly-printed, or that the delicate and fragrant words painting the character of the one who now bore the features of Tien had undergone som

To satisfy himself, scarce as taels had become with him, he purchased another copy.

There are many exalted sayings of the wise and venerable Confucious constructed so as to be of service and consolation in moments of strong mental distress. These for the greater part recommend tranquillity of mind, a complete abnegation of the human passions and the like behaviour. The person who is here endeavouring to bring this badly-constructed account of his dishonourable career to a close pondered these for some moments after twice glancing through the matter in the printed leaves, and then, finding the faculties of speech and movement restored to him, procured a two-edged knife of

distinguished brilliance and went forth to call upon the one who sits in an easy-chair.

"Behold," said the lesser one, insidiously stepping in between this person an the inner door, "my intellectual and all-knowing chief is not here to-day. May his entirely insufficient substitute offer words of congratulation to the inspired Kin Yen on his effective and striking pictures in this week's issue?"

"His altogether insufficient substitute," answered this person, with difficulty mastering his great rage, "may and shall offer words of explanation to the inspired Kin Yen, setting forth the reason of his pictures being used, not with the high-minded story of the elegant Tong-king for which they were executed, but accompanying exceedingly base, foolish, and ungrammatical words written by Klan-hi, the Peking remover of gravity— words which will evermore brand the dew-like Tien as a person of light speech and no refinement"; and in his agony this person struck the lacquered table several times with his elegant knife.

"O Kin Yen," exclaimed the lesser one, "this matter rests not here. It is a thing beyond the sphere of the individual who is addressing you. All he can tell is that the graceful Tong-king withdrew his exceedingly tedious story for some reason at the final moment, and as your eminent drawings had been paid for, my chief of the inner office decided to use them with this story of Klan-hi. But surely it cannot be that there is aught in the story to displease your illustrious personality?"

"Judge for yourself," this person said, "first understanding that the two immaculate characters figuring as the personages of the narrative are exact copies of this dishonoured person himself and of the willowy Tien, daughter of the vastly rich Pe-li-Chen, whom he was hopeful of marrying."

Selecting one of the least offensive of the passages in the work, this unhappy person read the following immature and inelegant words:

"This well-satisfied writer of printed leaves had a highly-distinguished time last night. After Chow had departed to see about food, and the junk had been fastened up at the lock of Kilung, on the Yang-tse-Kiang, he and the round-bodied Shang were journeying along the narrow path by the river-side when the right leg of the graceful and popular person who is narrating these events disappeared into the river. Suffering no apprehension in the dark, but that the vanishing limb was the left leg of Shang, this intelligent writer allowed his impassiveness to melt away to an exaggerated degree; but at that moment the circumstance became plain to the round-bodied Shang, who was in consequence very grossly amused at the mishap and misapprehension of your good lord, the writer, at the same time pointing out the matter as it really was. Then it chanced that there came by one of the maidens who carry tea and jest for small sums of money to the sitters at the little tables with round white tops,

at which this remarkable person, the confidant of many mandarins, ever desirous of displaying his priceless power of removing gravity, said to her:

"'How much of gladness, Ning-Ning? By the Sacred Serpent this is plainly your night out.'

"Perceiving the true facts of the predicament of this commendable writer, she replied:

"'Suffer not your illustrious pigtail to be removed, venerable Wang; for in this maiden's estimation it is indeed your night in.'

"There are times when this valued person wonders whether his method of removing gravity be in reality very antique or quite new. On such occasions the world, with all its schools, and those who interfere in the concerns of others, continues to revolve around him. The wondrous sky-lanterns come out silently two by two like to the crystallized music of stringed woods. Then, in the mystery of no-noise, his head becomes greatly enlarged with celestial and highly-profound thoughts; his groping hand seems to touch matter which may be written out in his impressive style and sold to those who print leaves, and he goes home to write out such."

When this person looked up after reading, with tears of shame in his eyes, he perceived that the lesser one had cautiously disappeared. Therefore, being unable to gain admittance to the inner office, he returned to his home.

Here the remark of the omniscient Tai Loo again fixes itself upon the attention. No sooner had this incapable person reached his house than he became aware that a parcel had arrived for him from the still adorable Tien. Retiring to a distance from it, he opened the accompanying letter and read:

"When a virtuous maiden has been made the victim of a heartless jest or a piece of coarse stupidity at a person's hands, it is no uncommon thing for him to be struck blind on meeting her father. Therefore, if the degraded and evil-minded Kin Yen values his eyes, ears, nose, pigtail, even his dishonourable breath, let him hide himself behind a fortified wall at Pe-li-Chen's approach.

"With this Tien returns everything she has ever accepted from Kin Yen. She even includes the brace of puppies which she received anonymously about a month ago, and which she did not eat, but kept for reasons of her own—reasons entirely unconnected with the vapid and exceedingly conceited Kin Yen."

As though this letter, and the puppies of which this person now heard for the first time, making him aware of the existence of a rival lover, were not enough, there almost immediately arrived a letter from Tien's father:

"This person has taken the advice of those skilled in extorting money by means of law forms, and he finds that Kin Yen has been guilty of a grave and highly expensive act. This is increased by the fact that Tien had conveyed his

seemingly distinguished intentions to all her friends, before whom she now stands in an exceedingly ungraceful attitude. The machinery for depriving Kin Yen of all the necessaries of existence shall be put into operation at once."

At this point, the person who is now concluding his obscure and commonplace history, having spent his last piece of money on joss-sticks and incense-paper, and being convinced of the presence of the spirits of his ancestors, is inspired to make the following prophecies: That Tieng Lin, who imposed upon him in the matter of picture-making, shall come to a sudden end, accompanied by great internal pains, after suffering extreme poverty; that the one who sits in an easy-chair, together with his lesser one and all who make stories for them, shall, while sailing to a rice feast during the Festival of Flowers, be precipitated into the water and slowly devoured by sea monsters, Klan-hi in particular being tortured in the process; that Pel-li-Chen, the father of Tien, shall be seized with the dancing sickness when in the presence of the august Emperor, and being in consequence suspected of treachery, shall, to prove the truth of his denials, be submitted to the tests of boiling tar, red-hot swords, and of being dropped from a great height on to the Sacred Stone of Goodness and Badness, in each of which he shall fail to convince his judges or to establish his innocence, to the amusement of all beholders.

These are the true words of Kin Yen, the picture-maker, who, having unweighed his mind and exposed the avaricious villainy of certain persons, is now retiring by night to a very select and hidden spot in the Khingan Mountains.

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12: Old Ben Alibi

Irvin S. Cobb

1876-1944

Cosmopolitan, Sep 1922

IF BEN ALI CRISP, of *The Daily Star*, better known among enemies as Old Ben Alibi, had not been about the smartest city editor on the hemisphere he would have made a great detective. Probably it isn't going too far to say he might have made the great detective of his generation; one whose name would live on afterwards, bracketed with the names of McPartland and Pinkerton, Byrnes and Burns, and whose work, by lovers of the comparative, would have been likened to the fictional achievements of Sherlock Holmes and Hawkshaw and Nick Carter.

Those in place to know the facts conceded to him an indubitable genius in this direction. Police Commissioner Dudley did, for one. District Attorney Salmon did, for another. And neither Salmon nor Dudley liked a hair in Crisp's head. However, this prejudice of theirs in no wise distinguished them as persons holding to a unique view. Of those who did not like a hair in that grizzled head there was, as you might say, one for every hair. To go about Park Row publicly disliking Crisp merely was expressing a common sentiment.

Still, at that, and even so, the estimation in which the members of his own staff and the members of other staffs held him had nothing to do with the special gift which had been given Ben Ali. Call it intuition, call it a flair for deduction and elimination, call it a sublimated news sense, call it an apt instinct for reaching a conclusion by processes of addition and subtraction. Call it whatsoever you please. Whatever it was, he had it and there was no denying he had it. He'd proved it more times than several.

For instance, mark that time away back yonder when Crisp had been star man on the old Intelligencer. The Intelligencer has been a memory and a shelf-load of mildewed files these twenty-odd years, but the recollection of Crisp's work on the Starbuck kidnaping abides as a green spot in the minds of many unofficial historians.

At one o'clock one morning he limped into the Intelligencer shop with a bundle on his arm and a crumple of scribbled sheets of scratch pad in his hand. He was streaked with coal soot and smeary with brick dust and one wrist dripped blood where broken glass had nicked it. Tradition records how he traveled the length of the city room till he came to the far end where old Walrus Clarkson sat on the night desk getting ready to put the late mail edition to bed. He halted and Clarkson looked up at him from under his green eye-shade, and there befell a little pause while all others present stared at the pair of them.

Crisp loved the dramatic and the spectacular; all good newspaper men do. He prolonged the stage wait, noticeably. Then:

"Boss," he said, "here's the story of the missing Starbuck baby."

And laid down his scrambled wad of copy in front of Clarkson.

"And here's the Starbuck baby."

And put the bundle down on the desk alongside the copy.

Then there was the time he proved that the Prospect Heights murder over in Brooklyn was no murder at all, but a suicide devised to seem a murder; proved it with the help of a fox terrier and on the testimony of the said fox terrier. And the time when he set out, with nothing better to start off on than a strip of red oilcloth and an overcoat button, and after six weeks of single-handed delving dug up the evidence which sent a dishwasher to the chair and a midwife to prison for life; that was the Garfunkel trunk mystery, so called. There was the famous Rossiter case up in Westchester. Unraveling it was perhaps Crisp's greatest coup of all and the tale of it makes a tale which should be told, but not now. And there was the time he rigged the trap for Tappan, the cracked dynamiter who tried to blow Fergus Hite into small, untidy particles— and came almighty near succeeding, too. It is with this last named matter that we deal here. It is chosen chiefly for the reason that it came to pass after Wendover had founded the *Daily Star* and had lured Crisp in from the outside to be its city editor.

The Fergus Hite story started off with a bang— literally. It was one of those infrequent bangs which are heard round the world.

As may be recalled, old Mr. Hite, at the time of the attempt upon his life, was Wall Street's outstanding figure as an independent operator. On the Stock Exchange and in the newspaper offices they called him Cheese-Paring Fergy. In sundry other places they called him by much worse names than that— miser, for example, and bloodsucker and oppressor of the poor. From pinched bellies spring bitter words and the old man's wheat corner, whereby the price of a loaf of bread had been boosted from five cents to nine, was a recent and a grievous memory in the public mind. Now then, encouraged by the success of that manipulation, he was reputed to be organizing a second combine with intent to control the milk supply of Manhattan Island.

Wherefore he figured scandalously on front pages and in editorial columns and the paragraphers sped barbed and libelous darts into his epidermis. Mighty little he cared for that! So long as the cash rolled in it was all one to old Fergus. But this publicity, this gush of printer's ink, served a purpose which came very near being his mortal undoing. Before anyone who could read fair print, it set up a picture of his personality, his habits, the way he lived, the way he ran his office.

For example, the papers had told, not once but often, how he never threw away anything which by a stretching of the most frugal imagination might be regarded as having the slightest possible value; how he saved strings and twine and waste paper and old cigar boxes and empty medicine vials and stray corks and pins and all. They had described how he never trusted anyone to open and read his private mail but opened it all himself and, if there were letters of importance, personally answered them, with his long, shriveled fingers pecking out the words on the keys of a rattletrap of a second-hand typewriter which he had picked up somewhere at a rare bargain price; and then, according to some mysterious filing system of his own, stored the correspondence away in lock-up wooden packing cases.

So much for that; it is told because it has a bearing. One morning in the spring of the year old Fergus sat over his mail in the inner room of the dingy two room suite he occupied on the top floor of the Hite Building in Broad Street, four doors off Wall. He might have had his choice of any of the floors of the Hite Building. He owned it. But he chose to rent out its choicer parts. Snug quarters up under the roof suited him. He was an early riser. He was at his desk at an hour when most Wall Street men were chipping the breakfast egg. It was eight-forty-five, about, when his man, Darrow, came in to tell him he was wanted on the telephone by Mrs. Hite. He had no desk telephone; that would be an expensive and utterly unnecessary luxury, seeing there was a perfectly dependable wall phone in the front room.

Darrow was another of his pet economies. In almost any other operator's office Darrow would have been what is called a confidential clerk or a managing clerk. But Mr. Hite, you see, never gave his confidences to anyone; and as for managing the more intimate affairs of his business, he attended to all that himself. Darrow was a sort of clerical man of all work, a middle-aged shabby chore boy, obedient but dull.

As the old man got up from where he sat, he tapped with his fingers a package which lay upon his desk. It was an oblong package, rectangular in shape, measuring about twelve inches the long way and perhaps five inches across. It looked as though it might contain a box or a carton. It was wrapped and double-wrapped in heavy manila paper. Mr. Hite already had removed the outer wrapping and at the moment of Darrow's intrusion was engaged in trying to free the stout string which bound the inner layer of paper. Afterwards, with that faculty of his for minute detail, he was able to state that one end of this cord was fast under a turned-in fold of the paper as though, by chance, the sender had let it twist inside the parcel proper and then, unwittingly, had fitted the top on it.

"Here, Darrow," he said, "finish undoing this package. I'll be back in a minute."

He had no need to warn Darrow not to cut the cord and not to tear the paper and, above all, not to open the enclosure itself when he had released it from its wrappings. Darrow had been with Hite a long time; his sense of curiosity was schooled to an ordered restraint, which was one reason why he held his job— that, coupled with the still better reason that he worked for small pay. In suffering him to handle any mail at all his employer departed from an established rule. Darrow might safely be trusted not to tamper with office precedents on an independent account.

Hite went out of the room closing the door behind him. Darrow, presumably, took the partly undone parcel in his hands and, finding the string binding already somewhat loosened, cast it off and then gave a sharp tug at the imprisoned length, caught under the sliding wooden lid. This is what must have happened. Experts from Headquarters subsequently were able to reconstruct the action substantially as it must have occurred.

At eight-forty-seven, or thereabouts, came an explosion which shook the Hite Building from its gables to its basement. Simultaneously smoke gushed through the shattered sashes of a top floor window siding upon a narrow court toward Wall Street. Those in the building felt the jar of the shock; persons passing along the sidewalk, including a patrolman, heard the crash and some of them saw the sudden pouring of yellowish smoke from the blown-out window frame. It was the patrolman who led the hunt for the source and cause of the explosion. He ran up the stair flights, floor by floor, with a constantly growing queue of startled civilians tailing at his heels, until he came to the top story.

Wisps of smoke of a most curious and unwholesome smell crept through the jambs of a door which bore on a lettered tin sign, "F. Hite, Investments." There was no sound of life within, nor any answer to the policeman's knock. He thrust open the door and entered, coughing because of the smoke and the strange reek, and the more hardy among those at his back came scrooging in behind him. Mr. Hite, unhurt but in a dumb palsy of fear, was face downward on the floor. Power of speech did not return to him for some minutes thereafter; he was conscious, though. He pointed a lean finger that quivered toward the inner room, making little choked whimpering noises down in his throat.

In there, where the unsavory fumes were thicker, they found Darrow against a side wall, with both arms blown off at the elbows and his chest all caved in. His face was a blur of mutilation; he must have died instantly. The desk was wrecked, its flat top ripped to bits and its sides sprung. Strangely enough, the rest of the meager fittings had suffered no serious hurt. Burst window panes and scars in the wall where flying metal scrappage had struck— these about finished out the tally of damage.

Now, ninety-nine times out of a hundred, the police investigation into this tragedy would have assumed at the outset a two-way angle. Lieutenant Hughey

Fay, the Headquarters specialist in explosives, would have set about gathering up the fragments of the devilish thing that had killed Darrow and rebuilding them into a semblance of their original shape with a view, if possible, to identifying the device as the characteristic handicraft of some particular anarchist or group of anarchists. And while he was doing this the Detective Bureau would be seining the back eddies of the island, West Side, East Side and Little Italy, uptown, for all avowed or suspect advocates of the theory of achieving economic reforms by force. "Drag Net Out for Hite B'ldg Dynamite Assassin"— this probably would have been Ben Ali's choice for his seven column top line; or possibly it might have been "Round-up of Red Radicals Follows Broad St. Bomb Outrage." He loved the alliteration in a scream head.

But this was the hundredth case, and for once the police found their work simplified; that is to say, their work, on the face of it, seemed simple enough at the outset. Instead of routing out and chasing down a whole shoal of the known enemies of capitalistic society and then, by the crudely effective methods of the third degree, endeavoring to fix color of presumptive guilt upon this man or that woman, they had merely to find one given person. When they found him they could take their ease; the rest of it would be a job for the District Attorney's office. Before Darrow's body was stiff they knew their man's name and were looking for him and the scent seemed fresh and hot and Central Office was in a free sweat of anticipatory joy. They got the name from old Fergus. It was almost the first thing they did get from him after he regained his faculties for sane utterance.

First, though, they had to nurse him back to the point where he could think and speak coherently. They had to stand over him and chafe his hands and give him stimulants and assure him, times past counting, that there was no more danger, that he was quite safe.

So it took time to bring him round; it took the better part of a precious half hour. Here was a quiet old gentleman, one well on past seventy, concerned solely with his own business and asking only to be let alone, who'd had a shaving close call from a violent and a most distressing end. Merely a chance coincidence, a hairline deviation from his daily routine, had saved him. Likewise, although probably none present discerned it. he had another secret and poignant concern. It was not so much for Darrow's death that he sorrowed inwardly. Even at the wages he paid, a suitable successor to Darrow might easily be found. But a forty dollar desk practically had been demolished and, when all is said and done, a forty dollar desk is a forty dollar desk. He came very near to collapsing all over again when an ambulance surgeon and a policeman carried him into his inner room and he beheld the state of it. He had not wished to go in there at all, but it was necessary that he should go in order that he might find the letter for them.

The letter, now, was almost the first thing he had spoken of after his fear-addled mind began rationally to function. It had come to him on the day before, he remembered. According to his custom, he had filed it away in one of his wooden storage chests.

It was a short letter, brisk and businesslike and, excepting for the signature, done on a typewriter. Its author began by saying he had read in the daily press that Mr. Hite had underway an amalgamation of the principal companies of the local dairy industry. Assuming this to be a correct statement, he assumed also that Mr. Hite would be interested in a new style of milk container which he, the writer, had devised and perfected and upon which he expected shortly to ask a patent. This container was intended for use in retail deliveries. It was light and dependable; it was leak-proof and it was sanitary. Above all, it was cheap— could be manufactured at very small cost and was not easily broken. The word "cheap" was made in capitals and heavily underlined; plainly the sender had divined the surest way of interesting the recipient.

The second and concluding paragraph set forth that within forty-eight hours Mr. Hite would receive by mail, properly boxed, a specimen of the invention. His personal examination of the sample was invited with a view to negotiations for the exclusive use of this handy and economical little article— "economical" also capped and underscored— in the event of Mr. Hite's realizing, as he must, its merits and its undoubted superiority over any glass, composition or metal milk bottle now on the market. Then followed a name and an address.

The name was Axel Tappan. The address was an address in Great Jones Street. Mr. Hite was by now able to recall that the name Tappan likewise had been written in the upper left-hand corner of the package which had reached him this present morning.

No great amount of figuring was required. The name of the man already was familiar to thousands among New York millions: Axel Tappan, notorious crank inventor, American born, of mixed Dutch and Scandinavian breeding, designer of any number of mechanical devices, a genius whose brain had been clabbered by overmuch reading of anarchistic tracts and who, before that happened, publicly had been heard to voice a perpetual hate for all owners of swollen fortunes because one such, in times gone by, triggered him out of a patent car coupling device worth a lot of money. Who else but Axel Tappan, already on record among the listed believers in the curing of social and financial ills by smash and scatteration— who else but Axel Tappan would have been so likely to evolve this almost perfect plan for encompassing Fergus Hite's destruction and, on top of that, boldly to furnish in advance such sure evidence against himself?

If further proof of the identity of the murderer were needed— which it wasn't, it seemed— the remains of the bomb provided it, as the experts pointed out later that same day. This trick of sealing it in a perfectly innocent appearing

outer covering, with a common string apparently accidentally hitched under the box lid within, a string connecting with a coiled spring which on a sharp pull would bring a tiny hammer smartly down upon the cap of the bomb proper— they found bits of the hammer and scraps of the spring— was absolutely just such a trick as Axel Tappan might be expected to contrive.

Five minutes, say, after old man Hite's shaking forefinger had pointed out the letter where it lay atop a riffle of papers in one of his crude filing cabinets, things began to happen here and there and everywhere. Make it six minutes for good measure— two minutes for the policeman to read the letter and two minutes for him to fire a rapid volley of leading questions at Mr. Hite and the last two minutes for him to get Headquarters on the telephone. It was quick work, with more of the same to follow— a general alarm going out over the Central Office wires to every corner of the five boroughs, a patrol wagon load of reserves tearing off from the Mercer Street station bound for the address in Great Jones Street; and in the shops of all the evening papers the staffs throwing together the second batch of extras of that crowded morning. One crop had been on the streets fot half an hour or more, these telling in bulletin flashes of Fergus Hite's miraculous escape and of the shocking death of one of his employees. This second sowing would broadcast in sharp, staccato paragraphs the brief summary of this newest and most startling denouement. Some of the papers called it startling, some called it sensational; some called it both sensational and startling, which undoubtedly it was.

That was a day for extras. They trod upon one another's tails coming off the presses, as the fresh developments kept piling up and pyramiding. Mark how they did:

For one thing, the police did not catch Tappan. Neither that day nor the next day nor the day after did they catch him. For the matter of that, the police never did catch him. Here came the cops, clattering into Great Jones Street, spilling out the back end of their patrol wagon in a blue cascade and swarming into and around the specified house, which was an old residence converted into a rooming house.

Their man wasn't there. He had been there but he was gone. His late landlady supplied excited information as to the manner of his departure. All the early part of the morning he had been hanging about the street doorway; he seemed to be waiting for something, she thought. Then a news vender came into the street baying extras. Tappan had bought a paper from this person, had glanced at the front page, had crumpled the sheet into his pocket, had drawn his hat down over his face, had walked away, going eastward. That was half an hour, roughly, before the search party came. In view of everything, she hardly expected him back.

Other information the furnished room lady likewise furnished. Her vanished lodger had more than one biding place. He had three that she knew of. Sometimes he stayed in her house, sometimes in a loft building up on west Sixteenth Street, sometimes at an address across town somewhere on Second Avenue. Accounting for his absences, he had mentioned these places to her. She rather thought he might have yet other quarters, for he was sort of peculiar, Mr. Tappan was, although always quiet and orderly and minding his own business and paying every week in advance. And just to think— all this time he'd been plotting to kill up somebody and bring shame and scandal upon as decent, respectable, hard working a woman as ever was in this world! The question was, who could a lone widow woman trust? The answer was, simply nobody at all.

Only the four men that stayed behind to watch the premises in case the wanted man should venture back to the neighborhood heard the further chapters of the lady's Jeremiad of pessimistic outpourings. The others of the disappointed raiding squad had pressing and immediate business elsewhere. This also was true of the plainclothes men who by now were swarming in to join the chase. The call was urgent for them to go, straightway and swiftly, some to Sixteenth Street and some to Second Avenue and find those other two establishments of the vanished assassin.

There was no great trouble about finding either. In a narrow loft building on Sixteenth Street Tappan, using his own name, had a whole floor under lease. He'd had it for several years past; was one of the regular tenants. On Second Avenue, in a shabby flat-house masquerading as an apartment house because it had an elevator and an artificial palm in the front entry way, he had, some months before, rented a three room suite. The detectives broke in the door here; on Sixteenth Street the janitor, using his pass key, let them in when they showed their badges to him.

Immediately, the purposes of both places were revealed. The loft, evidently, was his workshop; the flat was his playhouse— his green room, rather— where latterly he had made up and rehearsed for sinister undertakings; this also was plainly to be seen. In the loft, ranged in glass cabinets, were working models of many completed inventions, some full sized, some in miniature. In drawers under the cases were neatly arranged the plans, the scale drawings, the patent office papers for each of these. There was a forge, a wood-turning lathe, a portable smelter, laboratory equipment, all manners of tools and implements, an array of delicate mechanisms for testing and welding and weighing and balancing. A jumble of unfinished parts, of things half done and then cast aside, cumbered the corners and filled odd jogs in the walls and made unsightly rubbish heaps on the floor. There were no recognizable explosives about, nor were any prime constituents out of which explosives might be mixed and made to be found in the cluttered place.

These, though, were in the Second Avenue rooms, in an abundance fit to blow up a regiment. Also, the official invaders came upon much else of interest— such objects, for instance, as crepe hair, camphor gum, grease paint, wigs and shells of false teeth so fashioned that they might be slipped into place over the wearer's real teeth, thereby changing the set of his lips and the lines of his mouth. A roomy closet, built out into the kitchen, housed a wardrobe ample to provide for a dozen masquerades, and all complete down to the shoes and the hat that matched with each change. There were canes, umbrellas, handbags and a litter of what actors would call personal props for character make-up. Drawing on this abundant store, its owner might go forth as a tired businessman, a panhandler, a book agent, a clergyman, a longshoreman. It was like the costume room, back stage, of a resident stock company's theater. No, there's a better simile— it was like a page out of an old-fashioned dime novel.

It made news, all this swiftly uncovered revelation of the triple role essayed through months and perhaps through years by this Axel Tappan. What gorgeous news it did make all through that happy day for evening papers!

But when night time came and the morning papers took over where the evening papers left off, the biggest possible piece of news still was lacking. Tappan had not been run to cover, nor been caught nor been killed. His whereabouts was unknown, was not even to be guessed at. The pursuit had been less than an hour behind him in Great Jones Street, less than forty minutes behind him in Second Avenue, where another tenant who knew him by sight but not by name had seen him hurrying through a hallway, apparently bound for outdoors, carrying in his arms a very large bundle which looked as though it might contain wearing apparel. This must have been about ten-thirty A.M., so the tenant witness told the police.

For sake of chronological exactness, make it exactly ten-thirty A.M. Right then and there the fugitive passed beyond the ken of recognizing eyes.

So much for the first day, which was a Tuesday. On Wednesday, in the forenoon, the fugitive himself supplied the chief development of the second day story. This voluntary act on his part was meat to Park Row but to Headquarters it was poison. For, through the mails to the City News Association, which served all the papers barring one or two, came a statement written by Axel Tappan and signed by Axel Tappan. There was evidence of its authenticity in the autograph, and further evidence in the shape and alignment of the typed matter. Comparison of these with the facsimile of the letter to Fergus Hite, which had appeared in all the papers by now, proved it.

The statement was not long, but it was, as the saying goes, pithy. The undersigned began by expressing regret that a poor wage slave— his own phrase— should have been sacrificed as a sort of vicarious substitute for the man whose life had been aimed at; still, in the working out of the battle for

communism there must be innocent victims as well as guilty ones. He had intended, he said to surrender of his own free will as soon as word reached him of the successful outcome of his prime design. The design having unfortunately mischanced, he had, on hearing of the failure of the plan, altered his intentions and now was minded to put in motion a single-handed campaign of extermination against divers conspicuous enemies of the masses in the community— an undertaking which he had been contemplating and planning for months past. He had put it aside because he felt the death of Fergus Hite might serve as an object lesson and a warning to his fellow extortionists of the capitalistic class. Now, as proof of his power, he would revive it and put it into execution.

He was at this writing in Manhattan Borough, so the statement ran. He meant to stay in Manhattan and to stay at large, too, going and coming as he pleased. He defied the officers of the law to lay hands on him until of his own accord he chose to surrender. That would be after his appointed work was accomplished. And his work was to be this:

By agencies which, on his professional word of honor as a scientist he guaranteed would not go askew, with forces which could not conceivably be combated by the chosen objects of his private warfare, he pledged himself to obliterate from a world they had infected for too long, certain men. He named them— Fergus Hite; Mannesmann, the international banker; Connors, the traction magnate; Dulaney, the coal king; Forbes, the head of the metals trust; and Spotswood, the millionaire publisher, all outstanding Wall Street figures. These six men might as well be setting their earthly houses in order. For them the handwriting was on the wall. Signed:

Yours for Vengeance

Axel Tappan

The postmark was that of the branch postoffice on west 102nd Street and the time showed six-ten o'clock of Tuesday night.

The latter circumstantial and indisputable detail was what especially galled the withers of the Police Department. Seeking to save his own face, the Commissioner professed to see in this a fact testifying to the efficiency of his force. True, the police had not as yet unearthed the assassin but, on the other hand, the city had been so closely ringed about with watchers, so closely guarded at ferry docks and railroad terminals, that the fugitive could not slip past the cordons. The public might expect satisfactory results before many hours had passed.

That was what he said. It was a voicing, though, of what he desired, not of what he knew. When he said this, Commissioner Dudley was merely sparring for time, shadow boxing with an elusive hope. For neither he nor any man of the

department had the faintest idea where Tappan was, still less the faintest idea of what the man might do next.

They lacked a photograph of him; the available descriptions merely composited him as a person of medium height, utterly commonplace in appearance, with no distinguishing marks excepting that in moments of stress or annoyance he involuntarily twitched his left eye.

And so through Wednesday and Thursday and on to the end of the week they delved and scanned and searched and super-searched; nursed theories that flopped, followed leads that ran into blind ends, built up elaborate structures of deduction which, having footless foundations, presently flattened of their own weight. They tracked every squint-eyed or twitchy-faced man who showed himself on the street. And out of it all nothing at all came. And while they and all the amateur detectives in town were doing thus and so, and while the rest of the town was in a free and pleasant perspiration of anticipated tragedy, old Ben Ali, down in the *Star* office, threw himself into the story up to his armpits. It was exactly seasoned and savored to his liking. It was gravy to his favorite dish, sop on his daily bread.

He rang all the changes on it. In the handling of it the *Star* led the afternoon field, as usually it did unless Crisp happened to be sick at home or off on a vacation. His star descriptive writer wrote semi-editorial stuff, girding [sic] at the authorities for their failure to get track of a fugitive so daring, so defiant and so dangerous. Little Lily Simmons, queen bee among the sob sisters, preached a sharp sermon on the inefficiency of men, even in the field of crime detection where always their sex had ruled, pointing out that where masculine powers of analysis had utterly failed, feminine intuition might yet succeed. Under her pen name of Nita Dare she wrote it, but Crisp furnished both the text and the doctrine. He filled a whole page on Friday with graphic accounts of the movements and behavior of the six distinguished citizens marked for removal on Tappan's death list, telling how Hite, already terribly nerve-shaken, had suffered a relapse, how Spotswood had run away to Europe and Connors to the mountains, how Mannesmann had gone into retirement behind locked doors in his mansion on Park Avenue, how Delaney, in a state of collapse, was under specialists' care and how that canny old Scot, Forbes, gamest of the group though he was, stirred abroad only with a hired retinue of hawk eyes and strong arms to protect him.

On Saturday, too, he scored a clean beat on the town by printing a second warning note from Tappan. It had been mailed direct to the *Star* and in it Tappan reiterated his dreadful pledge against the panic-stricken sextet of Wall Street notables and then, with a touch of added audacity, tendered his congratulations to the paper for its masterly handling of the story. He was reading all the papers regularly, he wrote, and the *Star*, in his opinion, had this

week proved itself far and away the livest of the lot. He himself conceded it. And who, all things considered, was a better judge?

But by the middle of the following week, ten days after Darrow's taking-off, the story in spite of artificial stimulation began noticeably to peter out. Then it was that Crisp came to the point which all through this narrative I, as the chronicler, have been striving to reach. He had a saying:

"Any fool can get the news when the news is there to get. It takes brains to produce news when it isn't there and make the reader swallow it and like it and beg for more. It's the difference between picking ripe plums off a limb and breeding a plum the way this fellow Burbank does. And that's a favorite little trick of mine when a story begins to go sour."

He was like that. There was no false modesty about old Ben Ali. So far as the public was concerned he was perfectly willing that his personality should be buried in the paper he served. As a city editor his coups were anonymously recorded always, as it is proper that a city editor's coups should be. But behind the scenes, patting himself on the back over this or that of his journalistic achievements was his favorite indoor sport.

In this instance, feeling the story turning rancid under his fingers, he began Burbanking. He began when he summoned to him for private conference Sheridan, the best of his leg men. Sheridan had been covering various ends of the assignment.

"Sherry," he started off, "this is strictly between us— under your hat. I've got a little hen on in this Tappan case. If the stunt works out the Star gets the credit. If it flops nobody here in the office except the two of us need be any the wiser. See?"

"Yes sir," said Sheridan, "I get you."

"Good. Now then, what's your own private inside dope on this fellow— a nut, isn't he?"

"Nutty as a fruit cake, the way I figure him," said Sheridan. "Why, boss, just look at the way he's acted from the start. If ever there was a guy who was plumb different from everybody else——"

"I thought so," broke in Crisp. "You're no fool, Sherry. In some respects you're a pretty wise kid. But I see you're laboring under the same delusion that all the other newspaper men on the story and all the cops and everybody in the District Attorney's office are laboring under. You figure because the man is different in some respects from the run of human beings that he's different in every possible respect. What none of you seem to remember is this: Human nature is the same the world over. Merely because a human being has twisted notions about the big things of life, it's no sign that in certain cardinal elemental contingencies he won't behave exactly as the ordinary man would under similar circumstances. All of us are crazy in spots, I take it. Mighty few of us are crazy all

over, all the time. Admitting Tappan to be a bug in most respects, it's still a cinch he has his ordinary everyday side, too— pride, vanity, ambition, curiosity, cupidity, such traits as you have and I have and everybody we know has."

"All right, sir," said Sheridan. "for the sake of argument I'll admit you're right. But even so, what does that get us?"

"It may get us a lot before we're done," said Crisp. "Now then, Sherry, listen here. If you'd lost something you valued— a watch or a dog or a younger brother— and you couldn't find it, by looking on your own hook, what's the next thing you'd do?"

"Advertise," answered the reporter.

"Exactly," said Crisp. "Well, that's what I'm going to do in this case— advertise for Tappan."

"Do you expect him to answer your advertisement?" asked Sheridan incredulously.

"I do— and in person," said Crisp. "He will, if the ad is played up the right way. Never mind that part now, though. What I'm interested in just at present is knowing something of the situation with regards to that place of Tappan's uptown. I don't mean the dump in Second Avenue— I mean that layout of his in Sixteenth Street."

"Well, it's some layout," stated Sheridan. "Why, boss, there didn't seem to be any mechanical line, scarcely, that he hadn't dabbled in at one time or another. You ought to see that line of cabinets he kept the models and patterns of his inventions in— sixty of them in all and ranging all the way from a stabilizer to keep steamships from rolling to a thingamajig for fastening women's dresses up the back and a new fangled carpet sweeper."

"Yes?" said Crisp, with a touch of the dry scorn for lesser minds which was part of him. "I read the papers myself, Sherry— it's a part of my business. But you phoned in here one day last week that the police said there was no evidence to show he'd ever made any effort to put most of his inventions on the market. What I want to know is just which of his inventions have been manufactured and marketed and just which ones have not been. Do you know, by any chance?"

"Yes, I do," stated Sheridan, in the manner of a good reporter who overlooks no detail however trivial or however irrelevant to the main issue. "I think I can call off most of them, offhand."

"Fine!" commended his superior. "That's what I want to hear."

Sheridan made ready, aimed and fired off a list of things. Crisp halted him before he was half through.

"That's enough," he said. "Here's the next point: The Central Office has got the place under guard, naturally?"

"Sure— uniformed men on duty up there, day and night."

"It would know enough to do that," stated Crisp. "Do you happen to know any of these men personally?"

"Some of them— yes," said Sheridan. "They work in shifts, of course— two at a time. Anyway, if I don't know them they know me; they've all seen me up there one time or another."

"They'd all be strangers to me— it's been years since I was out on an assignment," said Crisp apparently apropos of nothing at all. "One more thing, Sherry— is there much danger that any reporter for any other paper in town might be hanging about who'd recognize me if he saw me up there?"

"Not much chance," said Sheridan; "that end of the story is pretty well frazzled out. But say, what's the big idea, chief? Thinking of running up there to give Tappan's shop the once-over yourself?"

"That's the identical idea," said Crisp, in his most matter of fact tone. It was as though he were regularly in the habit of nosing the cold spoor of a staled news story.

He pivoted about in his swing chair and hailed the head copy boy who loafed on a seat below the little platform where Crisp overlooked the city room.

"Issy, run into the art room and get me a bunch of drawing materials— a couple of drawing pencils and three or four pieces of drawing board— enough to make a show. And tell Mr. Faunot or whoever's in charge to borrow a police card off of one of the artists— bring that along with you, too." Issy jumped to obey. Crisp faced the astonished Sheridan again. "Sherry, what sort of a sketch artist do you think I'd pass for? I'll get by, won't I?" He let one eyelid droop in a half wink. Sheridan swore afterwards there was a suspicion of a twinkle in the eye behind the lid. But the rest of the staff put this down as a fiction, born of Sheridan's love of exaggeration. They said the Old Man's eyes hadn't twinkled for so long they must have forgotten how. He stood up.

"Oh, Flynn!" he called to the head copy reader. "Sit in here on the desk for me, will you? I'm going uptown for a couple of hours or so— on a little private business … Come on with me, Sheridan."

AS A MATTER OF FACT he was back at the *Star* building in less than two hours. On his way upstairs to the editorial rooms he stopped by the Advertising on the main floor. Conklin, the assistant advertising manager, lifted his eyebrows in surprise when he saw who it was that stood in the door of his room. Like most men who work on the news side of a daily paper, Crisp had small use personally for the business office, its personnel or its performances. Social visits by him downstairs were rare events.

"Hello, Conk," he said. "Loafing as usual, I see. Well, rouse up and tell me something. Tell me what former active newspaper men are handling publicity for some of the bigger department stores. I don't mean reformed solicitors out

of some business office or ex-circulation boosters— I mean honest-to-God newspaper men— ex-reporters who'd know a good press agent stunt when they saw it. Hold on— don't give me the names of all of 'em. Just tell me which one of the whole lot is the smartest of the whole lot."

"Seabright, I'd say," answered Conklin; "used to be assistant make-up man on the Clarion. He's with Strassmer Brothers."

"Sufficient— I remember him in the old days," said Crisp. "Get him on the wire for me, will you?— you know him personally I suppose— and ask him to run down here to see me between now and three o'clock this afternoon. Tell him there's a chance for his shop to get some good free publicity— that ought to fetch him."

Then he went on upstairs to his own domain leaving Conklin burning with a high fever of unslaked curiosity. But before relieving Flynn on the city desk he sat down in one of the battery of telephone booths over against the side wall and told Jessie, the operator on the *Star's* exchange switchboard, to get for him a certain number. Shortly thereafter head office boy Issy decided his duties required him to slip into an adjoining booth. He cocked a keen ear close up to the dividing wooden partition and heard the concluding utterances of his boss over the wire.

"You understand? Six of your best operatives— five men and one woman— to report to me personally tomorrow morning for instructions, and don't forget that the woman must be young and good looking and smart as a whip. That's all— no, hold on a bit; there's one thing more I'd almost forgotten; important, too. Tell them not to come to the Star office— have them all report to me at nine o'clock in my rooms at the Epworth apartment on Seventy-third Street just off Broadway. I'll talk to them there where there'll be no chance for a leak. That'll be all— good by."

For the remainder of the work day Issy was inwardly consumed by the same febrile fires which afflicted Conklin down in the Advertising.

IF THE APPROACH to the climax of this narrative has been prolonged and drawn out, the climax itself was briefened and may briefly be summed up, thus justifying the law of averages and compensations. Perhaps it would be better to have it, as nearly as may be, in the words of the man responsible for it.

This is Ben Ali Crisp enthroned at his desk in the *Star's* city room, speaking to a worshipful audience. Behind his back his men may call him slave driver and czar, but at this moment— which is late on Tuesday afternoon after the final sporting extra has gone to press— they give him the meed of an unqualified admiration for the thing he has done, which is a thing that has brought glory to the *Star* and, by indirection, to them and to all and sundry that serve the *Star*. There is a happy gleam in his puckered, cold eye, also exultation in his tone as

he tells them certain details which, in part at least, have been to this group unrevealed until now:

"Yep, I had the notion in the back part of my head almost from the beginning. But I chose to hold back on it and give old Dudley up at Headquarters enough rope to hang himself with.

"I waited, you see, until the Commissioner had quit promising and begun apologizing. That seemed to me to be the psychological moment, as you rewrite men are so fond of saying. So I had Sheridan take me up there to Tappan's workshop, I pretending to be a staff artist coming to make sketches, and while he stalled for me, keeping those two dumb cops engaged at one end of the loft, I was busy at the other end. It didn't take me five minutes to pick out which one of Tappan's working models I wanted to swipe. I'd decided in advance it probably would be either his patent carpet sweeper or his patent can opener, because it had to be something suitable for show window demonstration. See? But the can opener was the thing I decided on— being small and compact and easy to carry. So I just slid it into my coat pocket, along with the plans and specifications for it, and then a little while after that, when I'd gone through the motions of making a couple of pictures, I gave Sherry the high sign and we came on away. It was like taking candy from a baby."

"And the can opener turned the trick, didn't it?" puts in one of the copy readers.

"No, it didn't turn the trick, either," says Crisp. "It helped, of course, but at that, there were half a dozen other inventions in the lot which might have served— any one of them— in a pinch. What really did the trick was that full page ad that we ran three days hand running in all our editions and then stuck into the Sunday edition.

"I wrote that ad myself— sat up nearly all of last Wednesday night at my apartment getting it blocked out to suit me. And it was a good job if I do say it. Here, give it a close look— if all of you haven't already done so."

He spreads out before them a sheet ripped from the Sunday edition. His fingers play over it lovingly, as a painter's fingers might play over one of his masterpieces.

"See here, now— on the surface it's just an ordinary display ad for the 'Little Giant Improved Automatic Can Opener'— that's the name I gave it myself— 'A New Boon to Housewives and Cooks— Warranted to Open Any Tin or Other Light Metal Receptacle— Operates Instantly, Easily and Neatly— A Child Can Use It'— and so forth and so on. 'Beginning Monday next'— that's yesterday— 'it will be demonstrated daily, from ten to four, in the largest show window of Strassmer Brothers' department store on Twenty-third Street, and immediately thereafter is to be put on sale by this firm as sole agents for the manufacturers.'

And then down here in this box, in smaller type, is a full and complete description of the Little Giant. And that's all there is to it— on the surface.

"Innocent looking enough, you'd say, wouldn't you? On the face of it, it's just what it seems to be— a bona-fide boost for a patent kitchen utensil, paid for by a concern which has a lot of faith in the new wrinkle it's putting out— that's all, eh? The average reader is going to figure it out to be just that. But it's not meant for the average reader— it's meant to nail the attention of just one man— Axel Tappan, Esquire.

"Look here at the jokers concealed in it. It's Tappan's own invention— this half-tone inset proves that and the description of it proves it all over again in another place. He'd been reading the papers all along— we know that already— and the chances are he'll read this ad. If he misses it the first insertion or the second it's almost as good as an open and shut cinch that he'll run across it on Saturday or Sunday. Sooner or later it's bound to catch his eye— he being naturally interested in can openers, having invented one himself. And in half a minute after he sees the spread, he realizes that it's his own invention or else its twin brother, that's being advertised here, a full page at a clip. And he's bound to conclude one of two things— either that somebody has bodily stolen his can opener since he ducked out and left his workshop in the hands of the police and is now about to pirate the thing on a big scale or, what's not so likely, that some other inventor has evolved an original style of can opener that's an exact duplicate of his. The thing just naturally can't go wrong— he's hooked from that moment.

"Anyway that's what I figure on. So, all day Sunday, with the curtains drawn, we're rigging up our stage in Strassmer's biggest front show window and drilling our actors. The head window dresser is there along with Seabright, the firm's publicity man. I'm there. My specially engaged troupe, direct from the M. J. Brock private detective agency, are there. We trick out that show window with shelves and tables and cases of canned goods and ice boxes and things so as to make it look like a model pantry. And then I put the full strength of the company through a series of dress rehearsals.

"So, Monday morning— that's yesterday— we're ready to go; and at ten o'clock we do go. Brock's smartest woman operator— smart and good looking, too— in the get-up of a maid servant, is back of that big sheet of plate glass demonstrating the Little Giant on cans of tomatoes and out of the corner of her eye watching the crowds that gather outside the window. If you've never tested it you'd be surprised to see how clear your vision is when you're back in under an overhang looking out through a piece of fine clear glass toward people or objects pressing close up against the other side of the pane in the open. I don't know whether it actually magnifies but I do know that with the naked eye you

can detect things that you'd probably overlook altogether at the same distance if the glass wasn't there between you and them.

"Well, the girl is there, as I tell you, with her weather eye peeled. Two of Brock's best men are hidden in some false work back of the faked pantry wall, with their eyes glued to peep holes, helping her watch. There's a floor walker hanging about the main entrance to the store right alongside the show window and there's a carriage starter at the edge of the pavement twenty feet away and out in the street there's a White Wings killing time— all three of them hired hands from Brock's staff in proper make-up. What with one thing and another, including a couple of reporters standing by in the offing, we've put on quite a production.

"I'm banking the whole show on human nature. It's human nature for a man or a woman— any man or any woman— no matter how big a hurry they're in, to stop and watch a pretty girl demonstrating any thingamajig or other in a store window. And it's human nature manifolded for a person who's especially and personally interested in the article that's being demonstrated to give it some earnest and sincere attention. As for Tappan— well, I tell myself that if he's read our decoy ad and if, with all his crazy crotchets, he's got one single solitary normal human impulse left in his system he'll be there in the flesh, sooner or later but probably sooner, and unless he's got a supernatural gift for repressing his feelings he'll give himself away, too.

"Well, that'll be about all, I guess. Even such of you as haven't been working on any angle of the story today know the rest of it yourselves. You saw the flash in the first extra we put out and you've seen the full story in all the regular editions after that."

"Go on please, boss," says Whitney of the sports desk. "I just got in a little while ago and missed the big doings. I'd like to hear the whole of the inside dope, the way you tell it."

"Well, there's not much more to tell," says Crisp. "Our man doesn't show up yesterday, but he does show up this morning. He's beautifully made up as a crippled street beggar— wig, ragged clothes a mile too big for him, toes sticking out of his shoes, his left arm strapped down to his side under his dirty shirt, a pair of smoked glasses on his nose and a "gat" on his hip. But when he pokes his nose up against that show window and sees his own little pet can opener in operation that left eye of his starts twitching and jerking as if he had St. Vitus's dance. The girl sees it— his glasses help to hide his eyes but the whole upper left side of his face is affected; she can't help seeing it. She isn't dead sure that it's our man, but at that she's pretty sure, and she tips the signal to the fellows back of the scene and they take the word to the three men outside and they all five begin to close in on the suspect, moving up in a casual sort of way but ready to jump him at the first quick move.

"Maybe he's organizing to break loose and get violent— nobody can say as to that— but he never gets the chance. Because Burkham— that's the big fellow who's playing the carriage starter's role— slips up close enough to him to see where the false hair of the wig joins the real hair at the temples and he sees that the imitation sunburn on the back of the ragged man's neck has rubbed off on his shirt collar. That's ample for Burkham. He just wraps both of those long arms of his around the stranger and in half a minute he's been rushed in off the street and frisked for his gun and rushed out by the rear delivery entrance of the Strassmer building and shoved into a closed cab that's been stationed there all along, in charge of Sheridan, and the cab has pulled out for Park Row, leaving a lot of people milling around in a high state of excitement, thinking they've seen a kidnaping pulled off in broad daylight on Twenty-third Street.

"Well, in a way of speaking, that's what they have seen. But, be that as it may, on his way down here in the cab, Tappan owns up to the detecs and to Sherry that he's Tappan— which is interesting but unnecessary— and when he gets here he spills his whole story, telling where he's been hiding and how he's fooled the cops and what his plans were for killing off that rich Wall Street bunch when he got round to it and all. And we hold him here until the *Star* is out with the exclusive story and then I send him on up to the Central Office with my personal compliments."

"A magnificent journalistic achievement, truly," says Lang, the chief editorial writer, who generally speaks as he writes— that is to say, sonorously and with impressive gravity; "and I congratulate you. Mr. Crisp, upon it. To serve the ends of justice, as you this day have served them, should be to us all a source of—"

"Ends of justice be hanged!" breaks in Crisp. "Any dub of a lawyer that Tappan hires to defend him can convince any other twelve dubs on a jury that the man is crazy. His trial will be a stroll through a courtroom into an insane asylum— that's all. I'm not concerned about the ends of justice. I wanted to show up Mr. Police Commissioner Dudley and likewise Mr. District Attorney Salmon, who's been swearing all along the man was sane and responsible, and I've done both. And, most of all, I wanted to put the *Star* across for the biggest beat in ten years— and that's done, too."

Speaking these last twenty words he drops his tone of vainglory and sinks his voice almost to a reverent key. And his men know that, involuntarily, he is practicing the only religion he has, bowing down and worshiping before the only deity he acknowledges— they know he is making oblation at the high altar of that club-footed, tangle-eyed, inky-fingered god of his called News.

———————

13: The Lottery Ticket

Harold Mercer (as by 'Hamer')

1882-1952

The Australian Woman's Mirror, 17 Jan 1933

"WAIT till we win the lottery!"

Mrs. Stoney issued that invitation with unfailing regularity every time trouble— invariably it was a financial trouble— presented itself. Sometimes I heard the younger and more innocent members of the Stoney family making the promise definite.

"We're going to win the lottery next week, see?" little Gladys— or it might be Tom— would say, evidently maintaining the pride of the family against the assault of a young companion who had turned hostile.

However impecunious the Stoneys were, there was always a lottery ticket to gild the future with hope. Of that impecuniosity I became aware from the moment I lifted the highly polished brass knocker and gave my first rat-tat on the door. It was the alliance of that polished knocker, a glossily blackened doorstep and a card in the window announcing a room to let that had drawn me to the door.

A whispering rustle came to me from inside, and shortly, as I waited, the door opened cautiously to reveal the freckled face of a girl of about eleven.

"Mum's out. Call again next week," said the child all in a burst.

"I called about the room," I said with a wave of my hand to the window.

"Oh, wait!" said the child and her face vanished. "Mum, it isn't the landlord. It's about the room," I heard a voice calling; and soon a pleasant matron with a replica of the child's face was smiling at me.

Perhaps I felt flattered at being taken for a landlord. The room was suitable in convenience and price, and, accepted into the bosom of the Stoney family, I became acquainted with more of its financial disabilities. The landlord incident was only an introduction.

There were occasions when, a knock having come to the door as I was preparing to descend the stairs, Mrs. Stoney would whisper to me, "Would you mind saying, Mr. Hamer, to whoever that might be, that I'm having a bath and I would be glad if he'd call next week."

On such an occasion Mrs. Stoney would prove herself a sport. She would lend artistic verisimilitude to the tale she had commissioned me to tell by turning the shower full on and giving me the moral support of much water-splashing.

There was always someone to be postponed in this fashion. If the landlord happened to be paid, or partly paid, there was the t.-p. man or the grocer's collector to be sent away with empty hands, or it might be the cash-order man.

The Stoneys' credit was good, for apparently they had lived for ages in the same house and their honesty was recognised; but their financial methods were as untidy as those of any Australian Treasurer.

"But we'll win something in the lottery one of these days," Mrs. Stoney would say happily, "and then everything will be all right."

She was quite candid about their financial difficulties, for in that hearty manner which was native to her I had been made one of the family directly I crossed the threshold. I had not been in the house for more than two days before, just after I had gone to my room on my return in the evening, a knock at my door introduced young Tom on an errand.

"Mum says would you mind letting her have a look at your evening paper if you're not using it. She wants to see if we've won the lottery," he said.

That was my introduction to the lottery enthusiasm. After that, as a natural thing, my evening paper became a sort of family possession on days of the drawings. Stoney himself, who departed for some work carrying a tin lunch-carrier sometimes during the day and sometimes later at night, would run a horny finger down the lists of numbers and give an occasional whoop of joy which would impart a thrill to the family. It always grouped itself near by on these sacred occasions.

"Here it is! A twenty-pound prize!"

Stoney would shout. "Four-two-three-five-one —that's our number, isn't it?"

There would be a flurry while the ticket was sought. It had always been placed somewhere "for safety," as Mrs. Stoney said, and when this excitement came it was difficult to remember the safe deposit. The ticket found in the tea-caddy would probably be one that had already disappointed the family hopes, and another back-number would be found in the knife-drawer.

"Go up to my bedroom and look under the carpet near the wardrobe, Hilda," Mrs. Stoney would say.

The ticket would arrive at last; it would probably be 42315. The family suspense would fade away in a sigh, and hope would be transferred to the next lottery.

They were a pleasantly happy if happy-go-lucky family, tied together with bonds of affection that were very appealing. If young Bert appeared with a cut lip and a blackened eye it was certain to be that he had been lured into a fight, not because of a love of it, but in pursuit of a duty— the protection of his young brother Tom from the bullying of some bigger boy. The whole family stood to each other like that.

The house had its drawbacks, certainly. The family itself lived mainly in the kitchen, but it had a sitting-room which was by way of being a mausoleum. The grotesquely enlarged photographs of the family's immediate ancestors hung on

the walls and stared woodenly at me on the few occasions when for quiet discussion on various family matters I was introduced to this holy of holies.

There were times when the mere knowledge that this family vault existed irritated me. So used had I become to it that one day when I entered with the just-published early edition I left the paper downstairs in the hands of young Tom, who had come home from school for lunch, and made my way to my room.

A sudden outcry in the house startled me. Opening my door, I was in time to prevent Tom, charging like a young bull, from banging his head upon it. His "Dad wants you to come down. We've won the lottery!" mingled with the excited call of "Mr Hamer! Mr. Hamer! Come quickly!" from Mrs. Stoney somewhere about the foot of the stairs.

Stoney, looking as if he had been just ready to depart for work, was standing in the kitchen with his finger pinned firmly upon a number in the lottery list as if he feared it might escape, and in his other hand the current lottery ticket.

"We've won it! We've won it at last!" he said in the manner of a man who had fulfilled a life's ambition.

"Have a look at it, Mr. Hamer," appealed Mrs. Stoney. "It's the third prize!"

It was the third prize.

"You've won it, all right," I said.

It was as though the family, unable to trust its own senses, was waiting for that verdict. Not until it was given did its suspense really end. Then Mrs. Stoney flung her arms around Stoney and kissed him; before I could escape she had repeated the performance with me, and she proceeded to scatter her embraces amongst all her progeny.

Young Tom broke away from the pandemonium ; a scrambling sound indicated that he was scaling the fence, and his shrill "Hey, Bill, we've won the lottery!" showed that the news was being proclaimed to the world.

"It's a wonder the newspapers haven't been after you," I remarked. "They usually interview the big prize-winners."

"I got my ticket down at the works," said Stoney. "They'll be looking for me there."

"Well, I'm very glad. You're set now," I said. "What are you going to do with the money?"

"There won't be enough in it for a pub," said Stoney. "I reckon a nice tobacconist's business would be just the thing."

"Don't you be silly, Bert," said Mrs. Stoney. "What we're going to do is buy a good residential that will set us up for life. Or a mixed-goods shop in a good district."

"What I say about a tobacconist's—"

It was suddenly realised that Stoney would be late for work. He might not have minded, in the glow of his fortune, but obviously he desired to spread the tidings of his financial success amongst his fellows.

"I'll get off, though; the foreman'll fix it for me," he said.

A little afraid that Mrs. Stoney's exuberance might run to further embraces, I withdrew also.

The discussion was merely adjourned until the evening, when I found myself, on my return home, drawn into that and a festivity of beer and prawns, spread as a special occasion in the sacred sitting-room before the stony eyes of those enlarged ancestors.

It seemed that they had been waiting for me— the Stoneys, I mean, not the ancestors, although from the way the latter stared down from their stiff frames it seemed that they had been waiting, too.

As far as they had gone, Mrs. Stoney appeared to have triumphed in her idea about the residential; Stoney had agreed on the suggestion that there might be a small shop on the ground floor where he could run his tobacco business and talk about horses.

"But first of all," said Mrs. Stoney decidedly, "there's my mother and father without as much as a stone on their graves."

"I don't suppose the stone'll make 'em settle down any more comfortable," remarked Stoney uneasily.

"We've got to do the right thing by them," said Mrs. Stoney firmly. "It was all right when we didn't have the money. We couldn't do impossibilities. Now we've come into this money I'd feel ashamed of myself if I didn't give them a stone."

"There's my own father and mother," said Stoney.

"Why, of course; we must do the right thing by them, too," said Mrs. Stoney justly but unenthusiastically. "There wasn't even a notice in the papers when they died. That's something we've got to make amends for."

"For the matter of that," put in Stoney, "there's my brother Joe."

"Joe," remarked Mrs. Stoney rather tartly, "was a drunken wretch who always had enough money for booze but couldn't pay his board and was always cadging money from you. And look how he broke that vase of mine, coming home drunk— my mother's wedding present!"

"Speak no evil of the dead," said Stoney scntentiously. "He's gone now, poor Joe, and it's only right we should pay respect to his memory."

"There's my aunt Martha, too," remarked Mrs. Stoney.

"Aunt Martha was—"

Whatever Stoney had intended to say about that departed, he checked himself. "We'll do the right thing by all of them," he said.

"And Mr. Hamer will help us, I'm sure," said Mrs. Stoney.

I tried to dissuade them, but when I found they were intent upon "doing the right thing" I did what I could to help them.

It was obvious, however, that my efforts at In Memoriam verse, designed to get away from the usual style of such things, did not appeal to them. They were received in a manner that suggested that, although they did not want to hurt my feelings, they had overrated my ability. It was a proud day for the Stoney family when the *Sydney Morning Herald* came out one morning with a regular splather of announcements extolling the virtues of the Stoneys' departed relations. As a personal favor, Mrs. Stoney got me to bring home twenty-four copies of the paper that evening, the local supplies having apparently been exhausted.

To each one of the announcements was attached a tag of verse in the style much used by In Memoriamists. There was a touching reference to the mother of Mrs. Stoney as a bird in heaven; and the spirit of her father was informed in pious print that his picture was turned to the wall— a picturesque use of poetic licence, for the enlargement of the old gentleman's photograph was probably the most annoying of the portraits hanging in the mausoleum. In a separate tribute these grandparents were informed that their loving grandchildren would suffer grief and pain until they saw them once again.

Stoney's mother, it appeared, had become an angel ever bright and fair; and his father was assured of a reunion on the happy shore. Aunt Martha was told that her voice was still heard in dreams— which, from a private account of the dead relation given to me by Stoney, may have been a sly hit on his part. The bibulous Joe, all his sins forgiven, had his place, too:

A brother true, an uncle kind,
A purer soul 'tis hard to find.
He lived with us for many years;
His grave is watered by our tears.

No mention of unpaid board in that! Determined to make a clean sweep, the Stoneys had even dragged in some cousins, who were duly honored in verse.

"Now we only want a stone over the old people's graves and we're set," said Stoney, staring with satisfaction at the sheet setting out the virtues of the departed relations.

"To-morrow," announced Mrs. Stoney, "I am going out to look for a suitable residential."

Business in Brisbane drew me away from the Stoneys suddenly. I left them in the midst of discussions over the details of residentials available for purchase and suitable headstones for graves. As these latter discussions rather irked me, I was glad to get away.

As it was not to be expected that the Stoneys would be in the same place when I returned, I did not bother about looking them up. One day, however, I ran right into Stoney in his working clothes and carrying his lunch-tin. His face brightened as he saw me. I found myself looking at a photograph of a tombstone he had thrust into my hand.

"Is this the one over your people's grave or those of Mrs. Stoney?" I asked.

"No; we've got those framed at home. This is Aunt Martha's," he returned.

"By the way," I said, "where is your home ?"

"Same old place."

It surprised me.

"What? Did you decide to give up the residential idea?"

"It gave itself up," he said with a laugh. "What with paying up what we owed and getting new outfits, and then the cost of them tombstones you've no idea what tombstones cost, Mr. Hamer!— we found we didn't have the money. I'm on the way to the grocer's now to give him a bit on account. He's overdue."

"You don't mean to say," I exclaimed, "that you spent all that money on putting up memorials to your dead relations?"

He looked at me and laughed, not at all unhappily.

"Oh, well," he said, "she liked it! And what does it matter if we're happy? There was the gramophone and wireless set an' a few things like that, too; but it was mainly the relations."

He laughed again.

"We did the right thing by them— blast them," he said.

———————

14: The Grey Lady

Anna Katharine Green

1846-1935

In: *Masterpieces of Mystery*, 1913

WAS IT a spectre?

For days I could not answer this question. I am no believer in spiritual manifestations, yet— But let me tell my story.

I was lodging with my wife on the first floor of a house in Twenty-seventh Street. I had taken the apartments for three months, and we had already lived in them two and found them sufficiently comfortable. The back room we used as a bedroom, and as we received but few friends, the two great leaves of old mahogany connecting the rooms, usually stood wide open.

One morning, my wife being ill, I left her lying in bed and stepped into the parlour preparatory to going out for breakfast. It was late— nine o'clock probably— and I was hastening to leave, when I heard a sound behind me— or did I merely feel a presence?— and, turning, saw a strange and totally unknown woman coming toward me from my wife's room.

As I had just left that room, and as there was no other way of entrance save through a door we always kept locked, I was so overpowered by my astonishment that I never thought of speaking or moving until she had passed me. Then I found voice, and calling out "Madam!" endeavoured to stop her.

But the madam, if madam she was, passed on as quietly, as mechanically even, as if I had not raised my voice, and before I could grasp the fact that she was melting from before me flitted through the hall to the front door and so out, leaving behind on the palm of my hand the "feel" of her wool dress, which I had just managed to touch.

Not understanding her or myself or the strange thrill awakened by this contact, I tore open the front door and looked out, expecting, of course, to see her on the steps or on the sidewalk in front. But there was no one of her appearance visible, and I came back questioning whether I was the victim of a hallucination or just an everyday fool. To satisfy myself on this important question I looked about for the hallboy, with the intention of asking him if he had seen any such person go out, but that young and inconsequent scamp was missing from his post as usual and there was no one within sight to appeal to.

There was nothing to do but to re-enter my rooms, where my attention was immediately arrested by the sight of my wife sitting up in bed and surveying me with a look of unmistakable astonishment.

"Who was that woman?" she asked. "And how came she in here?"

So she had seen her too.

"What woman, Lydia? I have not let in any woman. Did you think there was a woman in this room?"

"Not in that room," she answered hoarsely, "but in this one. I saw her just now passing through the folding doors. Wilbur, I am frightened. See how my hands shake. Do you think I am sick enough to imagine things?"

I knew she was not, but I did not say so. I thought it would be better for her to think herself under some such delusion.

"You were dozing," said I. "If you had seen a woman here you could tell me how she looked."

"And I can," my wife broke in excitedly. "She was like the ghosts we read of, only that her dress and the veil or drapery she wore were all grey. Didn't you see her? You must have seen her. She went right by you— a grey woman, all grey; a lady, Wilbur, and slightly lame. Could I have dreamed all that?"

"You must have!" I protested, shaking the door leading directly into the hall so she might see it was locked, and even showing her the key to it lying in its accustomed place behind the bureau cushion. Yet I was in no satisfied condition myself, for she had described with the greatest accuracy the very person I had myself seen. Had we been alike the victims of a spiritual manifestation?

This was Tuesday. On Friday my question seemed to receive an answer. I had been downtown, as usual, and on returning found a crowd assembled in front of my lodging-house. A woman had been run over and was being carried into our rooms. In the glimpse I caught of her I saw that she was middle-aged and was wrapped in a long black cloak. Later this cloak fell off, as her hat had done long before, and I perceived that her dress was black and decent.

She was laid on our bed and every attention paid her. But she had been grievously injured about the head and gradually but surely sank before our eyes. Suddenly she roused and gave a look about her. It was a remarkable one— a look of recognition and almost of delight. Then she raised one hand and, pointing with a significant gesture into the empty space before her, sank back and died.

It was a sudden ending, and, anxious to see its effect upon my wife, who was standing on the other side of the bed, I glanced her way with some misgiving. She showed more feeling than I had anticipated. Indeed her countenance was a study, and when, under the influence of my scrutiny, she glanced my way, I saw that something of deeper import than this unexpected death in our rooms lay at the bottom of her uneasy look.

What that was I was soon to know, for catching up from amid the folds of the woman's grey-lined cloak a long grey veil which had fallen at the bedside, she disposed it softly about the woman's face, darting me a look full of significance.

"You remember the vision I had the morning when I was sick?" she whispered softly in my ear.

I nodded, secretly thrilled to my very heart's core.

"Well, it was a vision of this woman. If she were living and on her feet and wrapped, as I have shown you, in this veil, you would behold a living picture of the person I saw passing out of this room that morning."

"I shall not dispute you," I answered. Alas! I had myself perceived the likeness the instant the veil had fallen about the pinched but handsome features!

"A forewarning," whispered my wife; "a forewarning of what has this day happened under our roof. It was a wraith we saw. Wilbur, I shall not spend another night in these rooms."

And we did not. I was as anxious to leave as she was. Yet I am not a superstitious man. As proof of it, after the first effect of these events had left me I began to question my first impressions and feel tolerably ashamed of my past credulity. Though the phenomenon we had observed could not to all appearance be explained by any natural hypothesis; though I had seen, and my wife had seen, a strange woman suddenly become visible in a room which a moment before had held no one but ourselves, and into which no live woman could have entered without our knowledge, something— was it my natural good sense?— recoiled before a supernatural explanation of this, and I found myself forced to believe that our first visitor had been as real as the last; in other words, the same woman.

But could I prove it? Could the seemingly impossible be made possible and the unexplainable receive a solution satisfying to a rational mind? I determined to make an effort to accomplish this, if only to relieve the mind of my wife, who had not recovered her equanimity as readily as myself.

Starting with the assumption above mentioned— that the woman who had died in our presence was the same who had previously found an unexplainable entrance into our rooms— I first inquired if the black cloak lined with grey did not offer a solution to some of my previous difficulties. It was a long cloak, enveloping her completely. When worn with the black side out she would present an inconspicuous appearance, but with the grey side out and the effect of this heightened by a long grey veil hung over her hat, she would look like the grey lady I had first seen. Now, a cloak can be turned in an instant, and if she had chosen to do this in flitting through my door I would naturally find only a sedate, black-clothed woman passing up the street, when, rousing from the apathy into which her appearance had thrown me, I rushed to the front door and looked out. Had I seen such a woman? I seemed to remember that I had.

Thus much, then, was satisfactory, but to account for her entrance into our rooms was not so easy. Had she slipped by me in coming in as she had on going

out? The parlour door was open, for I had been out to get the paper. Could she have glided in by me unperceived and thus found her way into the bedroom from which I afterward saw her issue? No, for I had stood facing the front hall door all the time. Through the bedroom door, then? But that was, as I have said, locked. Here, then, was a mystery; but it was one worth solving.

My first step was to recall all that I had heard of the actual woman who had been buried from our rooms. Her name, as ascertained in the cheap boarding-house to which she was traced, was Helmuth, and she was, so far as any one knew, without friends or relatives in the city. To those who saw her daily she was a harmless, slightly demented woman with money enough to live above want, but not enough to warrant her boasting talk about the rich things she was going to buy some day and the beautiful presents she would soon be in a position to give away. The money found on her person was sufficient to bury her, but no papers were in her possession nor any letters calculated to throw light upon her past life.

Her lameness had been caused by paralysis, but the date of her attack was not known.

Finding no clue in this to what I wished to learn, I went back to our old rooms, which had not been let since our departure, and sought for one there, and, strangely enough, found it. I thought I knew everything there was to be known about the apartment we had lived in two months, but one little fact had escaped me which, under the scrutiny that I now gave it, became apparent. This was simply that the key which opened the hall door of the bedroom and which we had seldom if ever used was not as old a key as that of the corresponding door in the parlour, and this fact, small as it was, led me to make inquiries.

The result was that I learned something about the couple who had preceded us in the use of these rooms. They were of middle age and of great personal elegance but uncertain pay, the husband being nothing more nor less than a professional gambler. Their name was L'Hommedieu.

When I first heard of them I thought that Mrs. L'Hommedieu might be the Mrs. Helmuth in whose history I was so interested, but from all I could learn she was a very different sort of person. Mrs. L'Hommedieu was gay, dashing, and capable of making a show out of flimsy silk a shopgirl would hesitate to wear. Yet she looked distinguished and wore her cheap jewelry with more grace than many a woman her diamonds. I would, consequently, have dropped this inquiry if some one had not remarked upon her having had a paralytic stroke after leaving the house. This, together with the fact that the key to the rear door, which I had found replaced by a new one, had been taken away by her and never returned, connected her so indubitably with my mysterious visitor that I resolved to pursue my investigations into Mrs. L'Hommedieu's past.

For this purpose I sought out a quaint little maiden lady living on the top floor who, I was told, knew more about the L'Hommedieus than any one in the building. Miss Winterburn, whose acquaintance I had failed to make while residing in the house, was a fluttering, eager, affable person whose one delight was, as I soon found, to talk about the L'Hommedieus. Of the story she related I give as much of it as possible in her own words.

"I was never their equal," said she, "but Mrs. L'Hommedieu was lonely, and, having no friends in town, was good enough to admit me to her parlour now and then and even to allow me to accompany her to the theatre when her husband was away on one of his mysterious visits. I never liked Mr. L'Hommedieu, but I did like her. She was so different from me, and, when I first knew her, so gay and so full of conversation. But after a while she changed and was either feverishly cheerful or morbidly sad, so that my visits caused me more pain than pleasure. The reason for these changes in her was patent to everybody. Though her husband was a handsome man, he was as unprincipled as he was unfortunate. He gambled. This she once admitted to me, and while at long intervals he met with some luck he more often returned dispirited and with that hungry, ravaging look you expect to see in a wolf cheated of its prey.

"I used to be afraid he would strike her after some one of these disappointments, but I do not think he ever did. She had a determined character of her own, and there have been times when I have thought he was as much afraid of her as she was of him. I became sure of this after one night. Mrs. L'Hommedieu and myself were having a little supper together in the front parlour you have so lately occupied. It was a very ordinary supper, for the L'Hommedieus' purse had run low, and Mrs. L'Hommedieu was not the woman to spend much at any time on her eating. It was palatable, however, and I would have enjoyed it greatly, if Mrs. L'Hommedieu had shown more appetite. But she ate scarcely anything and seemed very anxious and unhappy, though she laughed now and then with sudden gusts of mirth too hysterical to be real. It was not late, and yet we were both very much surprised when there came a knock at the door, followed by the entrance of a visitor.

"Mrs. L'Hommedieu, who was always la grande dame, rose without apparent embarrassment to meet the gentleman who entered, though I knew she could not help but feel keenly the niggardly appearance of the board she left with such grace. The stranger— he was certainly a stranger; this I could see by the formality of her manner— was a gentleman of urbane bearing and a general air of prosperity.

"I remember every word that passed.

" 'My name is Lafarge,' said he. 'I am, or rather have been, under great obligations to your husband, and I have come to discharge my debt. Is he at home?'

"Mrs. L'Hommedieu's eye, which had sparkled at his name, dropped suddenly as he put the final question.

" 'I am sorry,' she returned after a moment of embarrassment, 'but my husband is very seldom home evenings. If you will come about noon some day—'

" 'Thank you,' said he, with a bright smile, 'but I will finish my business now and with you, seeing that Mr. L'Hommedieu is not at home. Years ago— I am sure you have heard your husband mention my name— I borrowed quite a sum of money from him, which I have never paid. You recall the amount, no doubt?'

" 'I have heard Mr. L'Hommedieu say it was a thousand dollars,' she replied, with a sudden fluttering of her hands indicative of great excitement.

" 'That is the sum,' he allowed, either not noticing me or thinking me too insignificant to be considered. 'I regret to have kept him so long out of it, but I have not forgotten to add the interest in making out this statement of my indebtedness, and if you will look over this paper and acknowledge its correctness I will leave the equivalent of my debt here and now, for I sail for Europe to-morrow morning and wish to have all my affairs in order before leaving.'

"Mrs. L'Hommedieu, who looked ready to faint from excess of feeling, summoned up her whole strength, looking so beautiful as she did so that one forgot the ribbons on her sleeves were no longer fresh and that the silk dress she wore hung in the very limpest of folds.

" 'I am obliged to you,' she said in a tone from which she strove in vain to suppress all eagerness. 'And if I can speak for Mr. L'Hommedieu he will be as grateful for your remembrance of us as for the money you so kindly offer to return to him.'

"The stranger bowed low and took out a folded paper, which he handed to her. He was not deceived, I am sure, by her grand airs, and knew as well as I did that no woman ever stood in greater need of money. But nothing in his manner betrayed this knowledge.

" 'It is a bond I give you,' he now explained. 'As you will see, it has coupons attached to it which you can cash at any time. It will prove as valuable to you as so much ready money and possibly more convenient.'

"And with just this hint, which I took as significant of his complete understanding of her position, he took her receipt and politely left the house.

"Once alone with me, who am nobody, her joy had full vent. I have never seen any one so lost in delight as she was for a few minutes. To have this money thrust upon her just at a moment when actual want seemed staring her in the face was too much of a relief for her to conceal either the misery she had been under or the satisfaction she now enjoyed. Under the gush of her emotions her whole history came out, but as you have often heard the like I will not repeat it,

especially as it was all contained in the cry with which a little later she thrust the bond into my hand.

" 'He must not see it! He must not! It would go like all the rest, and I should again be left without a cent. Take it and keep it, for I have no means of concealing it here. He is too suspicious.'

"But this was asking more than I was willing to grant. Seeing how I felt, she took the paper back and concealed it in her bosom with a look I had rather not have seen. 'You will not charge yourself with such a responsibility,' said she. 'But I can trust you not to tell him?'

" 'Yes,' I nodded, feeling sick of the whole business.

" 'Then— ' But here the door was violently flung open and Mr. L'Hommedieu burst into the room in a state of as much excitement as his wife, only his was the excitement of desperation.

" 'Gone! Gone!' he cried, ignoring me as completely as Mr. Lafarge had done. 'Not a dollar left; not even my studs! See!' And he pointed to his shirt-front hanging apart in a way I would never have looked for in this reckless but fastidious gentleman. 'Yet if I had had a dollar more or even a ring worth a dollar or so, I might have— Theresa, have you any money at all? A coin now might save us.'

"Mrs. L'Hommedieu, who had turned alarmingly pale, drew up her fine figure and resolutely confronted him. 'No!' said she, and shifting her gaze she turned it meaningly upon me.

"He misunderstood this movement. Thinking it simply a reminder of my presence, he turned, with his false but impressive show of courtesy, and made me a low bow. Then he forgot me utterly again, and, facing his wife, growled out:

" 'Where are you going to get breakfast then? You don't look like a woman who expects to starve!'

"It was a fatal remark, for, do what she would, she could not prevent a slight smile of disdain, and, seeing it, he kept his eye riveted on her face till her uneasiness became manifest. Instantly his suspicion took form, and, surveying her still more fixedly, he espied a corner of the precious envelope protruding slightly above her corsage. To snatch it out, open it, and realise its value was the work of a moment. Her cry of dismay and his shout of triumph rang out simultaneously, and never have I seen such an ebullition of opposing passions as I was made witness to as his hand closed over this small fortune and their staring eyes met in the moral struggle they had now entered upon for its ultimate possession.

"She was the first to speak. 'It was given to me, it was meant for me. If I keep it both of us will profit by it, but if you— '

"He did not wait for her to finish. 'Where did you get it?' he cried. 'I can break the bank with what I can raise on this bond at the club. Darraugh's in town. You know what that means. Luck's in the air, and with a hundred dollars— But I've no time to talk. I came for a dollar, a fifty-cent piece, a dime even, and go back with a bond worth— '

"But she was already between him and the door. 'You will never carry that bond out of this house,' she whispered in the tone which goes further than a cry. 'I have not held it in my hand to see it follow every other good thing I have had in life. I will not, Henry. Take that bond and sink it as you have all the rest and I fall at your feet a dead woman. I will never survive the destruction of my last hope.'

"He was cowed— for a moment, that is; she looked so superb and so determined. Then all that was mean and despicable in his thinly veneered nature came to the surface, and, springing forward with an oath, he was about to push her aside, when, without the moving of a finger on her part, he reeled back, recovered himself, caught at a chair, missed it, and fell heavily to the floor.

" 'My God, I thank thee!' was the exclamation with which she broke from the trance of terror into which she had been thrown by his sudden attempt to pass her; and without a glance at his face, which to me looked like the face of a dead man, she tore the paper from his hand and stood looking about her with a wild and searching gaze, in the desperate hope that somehow the walls would open and offer her a safe place of concealment for the precious sheet of paper.

"Meanwhile I had crept near the prostrate man. He was breathing, but was perfectly unconscious.

" 'Don't you mean to do something for him?' I asked. 'He may die.'

"She met my question with the dazed air of one suddenly awakened. 'No, he'll not die; but he'll not come to for some minutes, and this must be hidden first. But where? where? I cannot trust it on my person or in any place a man like him would search. I must devise some means— ah!'

"With this final exclamation she had dashed into the other room. I did not see where she went— I did not want to— but I soon realised she was working somewhere in a desperate hurry. I could hear her breath coming in quick, short pants as I bent over her husband, waiting for him to rouse and hating my inaction even while I succumbed to it.

"Suddenly she was back in the parlour again, and to my surprise passed immediately to the little table in the corner where we had sat at supper. We had had for our simple refreshment that homeliest of all dishes, boiled milk thickened with flour. There was still some left in a bowl, and taking this away with her she called back hoarsely:

" 'Pray that he does not come to till I have finished. It will be the best prayer you ever made.'

"She told me afterward that he was subject to these attacks and that she had long ceased to be alarmed by them. But to me the sight of that man lying there so helpless was horrible, and, though I hated him and pitied her, I scarcely knew what to wish. While battling with my desire to run and the feeling of loyalty which held me kneeling at that man's side, I heard her speak again, this time in an even and slightly hard tone: 'Now you may dash a glass of cold water in his face. I am prepared to meet him now. Happily his memory fails after these attacks. I may succeed in making him believe that the bond he saw was one of his fancies.'

" 'Had you not better throw the water yourself?' I suggested, getting up and meeting her eye very quietly.

"She looked at me in wonder, then moved calmly to the table, took the glass, and dashed a few drops of water into her husband's face. Instantly he began to stir, seeing which I arose without haste, but without any unnecessary delay, and quickly took my leave. I could bear no more that night.

"Next morning I awoke in a fright. I had dreamed that he had come to my room in search of the bond. But it was only her knock at the door and her voice asking if she might enter at this early hour. It was such a relief I gladly let her in, and she entered with her best air and flung herself on my little lounge with the hysterical cry:

" 'He has sent me up. I told him I ought not to intrude at such an inconvenient hour; that you would not have had your breakfast.' (How carelessly she spoke! How hard she tried to keep the hungry note out of her voice!) 'But he insisted on my coming up. I know why. He searched me before I left the room, and now he wants to search the room itself.'

" 'Then he did remember?' I began.

" 'Yes, he remembers now. I saw it in his eyes as soon as he awoke. But he will not find the bond. That is safe, and some day when I have escaped his vigilance long enough to get it back again I will use it so as to make him comfortable as well as myself. I am not a selfish woman.'

"I did not think she was, and felt pity for her, and so after dressing and making her a cup of tea, I sat down with her, and we chatted for an hour or so quite comfortably. Then she grew so restless and consulted the clock so often that I tried to soothe her by remarking that it was not an easy task he had set himself, at which she laughed in a mysterious way, but failed to grow less anxious till our suspense was cut short by the appearance of the janitor with a message from Mr. L'Hommedieu.

" 'Mr. L'Hommedieu's compliments,' said he, 'and he hopes Mrs. L'Hommedieu will make herself comfortable and not think of coming down. He is doing everything that is necessary and will soon be through. You can rest quite easy, ma'am.'

" 'What does he mean?' marvelled the poor woman as the janitor disappeared. 'Is he spending all this time ransacking the rooms? I wish I dared disobey him. I wish I dared go down.'

"But her courage was not equal to an open disregard of his wishes, and she had to subdue her impatience and wait for a summons that did not come till near two o'clock. Then Mr. L'Hommedieu himself appeared with her hat and mantle on his arm.

" 'My dear,' said he as she rose, haggard with excitement, to meet him, 'I have brought your wraps with me that you may go directly from here to our new home. Shall I assist you to put them on? You do not look as well as usual, and that is why I have undertaken this thing all myself— to save you, my dear; to save you each and every exertion.'

"I had flung out my arms to catch her, for I thought she was going to faint, but she did not, though I think it would have been better for her if she had.

" 'We are going to leave this house?' she asked, speaking very slowly and with a studied lack of emotion that imposed upon nobody.

" 'I have said so,' he smiled. 'The dray has already taken away the half of our effects, and the rest will follow at Mrs. Latimer's convenience.'

" 'Ah, I understand!' she replied, with a gasp of relief significant of her fear that by some super-human cunning he had found the bond she thought so safely concealed. 'I was wondering how Mrs. Latimer came to allow us to leave.' (I tell you they always talked as if I were not present.) 'Our goods are left as a surety, it seems.'

" 'Half of our goods,' he blandly corrected. 'Would it interest you to know which half?'

"The cunning of this insinuation was matched by the imperturbable shrug with which she replied, 'So a bed has been allowed us and some clothes I am satisfied,' at which he bit his lips, vexed at her self-control and his own failure to break it.

" 'You have not asked where we are going,' he observed, as with apparent solicitude he threw her mantle over her shoulders.

"The air of lassitude with which she replied bespoke her feeling on that point. 'I have little curiosity,' she said. 'You know I can be happy anywhere.' And, turning toward me, she moved her lips in a way I interpreted to mean: 'Go below with me. See me out.'

" 'Say what you have to say to Miss Winterburn aloud,' he drily suggested.

" 'I have nothing to say to Miss Winterburn but thanks,' was her cold reply, belied, however, by the trembling of her fingers as she essayed to fit on her gloves.

" 'And those I will receive below!' I cried, with affected gaiety. 'I am going down with you to the door.' And resolutely ignoring his frown I tripped down

before them. On the last stair I felt her steps lagging. Instantly I seemed to comprehend what was required of me, and, rushing forward, I entered the front parlour. He followed close behind me, for how could he know I was not in collusion with her to regain the bond? This gave her one minute by herself in the rear, and in that minute she secured the key which would give her future access to the spot where her treasure lay hidden.

"The rest of the story I must give you mainly from hearsay. You must understand by this time what Mr. L'Hommedieu's scheme was in moving so suddenly. He knew that it would be impossible for him, by the most minute and continuous watchfulness, to prevent his wife from recovering the bond while they continued to inhabit the rooms in which, notwithstanding his failure to find it, he had reason to believe it still lay concealed. But once in other quarters it would be comparatively easy for him to subject her to a surveillance which not only would prevent her from returning to this house without his knowledge, but would lead her to give away her secret by the very natural necessity she would be under of going to the exact spot where her treasure lay hid.

"It was a cunning plot and showed him to be as able as he was unscrupulous. How it worked I will now proceed to tell you. It must have been the next afternoon that the janitor came running up to me— I suppose he had learned by this time that I had more than ordinary interest in these people— to say that Mrs. L'Hommedieu had been in the house and had been so frightened by a man who had followed her that she had fainted dead away on the floor. Would I go down to her?

"I had rather have gone anywhere else, unless it was to prison; but duty cannot be shirked, and I followed the man down. But we were too late. Mrs. L'Hommedieu had recovered and gone away, and the person who had frightened her was also gone, and only the hallboy remained to give any explanations.

"This was what he had to say:

" 'The man it was who went first. As soon as the lady fell he skipped out. I don't think he meant no good here— '

" 'Did she drop here in the hall?' I asked, unable to restrain my intense anxiety.

" 'Oh, no, ma'am! They was in the back room yonder, which she got in somehow. The man followed her in, sneaking and sneaking like an eel or a cop, and she fell right against— '

" 'Don't tell me where!' I cried. 'I don't want to know where!' And I was about to return upstairs when I heard a quick, sharp voice behind me and realised that Mr. L'Hommedieu had come in and was having some dispute with the janitor.

"Common prudence led me to listen. He wanted, as was very natural, to enter the room where his wife had just been surprised, but the janitor, alarmed by the foregoing very irregular proceedings, was disposed to deny his right to do so.

" 'The furniture is held as a surety,' said he, 'and I have orders— '

"But Mr. L'Hommedieu had a spare dollar, and before many minutes had elapsed I heard him go into that room and close the door. Of the next ten minutes and the suspense I felt I need not speak. When he came out again, he looked as if the ground would not hold him.

" 'I have done some mischief, I fear,' he airily said as he passed the janitor. 'But I'll pay for it. Don't worry. I'll pay for it and the rent, too, to-morrow. You may tell Mrs. Latimer so.' And he was gone, leaving us all agape in the hallway.

"A minute later we all crept to that room and looked in. Now that he had got the bond I for one was determined to know where she had hid it. There was no mistaking the spot. A single glance was enough to show us the paper ripped off from a portion of the wall, revealing a narrow gap behind the baseboard large enough to hold the bond. It was near—"

"Wait!" I put in as I remembered where the so-called Mrs. Helmuth had pointed just before she died. "Wasn't it at the left of the large folding doors and midway to the wall?"

"How came you to know?" she asked. "Did Mrs. Latimer tell you?" But as I did not answer she soon took up the thread of her narrative again, and, sighing softly, said:

"The next day came and went, but no L'Hommedieu appeared; another, and I began to grow seriously uneasy; a third, and a dreadful thing happened. Late in the afternoon Mrs. L'Hommedieu, dressed very oddly, came sliding in at the front door, and with an appealing smile at the hallboy, who wished but dared not ask her for the key which made these visits possible, glided by to her old rooms, and, finding the door unlocked, went softly in. Her appearance is worth description, for it shows the pitiful efforts she made at disguise, in the hope, I suppose, of escaping the surveillance she was evidently conscious of being under. She was in the habit of wearing on cool days a black circular with a grey lining. This she had turned inside out so that the gray was uppermost; while over her neat black bonnet she had flung a long veil, also grey, which not only hid her face, but gave her appearance an eccentric look as different as possible from her usual aspect. The hallboy, who had never seen her save in showy black or bright colours, said she looked like a ghost in the daytime, but it was all done for a purpose, I am sure, and to escape the attention of the man who had followed her before. Alas, he might have followed her this time without addition to her suffering! Scarcely had she entered the room where her treasure had been left than she saw the torn paper and gaping baseboard, and, uttering a cry so

piercing it found its way even to the stolid heart of the hallboy, she tottered back into the hall, where she fell into the arms of her husband, who had followed her in from the street in a state of frenzy almost equal to her own.

"The janitor, who that minute appeared on the stairway, says that he never saw two such faces. They looked at each other and were speechless. He was the first to hang his head.

" 'It is gone, Henry,' she whispered, 'It is gone. You have taken it.'

"He did not answer.

" 'And it is lost! You have risked it, and it is lost!'

"He uttered a groan. 'You should have given it to me that night. There was luck in the air then. Now the devil is in the cards and—'

"Her arms went up with a shriek. 'My curse be upon you, Henry L'Hommedieu!' And whether it was the look with which she uttered this imprecation, or whether there was some latent love left in his heart for this long-suffering and once beautiful woman, he shrank at her words, and, stumbling like a man in the darkness, uttered a heart-rending groan, and rushed from the house. We never saw him again.

"As for her, she fell this time under a paralytic attack which robbed her of her faculties. She was taken to a hospital, where I frequently visited her, but either from grief or the effect of her attack she did not know me, nor did she ever recognise any of us again. Mrs. Latimer, who is a just woman, sold her furniture and, after paying herself out of the proceeds, gave the remainder to the hospital nurses for the use of Mrs. L'Hommedieu, so that when she left them she had something with which to start life anew. But where she went or how she managed to get along in her enfeebled condition I do not know. I never heard of her again."

"Then you did not see the woman who died in these rooms?" I asked.

The effect of these words was magical and led to mutual explanations. She had not seen that woman, having encountered all the sorrow she wished to in that room. Nor was there any one else in the house at this time likely to recognise Mrs. L'Hommedieu, the janitor and hallboy both being new and Mrs. Latimer one of those proprietors who are only seen on rent day. For the rest, Mrs. L'Hommedieu's defective memory, which had led her to haunt the house and room where the bond had once been hidden, accounted not only for her first visit, but the last, which had ended so fatally. The cunning she showed in turning her cloak and flinging a veil over her hat was the cunning of a partially clouded mind. It was a reminiscence of the morning when her terrible misfortune occurred. My habit of taking the key out of the lock of that unused door made the use of her own key possible, and her fear of being followed caused her to lock the door behind her. My wife, who must have fallen into a doze on my leaving her, did not see her enter, but detected her just as she was

trying to escape through the folding doors. My presence in the parlour probably added to her embarrassment, and she fled, turning her cloak as she did so.

How simple it seemed now that we knew the facts; but how obscure, and, to all appearance, unexplainable, before the clue was given to the mystery!

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15: Promising

Anonymous

Chicago News, no date given
Geraldton Murchison Telegraph (West Australia) 20 Aug 1898

IN THE EARLY DAYS of my university sojourn (it would be absurd to call it a career) I was considered promising. The provost himself, when I went to breakfast with him on the last day of the summer term, was good enough to tell me so.

'The college,' he remarked, expects great things from you, Mr. Vansittart.'

'I wish, sir,' I rejoined, 'that the college may not be wrong.'

'With a little more application,' he pursued, 'a first-class is, in the opinion of the college, well within your reach.'

I believe I blushed.

The young lady sitting opposite me flung her eyelashes for a demure, amused glance. The provost smiled kindly.

'Yes you are a promising young man, Mr. Vansittart.' said he. 'God bless my soul it is 10 o'clock, and the vice-chancellor is waiting for me.'

'Oh, papa,' said the young lady opposite to me.

The provost held out his hand. I clasped it. I believed that he supposed me to be going at the same time. He went; I remained.

'It is.' I observed with a profound sigh, 'the last day of the term.'

'Yes,' said the young lady.

'If,' said I, 'you were to come and unlock the gate at the bottom of your garden for me, I could reach my rooms that way.'

'Would it be the shortest?' she asked.

'It would be much too short, anyhow,' said I.

A few moments later I sat down on a bench. Daisy stopped, looked doubtful, shook her head, sat down; we pursued the conversation, which we begun as we come along.

'Papa would never hear of it,' she said.

'I should not wish him to— just yet,' I observed. 'But, when I've taken my degree—'

'That's two years off— at least,' she interrupted.

'What do you mean by at least?' I asked, rather hurt. 'People don't always get through the first time they try.'

'You're thinking of the first time I—

'No, I'm not,' she cried, blushing amazingly. 'I mean, you'd probably be ploughed.' '

'I'm going to get a first,' said I.

'Nonsense!' said Daisy.

I drew a little nearer.

'You read the article?' I asked 'The fellow showed quite plainly that it could be done on three hundred— with careful management, you know.'

Daisy nodded sagaciously. 'And I don't see why I shouldn't have three hundred in— well, in about three years.'

I spoke as though three years were a moment of time.

'I shall be 20,' mused Daisy in an awe-struck tone.

'It's not a bit too old,' I cried. ' N-o, I suppose not,' she conceded; 'but it's a terrible long time, Dick—'

A pause followed. I hammered my cap against the bench.

'It's a beast of a world!' I burst out. 'Why the deuce can't— There's the dean, just got married.'

'The dean must be 40,' observed Daisy.

'He says he's 29.' And we both laughed. (I happen to know now that the dean spoke the truth).

'Dick,' said Daisy in a wistful tone, 'I wish you were rich, like Mr. Franklin Ford.'

'Ford's a beast,' said I.

'I didn't say he wasn't that, Dick, but—'

'Of course, if money's what you want—'

'You know I don't; but I suppose there is no harm in wishing that we—'

I recovered my good temper. I always did when she said 'we.'

'I can make as much as he's got,' said I confidently.

'Oh, can you Dick? how soon?'

I was not going to boast. Assuming a calm and wise air, I answered: 'By the time I am 30, anyhow.'

'Oh, 30 !' she moaned. Then she turned to me with a smile, saying: 'Never mind, Dick dear; we shan't want quite as much. Why he's got £5,000 a year.'

'How do you know?'

'Mrs. Jackson told me so. Oh, what do you think, Dick? She said that, if I liked, I might— she said she was sure I might— Where are you going Dick?'

'If you're only going to tell me what that wretched old woman says, I'm going back to my rooms. What did she say?'

'I won't talk about it if you don't—'

'Oh, what did she say?'

'Oh, well, why that Mr. Franklin Ford (you will break the corner of your cap in a minute, Dick); only that Mr. Franklin Ford (there! I knew you would— your cap's in an awful state, Dick; so is your gown); only what Mr. Franklin Ford— Oh, how stupid you are, Dick! You know perfectly well what she said.'

I flung my cap upon the bench, thrust my hands into my pockets, rested my chin on my necktie, and stared moodily at my toes. There was a long pause.

Presently I felt the lightest touch on my arm. I took no notice. The touch grew more insistent.

'Poor boy!' said Daisy. 'Dick, I told her I thought Mr. Ford horrid.'

'Did you?' I cried, my hands flying from to pockets to— elsewhere.

'Yes, and she said I should know better as I got older. I don't see what she means. Of course, I couldn't tell her about you, or she'd have seen that my getting older couldn't make any difference. Oh, Dick, isn't it wonderful?'

'Yes,' I answered soberly, for a look had passed in the blue eyes that seemed to me very wonderful indeed. Presently Daisy said in a low tone: 'I wish papa wouldn't insist on going abroad all the Long. He says he can work better there.'

'What does he want to work for?' cried I.

'I dont know?' said she. 'Dick, don't you come abroad?'

It was a bitter moment.

'I've got no money,' said I with defiant bluntness.

Her breath caught half-way through a little laugh, and she said: 'Oh, you poor, dear boy ! Never mind Dick. It's only till October.'

'Only!' said I, in tones a Hamlet might be proud of.

'Will it seem very long?' she asked dropping her lashes.

'As if you didn't know!'

'Yes, but, Dick, I may like to be told, all the same, you know.'

So I told her, and aeons on aeons of weary waiting rose before us at the bidding of my words.

'And in all that time,' she said, 'are you sure you won't forget? Oh, well, then, I believe you won't. Think, Dick, what it will be when you come back! You must look out of your window all the first day and perhaps I may come by.'

'And look up.'

'Perhaps.'

'Perhaps you'll have forgotten?'

'Oh, Dick, that is horrid of of you! I never forget my friends.'

'Friends!' I echoed indignantly.

'Well, you know what I mean,' she answered indulgently. As she spoke the great clock in the tower struck eleven.

She sprang to her feet.

'Don't go,' I urged. 'Daisy, it's the last time!'

'Oh, but I must: so must you.' She seemed resolute.

'Well, then, before you go, promise,' I urged.

'But I have promised, Dick.'

'You'll think of no one else in the whole time '.

'No— of no one else.'

'Not of that fellow, Franklin F—'

'Dick, I told you I hated him. Aren't you going to promise, too?'

The garden seemed peaceful and quiet. We sat down on the bench again for a moment— or it was meant to be a moment. But such moments are endowed from heaven with blessed elasticity.

I think I promised for a full quarter of an hour. Then, at a cry from Daisy, I looked up.

A tall, stout man, in gold spectacles, stood looking down at us, a curious, only half-unkind smile on his face. I felt crimson all over, and sat speechless.

'Pray what is the meaning of this, Mr. Vansittart?' he asked, the mixed smile still on his lips. I looked at him in fright for an instant. Then a pride rose in me I cleared my throat and began:

'Sir, I am promising—'

The demon of irony raked up in the provost's mind the memory of his last words to me. Oh, that I had found another exordium for my heroic speech!

'Upon my word,' said he, thrusting one hand into his crosscut trousers pocket and pulling at his whiskers with the other, 'you are promising for your age— very promising Mr. Vanisttart.'

The bubble was broken. Daisy hung her head. I was very red, and hot again.

'Very promising, chuckled the provost, jingling the money in his pocket. 'Very promising indeed!'

I could have struck him for his mocking iteration.

'Daisy, go indoors,' said he; 'and Mr. Vanisitart, may I lend you my key of the garden gate? Pray be so good as to return it to the porter.' He handed it to me with a polite bow.

Daisy was in retreat, hurrying in sad shame towards the house. I took the key.

'I meant it, sir,' I stammered.

'You're a young fool,' said he. And he held out his hand. 'Yes, a young fool,' he said again as he shook hands.

I went. He stood watching my exit. I looked back as I reached the gate. He was there still, and behind him on the porch waved a handkerchief. I passed through the gate, and locked it behind me. And was the Long very long? And did I forget her in the Long? I am willing to answer at any cost to my own character all material questions. But that question is immaterial. For she forgot me in the Long. Dear me! I hope she's happy somewhere.

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16: A Piece of String

Jacques Futrelle

1873-1912

Associated Sunday Magazine, 16 Sep 1906

A "Thinking Machine" story

IT WAS just midnight. Somewhere near the center of a cloud of tobacco smoke, which hovered over one corner of the long editorial room, Hutchinson Hatch, reporter, was writing. The rapid click-click of his type writer went on and on, broken only when he laid aside one sheet to put in another. The finished pages were seized upon one at a time by an office boy and rushed off to the city editor. That astute person glanced at them for information and sent them on to the copy desk, whence they were shot down into that noisy, chaotic wilderness, the composing room.

The story was what the phlegmatic head of the copy desk, speaking in the vernacular, would have called a "beaut." It was about the kidnapping that afternoon of Walter Francis, the four-year-old son of a wealthy young broker, Stanley Francis. An alternative to the abduction had been proposed in the form of a gift to certain persons, identity unknown, of fifty thousand dollars. Francis, not unnaturally, objected to the bestowal of so vast a sum upon anyone. So he told the police, and while they were making up their minds the child was stolen. It happened in the usual way— closed carriage, and all that sort of thing.

Hatch was telling the story graphically, as he could tell a story when there was one to be told. He glanced at the clock, jerked out another sheet of copy, and the office boy scuttled away with it.

"How much more?" called the city editor.

"Just a paragraph," Hatch answered.

His type writer clicked on merrily for a couple of minutes and then stopped. The last sheet of copy was taken away, and he rose and stretched his legs.

"Some guy wants yer at the 'phone," an office boy told him.

"Who is it?" asked Hatch.

"Search me," replied the boy. "Talks like he'd been eatin' pickles."

Hatch went into the booth indicated. The man at the other end was Professor Augustus S. F. X. Van Dusen. The reporter instantly recognized the crabbed, perpetually irritated voice of the noted scientist, The Thinking Machine.

"That you, Mr. Hatch?" came over the wire.

"Yes."

"Can you do something for me immediately?" he queried. "It is very important."

"Certainly."

"Now listen closely," directed The Thinking Machine. "Take a car from Park-sq., the one that goes toward Worcester through Brookline. About two miles beyond Brookline is Randall's Crossing. Get off there and go to your right until you come to a small white house. In front of this house, a little to the left and across an open field, is a large tree. It stands just in the edge of a dense wood. It might be better to approach it through the wood, so as not to attract attention. Do you follow me?"

"Yes," Hatch replied. His imagination was leading him a chase.

"Go to this tree now, immediately, to-night," continued The Thinking Machine. "You will find a small hole in it near the level of your eye. Feel in that hole, and see what is there— no matter what it is— then return to Brookline and telephone me. It is of the greatest importance."

The reporter was thoughtful for a moment; it sounded like a page from a Dumas romance.

"What's it all about?" he asked curiously.

"Will you go?" came the counter question.

"Yes, certainly."

"Good-by."

Hatch heard a click as the receiver was hung up at the other end. He shrugged his shoulders, said "Good-night" to the city editor, and went out. An hour later he was at Randall's Crossing. The night was dark— so dark that the road was barely visible. The car whirled on, and as its lights were swallowed up Hatch set out to find the white house. He came upon it at last, and, turning, faced across an open field toward the wood. Far away over there outlined vaguely against the distant glow of the city, was a tall tree.

Having fixed its location, the reporter moved along for a hundred yards or more to where the wood ran down to the road. Here he climbed a fence and stumbled on through the dark, doing sundry injuries to his shins. After a disagreeable ten minutes he reached the tree.

With a small electric flash light he found the hole. It was only a little larger than his hand, a place where decay had eaten its way into the tree trunk. For just a moment he hesitated about putting his hand into it— he didn't know what might be there. Then, with a grim smile, he obeyed orders.

He felt nothing save crumblings of decayed wood, and finally dragged out a handful, only to spill it on the ground. That couldn't be what was meant. For the second time he thrust in his hand, and after a deal of grabbing about produced— a piece of string. It was just a plain, ordinary, common piece of string— white string. He stared at it and smiled.

"I wonder what Van Dusen will make of that?" he asked himself.

Again his hand was thrust into the hole. But that was all— the piece of string. Then came another thought, and with that due regard for detail which made him a good reporter he went looking around the big tree for a possible second opening of some sort. He found none.

About three quarters of an hour later he stepped into an all-night drug store in Brookline and 'phoned to The Thinking Machine. There was an instant response to his ring.

"Well, well, what did you find?" came the query.

"Nothing to interest you, I imagine," replied the reporter grimly. "Just a piece of string."

"Good, good!" exclaimed The Thinking Machine. "What does it look like?"

"Well," replied the newspaper man judicially, "it's just a piece of white string— cotton, I imagine— about six inches long."

"Any knots in it?"

"Wait till I see."

He was reaching into his pocket to take it out, when the startled voice of The Thinking Machine came over the line.

"Didn't you leave it there?" it demanded.

"No; I have it in my pocket."

"Dear me!" exclaimed the scientist irritably. "That's bad. Well, has it any knots in it?" he asked with marked resignation.

Hatch felt that he had committed the unpardonable sin. "Yes," he replied after an examination. "It has two knots in it— just plain knots— about two inches apart."

"Single or double knots?"

"Single knots."

"Excellent! Now, Mr. Hatch, listen. Untie one of those knots— it doesn't matter which one— and carefully smooth out the string. Then take it and put it back where you found it. 'Phone me as soon after that as you can."

"Now, to-night?"

"Now, immediately."

"But— but— " began the astonished reporter.

"It is a matter of the utmost consequence," the irritated voice assured him. "You should not have taken the string. I told you merely to see what was there. But as you have brought it away you must put it back as soon as possible. Believe me, it is of the highest importance. And don't forget to 'phone me."

The sharp, commanding tone stirred the reporter to new action and interest. A car was just going past the door, outward bound. He raced for it and got aboard. Once settled, he untied one of the knots, straightened out the string, and fell to wondering what sort of fool's errand he was on.

"Randall's Crossing!" called the conductor at last.

Hatch left the car and retraced his tortuous way along the road and through the wood to the tall tree, found the hole, and had just thrust in his hand to replace the string when he heard a woman's voice directly behind him, almost in his ear. It was a calm, placid, convincing sort of voice. It said:

"Hands up!"

Hatch was a rational human being with ambitions and hopes for the future; therefore his hands went up without hesitation. "I knew something would happen," he told himself.

He turned to see the woman. In the darkness he could only dimly trace a tall, slender figure. Steadily poised just a couple of dozen inches from his nose was a revolver. He could see that without any difficulty. It glinted a little, even in the gloom, and made itself conspicuous.

"Well," asked the reporter at last, as he stood reaching upward, "it's your move."

"Who are you?" asked the woman. Her voice was steady and rather pleasant.

The reporter considered the question in the light of all he didn't know. He felt it wouldn't be a sensible thing to say just who he was. Somewhere at the end of this thing The Thinking Machine was working on a problem; he was presumably helping in a modest, unobtrusive sort of way; therefore he would be cautious.

"My name is Williams," he said promptly. "Jim Williams," he added circumstantially.

"What are you doing here?"

Another subject for thought. That was a question he couldn't answer; he didn't know what he was doing there; he was wondering himself. He could only hazard a guess, and he did that with trepidation.

"I came from him," he said with deep meaning.

"Who?" demanded the woman suspiciously.

"It would be useless to name him," replied the reporter.

"Yes, yes, of course," the woman mused. "I understand."

There was a little pause. Hatch was still watching the revolver. He had a lively interest in it. It had not moved a hair's breath since he first looked at it; hanging up there in the night it fairly stared him out of countenance.

"And the string?" asked the woman at last.

Now the reporter felt that he was in the mire. The woman herself relieved this new embarrassment.

"Is it in the tree?" she went on.

"Yes."

"How many knots are in it?"

"One."

"One?" she repeated eagerly. "Put your hand in there and hand me the string. No tricks, now!"

Hatch complied with a certain deprecatory manner which he intended should convey to her the impression that there would be no tricks. As she took the string her fingers brushed against his. They were smooth and delicate. He knew that even in the dark.

"And what did he say?" she went on.

Having gone this far without falling into anything, the reporter was willing to plunge— felt that he had to, as a matter of fact.

"He said yes," he murmured without shifting his eyes from the revolver.

"Yes?" the woman repeated again eagerly. "Are you sure?"

"Yes," said the reporter again. The thought flashed through his mind that he was tangling up somebody's affairs sadly— he didn't know whose. Anyhow, it was a matter of no consequence to him, as long as that revolver stared at him that way.

"Where is it?" asked the woman.

Then the earth slipped out from under him. "I don't know," he replied weakly.

"Didn't he give it to you?"

"Oh, no. He— he wouldn't trust me with it."

"How can I get it, then?"

"Oh, he'll fix it all right," Hatch assured her soothingly. "I think he said something about to-morrow night."

"Where?"

"Here."

"Thank God!" the woman gasped suddenly. Her tone betrayed deep emotion; but it wasn't so deep that she lowered the revolver.

There was a long pause. Hatch was figuring possibilities. How to get possession of the revolver seemed the imminent problem. His hands were still in the air, and there was nothing to indicate that they were not to remain there indefinitely. The woman finally broke the silence.

"Are you armed?"

"Oh, no."

"Truthfully?"

"Truthfully."

"You may lower your hands," she said, as if satisfied; "then go on ahead of me straight across the field to the road. Turn to your left there. Don't look back under any circumstances. I shall be behind you with this revolver pointing at your head. If you attempt to escape or make any outcry I shall shoot. Do you believe me?"

The reporter considered it for a moment. "I'm firmly convinced of it," he said at last.

They stumbled on to the road, and there Hatch turned as directed. Walking along in the shadows with the tread of small feet behind him he first contemplated a dash for liberty; but that would mean giving up the adventure, whatever it was. He had no fear for his personal safety as long as he obeyed orders, and he intended to do that implicitly. And besides, The Thinking Machine had his slender finger in the pie somewhere. Hatch knew that, and knowing it was a source of deep gratification.

Just now he was taking things at face value, hoping that with their arrival at whatever place they were bound for he would be further enlightened. Once he thought he heard the woman sobbing, and started to look back. Then he remembered her warning, and thought better of it. Had he looked back he would have seen her stumbling along, weeping, with the revolver dangling limply at her side.

At last, a mile or more farther on, they began to arrive somewhere. A house sat back some distance from the road.

"Go in there!" commanded his captor.

He turned in at the gate, and five minutes later stood in a comfortably furnished room on the ground floor of a small house. A dim light was burning. The woman turned it up. Then almost defiantly she threw aside her veil and hat and stood before him. Hatch gasped. She was pretty— bewilderingly pretty— and young and graceful and all that a young woman should be. Her cheeks were flushed.

"You know me, I suppose?" she exclaimed.

"Oh yes, certainly," Hatch assured her.

And saying that, he knew he had never seen her before.

"I suppose you thought it perfectly horrid of me to keep you with your hands up like that all the time; but I was dreadfully frightened," the woman went on, and she smiled a little uncertainly. "But there wasn't anything else to do."

"It was the only thing," Hatch agreed.

"Now I'm going to ask you to write and tell him just what happened," she resumed. "And tell him, too, that the other matter must be arranged immediately. I'll see that your letter is delivered. Sit here!"

She picked up the revolver from the table beside her and placed a chair in position. Hatch walked to the table and sat down. Pen and ink lay before him. He knew now he was trapped. He couldn't write a letter to that vague "him" of whom he had talked so glibly, about that still more vague "it" — whatever that might be. He sat dumbly staring at the paper.

"Well?" she demanded suspiciously.

"I— I can't write it," he confessed suddenly.

She stared at him coldly for a moment as if she had suspected just that, and he in turn stared at the revolver with a new and vital interest. He felt the tension, but saw no way to relieve it.

"You are an imposter!" she blurted out at last. "A detective?"

Hatch didn't deny it. She backed away toward a bell call near the door, watching him closely, and rang vigorously several times. After a little pause the door opened, and two men, evidently servants, entered.

"Take this gentleman to the rear room up stairs," she commanded without giving them a glance, "and lock him up. Keep him under close guard. If he attempts to escape, stop him! That's all."

Here was another page from a Dumas romance. The reporter started to explain; but there was a merciless gleam, danger even, in the woman's eyes, and he submitted to orders. So, he was led up stairs a captive, and one of the men took a place on guard inside the room.

The dawn was creeping on when Hatch fell asleep. It was about ten o'clock when he awoke, and the sun was high. His guard, wide eyed and alert, still sat beside the door. For several minutes the reporter lay still, seeking vainly some sort of explanation of what was happening. Then, cheerfully:

"Good-morning."

The guard merely glared at him.

"May I inquire your name?" the reporter asked.

There was no answer.

"Or the lady's name?"

No answer.

"Or why I am where I am?"

Still no answer.

"What would you do," Hatch went on casually, "if I should try to get out of here?"

The guard handled his revolver carelessly. The reporter was satisfied. "He is not deaf, that's certain," he told himself.

He spent the remainder of the morning yawning and wondering what The Thinking Machine was about; also he had a few casual reflections as to the mental state of his city editor at his failure to appear and follow up the kidnapping story. He finally dismissed all these ideas with a shrug of his shoulders, and sat down to wait for whatever was coming.

It was in the early afternoon that he heard laughter in the next room. First there was a woman's voice, then the shrill cackle of a child. Finally he distinguished some words.

"You ticky!" exclaimed the child, and again there was the laugh.

The reporter understood "you ticky," coupled with the subsequent peal, to be a sort of abbreviated English for "you tickle." After awhile the merriment died away and he heard the child's insistent demand for something else.

"You be hossie."

"No, no," the woman expostulated.

"Yes, you be hossie."

"No, let Morris be hossie."

"No, no. You be hossie."

That was all. Evidently some one was "hossie," because there was a sound of romping; but finally even that died away. Hatch yawned away another hour or so under the constant eye of his guard, and then began to grow restless. He turned on the guard savagely.

"Isn't anything ever going to happen?" he demanded.

The guard didn't say.

"You'll never convict yourself on your own statement," Hatch burst out again in disgust.

He stretched out on a couch, bored by the sameness which had characterized the last few hours of his adventure. His attention was attracted by some movement at the door, and he looked up. His guard heard, too, and with revolver in hand went to the door, carefully unlocking it. After a few hurriedly whispered words he left the room, and Hatch was meditating an instant rush for a window, when the woman entered. She had the revolver now. She was deathly white and gripped the weapon menacingly. She did not lock the door— only closed it— but with her own person and the attention compelling revolver she blocked the way.

"What is it now?" asked Hatch wearily.

"You must not speak or call, or make the slightest sound," she whispered tensely. "If you do, I'll kill you. Do you understand?"

Hatch confessed by a nod that he understood. He also imagined that he understood this sudden change in guard, and the warning. It was because some one was about to enter or had entered the house. His conjecture was partially confirmed instantly by a distant rapping on a door.

"Not a sound, now!" whispered the woman.

From somewhere below he heard the sound of steps as one of the servants answered the knock. After a short wait he heard two voices mumbling. Suddenly one was raised clearly.

"Why, Worcester can't be that far," it protested irritably.

Hatch knew. It was The Thinking Machine. The woman noted a change in his manner and drew back the hammer of the revolver. The reporter saw the idea. He didn't dare call. That would be suicide. Perhaps he could attract attention, though; drop a key, for instance. The sound might reach The Thinking Machine

and be interpreted aright. One hand was in a pocket, and slowly he was drawing out a key. He would risk it. Maybe— —

Then came a new sound. It was the patter of small feet. The guarded door was pushed open and a tousle-headed child, a boy, ran in.

"Mama, mama!" he called loudly. He ran to the woman and clutched at her skirts.

"Oh, my baby! what have you done?" she asked piteously. "We are lost, lost!"

"Me 'faid," the child went on.

With the door— his avenue of possible escape— open, Hatch did not drop the key. Instead, he gazed at the woman, then down at the child. From below he again heard The Thinking Machine.

"How far is the car track, then?"

The servant answered something. There was a sound of steps, and the front door closed. Hatch knew that The Thinking Machine had come and gone; yet he was strangely calm about it, quite himself, despite the fact that a nervous finger still lay on the trigger of the pistol.

From his refuge behind his mother's skirts the boy peered around at Hatch shyly. The reporter gazed, gazed, all eyes, and then was convinced. The boy was Walter Francis, the kidnapped boy whose pictures were being published in every newspaper of a dozen cities. Here was a story — the story — the superlative story.

"Mrs. Francis, if you wouldn't mind letting down that hammer— " he suggested modestly. "I assure you I contemplate no harm, and you— you are very nervous."

"You know me, then?" she asked.

"Only because the child there, Walter, called you mama."

Mrs. Francis lowered the revolver hammer so recklessly that Hatch involuntarily dodged. And then came a scene, a scene with tears in it, and all those things which stir men, even reporters. Finally the woman dropped the revolver on the floor and swept the boy up in her arms with a gesture of infinite tenderness. He cuddled there, content. At that moment Hatch could have walked out the door, but instead he sat down. He was just beginning to get interested.

"They sha'n't take you!" sobbed the mother.

"There is no immediate danger," the reporter assured her. "The man who came here for that purpose has gone. Meanwhile, if you will tell me the facts, perhaps— perhaps I may be able to be of some assistance."

Mrs. Francis looked at him, startled. "Help me?"

"If you will explain, perhaps I can do something," said Hatch again.

Somewhere back in a remote recess of his brain he was remembering. And as it became clearer he was surprised that he had not remembered sooner. It was a story of marital infelicity, and its principals were Stanley Francis and his wife— this bewilderingly pretty young woman before him. It had been only eight or nine months back.

Technically she had deserted Stanley Francis. There had been some violent scene and she left their home and little son. Soon afterward she went to Europe. It had been rumored that divorce proceedings would follow, or at least a legal separation, but nothing had ever come of the rumors. All this Mrs. Francis told to Hatch in little incoherent bursts, punctuated with sobs and tears.

"He struck me, he struck me!" she declared with a flush of anger and shame, "and I went then on impulse. I was desperate. Later, even before I went to Europe, I knew the legal status of the affair; but the thought of my boy lingered, and I resolved to come back and get him— abduct him, if necessary. I did that, and I will keep him if I have to kill the one who opposes me."

Hatch saw the mother instinct here, that tigerish ferocity of love which stops at nothing.

"I conceived the plan of demanding fifty thousand dollars of my husband under threat of abduction," Mrs. Francis went on. "My purpose was to make it appear that the plot was that of professional— what would you call it? — kidnappers. But I did not send the letter demanding this until I had perfected all my plans and knew I could get the boy. I wanted my husband to think it was the work of others, at least until we were safe in Europe, because even then I imagined there would be a long legal fight.

"After I stole the boy and he recognized me, I wanted him as my own, absolutely safe from legal action by his father. Then I wrote to Mr. Francis, telling him I had Walter, and asking that in pity to me he legally give me the boy by a document of some sort. In that letter I told how he might signify his willingness to do this; but of course I would not give my address. I placed a string, the one you saw, in that tree after having tied two knots in it. It was a silly, romantic means of communication he and I used years ago in my girlhood when we both lived near here. If he agreed that I should have the child, he was to come or send some one last night and unties one of the two knots."

Then, to Hatch, the intricacies passed away. He understood clearly. Instead of going to the police with the second letter from his wife, Francis had gone to The Thinking Machine. The Thinking Machine sent the reporter to untie the knot, which was an answer of "Yes" to Mrs. Francis's request for the child. Then she would have written giving her address, and there would have been a clue to the child's whereabouts. It was all perfectly clear now.

"Did you specifically mention a string in your letter?" he asked.

"No. I merely stated that I would expect his answer in that place, and would leave something there by which he could signify 'Yes' or 'No,' as he did years ago. The string was one of the odd little ideas of my girlhood. Two knots meant 'No'; one knot meant 'Yes'; and if the string was found by anyone else it meant nothing."

This, then, was why The Thinking Machine did not tell him at first that he would find a string and instruct him to untie one of the knots in it. The scientist had seen that it might have been one of the other tokens of the old romantic days.

"When I met you there," Mrs. Francis resumed. "I believed you were an imposter— I don't know why, I just believed it— yet your answers were in a way correct. For fear you were not what you seemed— that you were a detective— I brought you here to keep you until I got the child's release. You know the rest."

The reporter picked up the revolver and whirled it in his fingers. The action, apparently, did not disturb Mrs. Francis.

"Why did you remain here so long after you got the child?" asked Hatch.

"I believed it was safer than in a city," she answered frankly. "The steamer on which I planned to sail for Europe with my boy leaves to-morrow. I had intended going to New York to-night to catch it; but now— "

The reporter glanced down at the child. He had fallen asleep in his mother's arms. His tiny hand clung to her. The picture was a pretty one. Hatch made up his mind.

"Well, you'd better pack up," he said. "I'll go with you to New York and do all I can."

It was on the New York-bound train several hours later that Hatch turned to Mrs. Francis with an odd smile.

"Why didn't you load that revolver?" he asked.

"Because I was horribly afraid some one would get hurt with it," she replied laughingly.

She was gay with that gentle happiness of possession which blesses woman for the agonies of motherhood, and glanced from time to time at the berth across the aisle where her baby was asleep. Looking upon it all, Hatch was content. He didn't know his exact position in law; but that didn't matter, after all.

HUTCHINSON HATCH'S exclusive story of the escape to Europe of Mrs. Francis and her boy was remarkably complete; but all the facts were not in it. It was a week or so later that he detailed them to The Thinking Machine.

"I knew it," said the scientist at the end. "Francis came to me, and I interested myself in the case, practically knowing every fact from his statement. When you heard me speak in the house where you were a prisoner I was there

merely to convince myself that the mother did have the baby. I heard it call her and went away satisfied. I knew you were there, too, because you had failed to 'phone me the second time as I expected, and I knew intuitively what you would do when you got the real facts about Mrs. Francis and her baby. I went away so that the field might be clear for you to act. Francis himself is a detestable puppy. I told him so."

And that was all that was ever said about it.

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17: Doomed

Ernest Favenc

1845-1908

The Town and Country Journal, 29 April 1899

JIM TURNER sat in the verandah of his modest homestead reading a letter. The mailman had just left the bag, and amongst the miscellaneous contents was a letter from an old friend, one Dick Beveridge, and in the contents was an item of information which made him feel rather uncomfortable.

"You perhaps have not heard that Charley Moore is dead, and how he died. His horse fell on him and crippled him. He lay there for four and twenty hours before he was found, and then he had been only dead for about one hour. The ants were swarming over him. Fancy what he must have suffered! So now that he is gone, you and I are the last of the five."

Five of them. Yes, he remembered it well—five of them, eager, young, and hopeful, who came into the untrodden district just sixteen years ago. They found good country, and each took up a run. Now there was only Beveridge and himself alive, and the other three had all died violent deaths. How distinctly he recalled the occurrence, which had given rise to the looming fate that seemed to be overhanging them.

They were camped one afternoon on the bank of the river; the same river he could now see from the verandah, bordered by luxuriant-foliaged tea-trees, with flocks of white cockatoos screaming and frolicking amongst the bushes, varied by flights of the Blue Mountain parrots crowding and chattering round the white flowers.

"Hullo!" said Moore, "there are some niggers coming." Across the wide stretch of sand on the opposite bank some wandering blacks from the back country had just put in an appearance. Tired, thirsty, and burdened with their children and their camp furniture, they trooped down the bank to the water, and drank at the grateful pool in the river bed.

"What a start it would give them to drop a bullet in amongst them," said Daveney; "I'm blessed if I don't do it."

"Take care you don't hit one; there are a lot of gins and children amongst them," said Moore.

Daveney took up his carbine and fired. There was a start of dismay amongst the natives, and they bolted up the bank. One stopped behind a black patch prostrate on the sand.

"By heavens, you've hit one, you clumsy fool," said Beveridge, and the whole party went across the sand to the water. Not only one, but two, had been hit. The Martini bullet had gone clean through a gin's body and killed the baby she had been nursing. The gin was still alive. She looked at the white faces still

gazing down at her, and commenced to talk. What she said of course none of them could understand, but that it was a wild tirade of vengeance against the murderers of her child and herself they could pretty well understand. Death cut her speech short, and almost at the same time there was a wild yell from the bank above, and a shower of spears fell amongst the run-hunters. Only one man was hit badly, and that was Daveney, the man who fired the fatal shot. The blacks had retreated after throwing their spears, and the whites helped their wounded comrade across to camp. Pursuit was impossible; the evening was well on, and by the time the horses could be got together the blacks would be beyond reach.

Then Turner's memory recalled Daveney's death in raging delirium, when the tropic sun had inflamed his wound, and fever had set in.

"Keep that gin away, can't you? Why do you let her stop there talking, talking, talking? What is she saying? You will all die, die violent deaths. Ha! Ha! Ha! Funny a myall blackgin can talk such good English, but that's what she says, 'You will die violent deaths!' Keep her away, you fellows, can't you? There's no sense in letting her stand talking there!" He died, and was buried in a lovely valley, where never a white man has been near since. Then Strathdon was drowned in the wreck of the Gothenburg, and now Moore had met a horrible fate. Turner got up with a shudder. Who would go next, he or Beveridge? He had no wish to die just then. He had but lately married, and in a few years the station would be clear of all back debt. He took up the letter, and read it through. At the end Beveridge said, "I am coming your way, and will see you in a few days." Turner banished all memories of the past, and went in and ate a hearty dinner and his fair young wife congratulated him on his good appetite.

Beveridge came in due time. Like Turner, he had seemingly banished dull care, and had chosen to ignore the doom that strangely enough seemed hanging over him. Nay, he even declined to talk of it with his host, and resolutely declared it was "all bosh."

It was a sultry, thunderous evening, and Turner and his wife, with their precious first baby, had driven their guest out to a point of interest in the neighborhood, and were returning, when the thunderstorm suddenly burst over their heads. Turner kept his horses going, but the rain overtook them some five miles from the homestead, and pelted them in their faces. Then came a flash, and darkness, as though the electric fluid had struck their eyeballs blind. With the flash came a roar, as though the world was splitting in twain, and then the horses, which had bolted off the road, went headlong into a wire fence, instead of pulling up at the sliprails.

"It's as dark as pitch" said Turner, getting on his legs unhurt. "Where are you all?" There was no answer, and he commenced groping about, and came on the struggling horses. "Whoa! Beveridge, man, where are you? It can't be night, but

it's all dark. Didn't you see that cursed old gin standing in the road and startling the horses? Beveridge!"

One of the men fortunately came along and found Turner, stricken blind, crouching against a tree. One of the horses was dead, with a broken neck; the other was much cut about with the wire. The baby was uninjured, and Mrs. Turner was unconscious; while Beveridge's head had been smashed in by the hoof of one of the struggling horses; he was dead. Mrs. Turner recovered, but her unfortunate husband never did, and to the day when a merciful death took him away from the blind earth, whose beauty he would see no more, he asserted that the last thing he saw was the form of a black gin, with a child in her arms, standing in front of the sliprails and blocking the horses.

18: The Beggar Man

Dy Edwardson

Edward Dyson, 1865-1931
Punch (Melbourne) 28 Dec 1916

CHRIS WESTERTON encountered the man in Little Collins-street at about eleven o'clock on a warm summer morning. It was the marked disparity between his deportment and boots and his voice that pulled Westerton up sharp.

You see, Chris Westerton had an avid interest in humanity. He had an artist's curiosity about men, women and things that made the least inviting of mortal creatures attractive to him.

If Providence had any intention in the matter at all, it had meant Westerton to be an author— a creator of human documents, and a peerer into human motives, a gatherer of facts land fancies concerning man and his young to be pieced together into intelligible records called novels.

But parental influence had prevailed so far, and Westerton at twenty-six was a stock broker. You would never have guessed it. He preferred to look like an artist in a good way of business, and had a weakness for flowing ties and wide-rimmed, swanking hats. He had brown eyes and a dawning smile.

But we must let him go at that. The man leaning in the door said:

"Excuse me, sir, can you spare me a moment?"

"Well ?" Westerton replied.

"I wish to persuade you to let me have half a sovereign—"

Then Westerton laughed aloud. "I like your cheek," said he.

It was really the boots in contrast with the voice that had pulled Westerton up. The voice was intonated to a fault; the tone was contritious, but strengthened with assurance. Obviously the speaker had no doubt about the half-sovereign— he knew he would get it. 'Yet the boots were preposterous. They were old. In point of fact, they no longer deserved to be called boots at all. What right had such boots with such a voice?

Letting his eye run over the whole man, Chris found the rest of the outfit entirely in keeping with the boots. The suit was absurd in its dilapidation— almost as grotesque as that of a vaudeville tramp.

Chris's investigation was open and unashamed. He laughed again at its conclusion. "What is it— a joke?" he said.

The man shook his head, and his cap fell off.

"A joke?" he replied after restoring the cap. "This?"— indicating his dress— "No, sir, pressure of necessity."

Westerton looked into his face, grinning incredulously. The man was young— twenty-two, perhaps, burnt an even and admirable brown. He looked

healthy and strong enough to tear up trees. He had good eyes and fine teeth; he was rather a good-looking fellow.

"But you are all right. What is a man like you doing begging? Why don't you get a job?"

"What sort of a job, for instance?"

"Bless my soul-building gaols!"

The man shook his head. "Builders know their business better than you, sir. I couldn't do it. Never laid a brick in my life."

"But you could mix mortar."

"I think not. Perhaps you don't know it, but mixing mortar is— well, not exactly a gift. You have to learn to mix mortar."

"Come in here," said Westerton, "and have a cup of tea." He led the man to a small tea room, and gave an order for tea and scones.

"Come," he said, "you've existed up to now. How have you managed it?"

"I did not manage it. There was always somebody else to manage it for me. I was the pampered son of rich parents till I was twenty. Then a malign stroke of fortune deprived my parents of their riches; another malign stroke deprived me of my parents. I found myself friendless in the world. An uncle, with the idea of ridding himself of me most effectually, sent me to Australia."

"And you can do nothing but beg?"

"Candidly, I can do nothing half so well."

Westerton stared at the youth, and his face broke into a grin again. "I'm enjoying myself," he said. "You are refreshing. In fact, you are the most amusing mendicant I have met. You might be called an entertaining beggar."

"Thank you— I try to be."

"And it works?"

The young man nodded. "In most eases it does. My name is Amos Hope Ogilvie Higginbotham. Fatuous name, given me, I believe, to afford my father's tenants exercise in phonetics. I tried to get work. Sometimes I get it. I could never keep it. In no instance did any employer find the least difficulty in getting a better man. Eventually I discovered my utter uselessness.

"At any rate, you need not go about in this deplorable outfit," said Chris Westerton. "Here is my card. Call at that address at eight tonight, and I'll give you some decent clothes. You are about my size."

Higginbotham shook his head. "Could not think of it, sir. Decent clothes would spoil my business."

"Do you mean to say you wear those egregious boots from choice?"

"To be sure. I could find better in almost any dust-box."

"So you could. Then this wretched suit does not necessarily mean penury?"

"Not necessarily. I might be very much worse off in a very much better suit. If one is a beggar one must live up to one's calling. A coal miner does not go to

his work in a frock coat and polished Paris hat, although he may be earning more than a banker. One must be congruous— one must observe the fitness of things."

Chris laughed. "Very likely. You'll forgive me if I am not struck with the fitness of your things."

"Of course, they are not made for me." Higginbotham had never permitted himself to smile— his gravity was most impressive. "I know my business as a beggar at any rate. I have failed at most other things— I am a comparative success as a solicitor."

"Are you? And do you think this is the way to talk to a man from whom you expect alms?"

"Apparently it interests you; Sir, a beggar's calling is very like that of an actor. First of all, he must capture the interest of his audience. The rest is easy."

"Oh, I see, I see ; and I am to be trapped with engaging frankness."

"I hope so. I have given you a fair amount of my valuable time. I have interested you. I trust you will not be ungrateful."

Westerton finished his tea, and arose. "I won't," he said. "You are a unique experience. Here's half-a-crown."

"You don't think it's worth' half-a-sovereign, sir?"

"Perhaps; but I'll give you the other seven-an-sixpence in good advice. At this rate, you must have quite a stock of loose capital. Well, buy Gamecocks."

"Gamecocks? You think I might succeed poultry farming?" Mr. Amos Hope Ogilvie Higginbotham shook his head.

"Gamecocks are not poultry— they are Westralian mining stock. They can be bought for a few shillings a share just now. I have a very lively hope that they will be a few pound's apiece in a month. Good day, Mr. Higginbotham. I'm a busy man, and so are you."

Chris Westerton went about his duties for the rest of the day with his natural smile deepened to a grin. He had enjoyed Amos Hope Ogilvie Higginbotham immensely. He continued to enjoy him. "Fatuous name," he quoted a dozen times, with a fat chuckle, "given to me, I believe, to afford my father's tenants exercise in phonetics."

FIVE YEARS LATER, when on his travel, Chris Westerton, one of the largest shareholders in the Gamecock mine, Gumbutt, W.A., consequently a very rich man, was staying with the Cowards, English relations of his, at Broseley in Shropshire. There he was introduced to Mr. Horace Tudor, a neighbour of the Cowards, a well-to-do man still under thirty, handsome, indolent, easy-going, obviously supremely happy in the love of a pretty, cultivated wife, and the Possessor of a brown-eyed, beautiful, thick-legged baby girl.

Chris was more interested in Horace Tudor than in anything else he had met in England. He thought Tudor a man who had reduced living to a fine art, and told him so one day

"No," was the reply. Tudor sipped his whisky and soda. "Your words imply premeditation."

"Well, isn't this all evidence of it? Your house, your surroundings, your charming wife— even Esther here, the child, all in absolute keeping."

"We certainly do belong, but it is all fortuitous, my dear Westerton. All I can say is that I do not repel affinities."

"And you think a man who does not absolutely repel his affinities will eventually find self with everything quite to his liking?"

"With a little luck he should."

Westerton sighed. "My affinities must be shy," he said.

"But they tell me you are rich. At least there is the basis of a substantial happiness."

"Yes; a lucky speculation in Gamecock scrip put me quite right with the world from the financial point of view; but there is no home, no charming wife, no great romp of a girl."

"Where's your hurry? I have been round the world before I found what I wanted."

"Or, according to your own theory, before what you wanted found you. In your travels did you ever reach Melbourne?"

"Melbourne?" Tudor very carefully fingered the ash from his cigar.

"Yes— Australia, you know."

"Oh; I know where it is very well. In fact, I have a brother there. At any rate, I had. But I was never there myself."

"A younger brother?"

"A twin brother. To be candid with you, Westerton, I believe he went to the devil there. I would give something to know what has become of the rip."

"I am returning to Melbourne shortly. Do you think I might help you?"

"You might, but there is little to go on. He would certainly drop the family name. I know nothing of his life there— I only conjecture."

"Have you a photograph?"

Tudor went into another room, and presently returned with a photograph in his hand, the picture of a boy of eighteen, rather faded, and with the curious, out-of-date look photographs so quickly put on. "That is the scamp as he appeared nine years ago," said Tudor.

Westerton examined the face intently. "It might be yourself," he said.

"It might, indeed. There would be no difference worth mentioning between that and a picture of myself at fifteen—"

"May I take this?"

"Certainly."

"It is just possible I may stumble on your brother."

"Possible, but not probable."

"Probable! Quite probable. In fact, Tudor, I am certain I once took tea with, the original of this photograph in a small tea house in Little Collins-street, Melbourne. We had a conversation. I remember him quite distinctly."

Tudor was greatly interested. "It is an extraordinary coincidence that you should have turned up here," he said, musingly.

CHRIS Westerton brought the photograph of Arthur Tudor back to Australia with him. In Melbourne he set himself to work to hunt down Amos Hope Ogilvie Higginbotham, for he was satisfied in his own mind that the quaint beggar he had taken tea with was identical with Horace Tudor's missing twin.

After six months of vain efforts on his own, Westerton seized a chance opportunity that offered itself to obtain some little professional assistance.

"I can't place the man myself," said the detective to whom he showed Arthur Tudor's photograph, "but let me have this, and I'll consult Wire. Wire is the memory of the Victorian detective force. His ability to place a face is uncanny."

Detective Wire himself called on Westerton a day later.

"Connor handed in this photo, Mr. Westerton," he said. "I remember the man well. He went by the name of Higginbotham here. He served a sentence of six months for vagrancy some five and a half years ago. In coming out he disappeared. I remember the case particularly well, because we found in his possession four thousand Gamecock shares. They were almost worthless when he went in."

"Yes, yes, that would be in 1901," said Westerton. "When he came out those '1000 shares would be worth £40,000."

"Something like that, sir."

"The shares were sold in a lump at what would he a week after Higginbotham's liberation. Old John Henderson bought them. They were sold through Lee and Lees. That will do, thank you, Mr. Wire."

BY THE NEXT MAIL Chris Westerton wrote to Horace Tudor:

"I have traced your twin brother. I am delighted that he acted on the advice I gave him in connection with the buying of Gamecock shares, and not altogether surprised that the art of bagging as applied by him yielded sufficient money to enable him to indulge in a little speculation. Arthur Tudor— alias Amos Hope Ogilvie higginbotham— (shall we say the late Arthur Tudor?) is now effectually disposed of. He is buried in my breast, and there is to be no tombstone and no 'In memoriam.' "

In due time there came an answer:

"I am grateful for your efforts to trace my poor brother, and not sorry you have succeeded, since, there is to be no 'In memoriam.' There were hints in your eyes when we met here in my house that you recollected Amos Hope Ogilvie Higginbotham, so the twin brother was resurrected to account for a few things, and to soften what might have been an unpleasant situation."

"I should have trusted my perception," commented Westerton, as he put the letter away. "I knew the moment I set eyes on him he was the same man."

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19: "Honi Soit"

Ward Edson

Edward Dyson, 1865-1931
Punch (Melbourne) 2 Feb 1911

"ROSEHOLM" was a peaceful, commonplace, somewhat stupid boarding establishment, like almost all boarding houses, until little Mrs. Lett arrived. The little Mrs. Lett woke "Roseholm" up. The Misses Carter, who were landladies of place, objected to having their establishment awakened in this sense, but little Mrs. Lett did not seem to take the Misses Carter very seriously into account.

Mrs. Lett's Christian name was Jessie, and she did not care who knew it, or who used it. She was that rashly unconventional, revolutionary type which imagines Christian names were given us for purposes of identification. This will give you an idea of the kind of person Mrs. Lett was. No really nice woman would dream of permitting familiarities with her Christian name; it is almost more than one's reputation is worth to do so. As others were graciously allowed the use of the convenient appellation bestowed by Mrs. Lett's godparents, we shall extend to ourselves the same liberty.

Jessie was a widow, short, and so admirably rounded that a susceptible man felt she ought to be placarded with the warning: "Beware of the curves." She was cheerful in all weathers, and when you can say that of a woman in a climate like ours you have exhausted the language. The little widow woke up "Roseholm" as an electric shock shakes up a boosy patient. Not that there was anything boosy about the genteel Miss Carters' establishment. It was a most reputable place of residence, but dull.

There were no dull moments in Jessie's vicinity; she was volatile, exuberant, ruddy with health, spiritually effervescent. Her vivacity was charming, tonic, sweeping. Most of the boarders opened their hearts to it, . and suddenly acquired a new interest in life and other habits than "lying round" after meals, encouraging liver congestion and obesity.

But, of course, there were a few whom Mrs. Lett's exuberance and happy manners thoroughly scandalised. You meet the sort in all walks of life, although it may not be your business to recognise them, your business not being our game of pinning people on paper for the delectation of their neighbours. The people who did not like Mrs. Lett were the grumpy wives and the depressed husbands who were afraid of them, the confirmed old maids, and three extremely pious people, whose piety was of that devilish sort that confounds animal health and hearty spirits with all iniquity.

Had you lived at "Roseholm" for a month previous to the advent of Jessie Lett you would not have believed it possible that one person could have shaken that staid house to its foundation as Mrs. Lett did in the course of about ten

days. From a dimly-lit, close-shut, extremely orderly, very quiet, most prosy and methodical home, Mrs. Lett converted the Miss Carters' establishment into a disorderly rattle of a place, where lights blazed, windows were always wide open, pianos rattled, and laughter rang out from eve till midnight. The widow seemed to have thrown wide the dark walls, set matches to everything, hurled the rooms into comfortable disorder, and shaken all the people out of their bad habits of lethargy. Even those who disliked Jessie were the better for her coming; she gave them a new interest in life, a new theme for scandal, and something to expect. It is good to expect things, and in the vicinity of the widow of the late Andrew Lett there were always great expectations.

Of course, most of the male boarders liked Mrs. Lett. She was just thirty, and looked five years younger, nice enough for anything, and without a ha'porth of humbug in her composition.

"Bless my soul, she's made the house gay!" cried Mrs. Imieson.

"For which heaven be praised!" replied Abe Imieson, her son.

"But it's not respectable."

"Respectability is a horrible disease to die of, my dear mother— a sort of dry rot. Keep it out of your bones. Besides, Mrs Lett has lumps of money, gobs of it, tanks full, stacks!"

"How do you know that ?"

Abe laid a fat forefinger beside his fat nose, and winked cunningly.

"I know it in the way of business. It is not absolutely necessary for the others here to know it. She is not talking about it herself and it might make other admirers too enthusiastic. Wilson, and Berber, and Zich, for instance— mercenary brutes !"

"And my boy Abe is thinking of this dot of a woman ?"

"Your boy Abe is thinking of the dot."

Abe went on thinking of the dot. He was the most persistent of Jessie's followers, and her following now comprised quite two-thirds of the boarders. Jessie welcomed them all. She seemed to like everybody, but showed no preferences.

Abe Imieson's admiration and respect for Mrs. Lett went to pieces all of a sudden. He was her devoted admirer at dinner; before midnight he was her deadly enemy.

A few words had worked this wonderful transformation.

"No, Mr. Imieson, I am not thinking of marrying again, and if I were you are not It. Of course, that's meant nicely; it's no reflection on you. I don't happen to feel that I could care ninepence for a man like you 'in the loverly way.' "

"But— but couldn't you learn, Jessie?"

"Forget it, Mr. Imieson. Put it right out of sight underground, and don't dig it up again. I simply couldn't. I'm sorry, but it's as well to have no delusions of this sort hanging round."

It makes a lot of difference to some men. It made a lot of difference to Abe. He no longer admired Jessie Lett, he no longer trusted her, she no longer amused him; he was prepared to welcome the worst.

"She's a bad lot, mother, take it from me. Just you give it about quietly, and we'll have her out of this in a month."

Mrs. Imieson gave it about quietly. The suspectors welcomed every hint, and, of course, these were only hints. Three hints are an accusation. But Abe's was a long time coming.

Roseholm" was set in grounds almost large enough to be dignified as a park. The grounds were thickly planted with gardens, shrubs and trees. Coming in from the back entrance through the plantation of trees at about half-an-hour after midnight one morning, Abe fell upon a man lurking in the black shadow of a Moreton Bay fig. Abe was a big fellow; he pounced on the intruder at once.

"Here, here, hello, who're you?" he said. "You're not a lodger. What's yer game?"

The man gave an expert twist, and lunged at Abe's bottom vest button with his heel, but he did not break away. Imieson turned the man up, humped him on his shoulder blades, and planted a knee in his midriff.

"Now, we'll see what's doing," he said.

Abe struck a light, and examined his captive. The man was well dressed, slim, clean-shaven, good-looking.

"You don't look the ordinary common or garden burglar," said Abe. "Speak up; what's the game?"

"Get to ——, and find out!"

"Oh, very well, my boy, we'll get to the police station. That's nearer, and easier."

"Stop," said the intruder. "Don't be a fool. Can't you see there's a lady in this? I have a date here with a —— of a woman."

Abe gasped. "One of the boarders?" he said eagerly.

The man nodded. "Mrs. Lett. Come, now, out with it; it's Mrs. Lett?"

"I'm giving no names."

"But you are. You give a name, or you go along with me to Constable Harden."

"Oh, very well, if you must have it— it is Mrs. Lett."

Abe whistled a long, low, happy whistle. "So, so," he said. "Is the lady about due?"

"She was to be here at a quarter to one."

Abe looked at his watch. It was two minutes after the half-hour. He turned his man and marched him a few steps towards the back lane. "That's your way," he said. "You get."

"But I'm not going till I've seen the lady."

"You get, if you don't want to have to explain things in the police court to-morrow morning."

The man slunk off in the darkness, leaving Abe leaning on the tree trunk, thinking over the situation. He was not long in making up his mind. Within seven minutes Abe and Mrs. Imieson had carefully, secretly arranged a little reception committee in the plantation. The committee consisted of the three married couples most opposed to Jessie Lett, one acrimonious old maid, two ingrained pietists of the wowser type, and the Imiesons.

"She'll be here in about five minutes," said Abe. "We must all hide till she comes along. Then Crane can step but and impersonate the man. He looks sufficiently like him to pass in the shadow, and not too near. Of course, she gives herself away by coming, but we want to know all we can, don't we?"

"We want to know the worst, the hussie!" said the acrid spinster.

"And anything more that's going," said Abe.

So the committee of reception lurked in the shrubs and behind the tree butts, and waited with what patience it could command. Five minutes passed— seven— ten!

"She's not in a hurry," whispered Cantwell from under a lilac bush.

"Hush !" replied Abe. "Wait. These women are always slow off the scratch."

They waited fifteen minutes, and then there was a whispered conference. The committee waited another fifteen minutes, and then the old maid got a large beetle down her back, and abandoned the good work in disgust.

Creeping quietly, keeping to the dark, hopeful of not being discovered, and having their miserable failure paraded against them, the committee stole back to its various rooms.

It was Abe broke the solemn stillness of "Roseholm" with yells of anger and alarm.

"Police! Police! Murder! I'm robbed!" yelled Abe, darting from his room. "Thieves! Thieves! Thieves!" The second voice was that of Cantwell. A third voice took up the cry. The old maid was screaming her head off. "Roseholm" was in a sudden uproar.

The other boarders rushed from their rooms. The Misses Carter came forth, clad in dressing-gowns and curl-papers, clinging together.

"My room's been robbed," squealed Abe. "I've lost £15 in cash and £70 worth of jewellery."

Mrs. Imieson's room had been rifled, too; the old maid had lost what jewellery she possessed. Only two of the committee had escaped calamity.

"It's that Lett woman!" cried Imieson in his fury. "It's a put-up job. She had the burglar in the garden."

At this point Mrs. Lett and Mrs. Burn, her best friend at "Roseholm," put in an appearance.

"That is an interesting theory you may have to substantiate in court, Mr. Imieson," said Jessie. "Mrs. Lett has been sleeping with me," said Mrs. Burn. "We have been in bed since eleven."

There was no room for the smallest doubt. Abe had made the most grievous mistake of his life. The detectives pointed out that the man he captured in the plantation was certainly a burglar, that he offered Abe the most plausible excuse that occurred, and then, finding that Imieson's actions played into his hands, seized the opportunity to rifle the deserted rooms. Mrs. Lett kindly consented to overlook Abe's inconsiderate accusations and aspersions on his agreeing to pay £50 to a charity mentioned by her.

The moral of this story is "*Honi soit qui mal y pense*."

20: The Inverted Five

Baroness Orczy

1865-1947

Collected in: *Skin o' My Tooth*, 1928

One of the tales of the sharp lawyer Patrick Mulligan, known to all as "Skin o' My Tooth", as told by his confidential clerk. This is the 6th of 12 stories.

I THINK that I have made it clear by now why it is that Skin o' my Tooth is not popular among his colleagues. We all know that there is prejudice and petty spite in all professions, and the Law is no exception to this general rule.

Moreover, Skin o' my Tooth is totally unacquainted with the use of kid gloves. He works for the best of his client; let the other side look to themselves, I say.

Now take the case of young Newton Dampier. If ever I saw a man with the fatal noose already round his neck, there he was: good looking, not particularly intelligent, not particularly straight-laced where women were concerned, but a gentleman for all that, he had got himself into one of the worst messes a man had ever floundered in, and had, it not been for Skin o' my Tooth... but I am anticipating.

How well I remember that morning when Sir Leopold Messinger first called at the office. I took in his card myself, and as I went through I glanced at it. The card told me nothing, save his name and that of his club— the National Conservative. I had vaguely heard the name before in connection with racing, yachting, and other plutocratic habits, including the fitting up during the war of his sumptuous yacht as a hospital ship for naval officers and the presentation of it to the Admiralty, which act of generosity got him his title and half a column of fulsome flattery in the evening papers. Glancing through the window of our outer office, I had already caught sight of a gorgeous Hispano-Suiza, which was in thorough keeping with our visitor's reputation for wealth, as well as with his appearance, which, despite his title and all that he had done for England during the war, was not altogether English.

A minute or two later, while one of the boys showed Sir Leopold into the chief's office, I took up my seat in the alcove, which, as I said before, Mr. Mulligan so poetically calls "Behind the Arras." From this spot, sitting at my desk, notebook and pencil in hand, I could, without being seen, see and hear everything that went on during my chief's interview with his clients, and record in shorthand every word of the conversation that passed between them. I believe that this practice of using a confidential clerk as a faithful and secret recorder of interviews and conversations is peculiar to Skin o' my Tooth, and I am told that had it been universally known at the time that he was still in

practice, he would never have seen another client across his doors. But it is neither my purpose nor my business to justify so great a man as Patrick Mulligan in any one of his actions. All I need say is that my shorthand notes have done much in their time to save a man's life from the gallows or secure the acquittal of one wrongfully accused.

But to return to Sir Leopold Messinger. As I said before, he was distinctly un-English in appearance; large, stout, florid, with black hair carefully brushed across his cranium to hide the first signs of oncoming baldness. He wore a perfectly cut suit of dark tweed and held between his thick fingers a large cigar. His eyes, on the other hand, were extraordinarily kind and benevolent, his voice was gentle and persuasive, and his manner toward my chief particularly courteous and even deferential. He came very quickly to the point.

The governess of his children, a French girl of good family, who had been with him about six months, had mysteriously disappeared. She lived alone in a small flat in Maida Vale and came daily to Grosvenor Square at nine o'clock, gave lessons to the children, stayed to lunch, went out for a walk with them, and after tea went back to her flat. On Saturdays she usually went home directly after lunch.

Last Monday (this was Friday morning) she did not turn up, nor had she sent a note of excuse, which was curious, but at the time aroused no definite suspicion. But day followed day and still no news of Mlle. de Mery.

"I began to feel anxious," Sir Leopold went on "and yesterday I drove round to her flat in Maida Vale. There a neighbour of hers, a respectable-looking woman whom I happened to meet on the stairs, told me that nothing had been seen or heard of the girl since the previous Sunday, when she started off, presumably for a walk, sometime in the afternoon. Now what had not occurred to my informant but struck me at once, was that last Sunday was a very foggy day. I tackled the woman about this, expressing my astonishment that she had done nothing in the way of informing the police when for days on end she had seen nothing of her neighbour. But you know what people are in that class of life— clerks, shop-assistants, and so on; they have so many worries of their own they don't trouble— as they call it— about other people."

Sir Leopold's large, kind eyes— in expression something like an amiable Pekingese— fixed themselves inquiringly on the chief. But Skin o' my Tooth's face was utterly expressionless. I don't know if you have over seen him: vulgar minds have compared him to a Yorkshire pig. His skin was certainly roseate in colour, and he was what might be called corpulent. I think I mentioned before that he was as bald as an egg, and that his eyes were very small but penetrating, like gimlets. Usually they were expressionless, encased in their fleshy lids, but at times he would have a way of looking down and pursing his mouth, for all the world like a coy Mid-Victorian maiden. I could detect now a certain hesitation in

Sir Leopold's manner, as if he were sorry he had come for advice to this fat fool of an Irishman. They all went through that phase, and Skin o' my Tooth, as keen an observer as anybody, never made the slightest attempt to gain their confidence. He just would let them flounder along. Invariably they came round, and after the first interview trusted him implicitly.

Sir Leopold appeared to be pulling himself together as if he were making a desperate effort to chase away a nightmare, then he resumed: "It took me some time to persuade Mrs. Tomkins, or Hawkins— I think that was the name— firstly to make an attempt at effecting an entrance into Mlle. de Mery's flat, and when this was proved to be impossible, her front door being locked, to inform the police at once. I felt, you see, that it was more her business than mine, but it was only after we had argued the point for nearly half an hour and other neighbours had assembled, adding their shrill voices to those of Mrs. Hawkins, that, in a fit of exasperation, I declared that I would go to the police myself at once, but that the Hawkins' were not to be astonished if the police blamed them severely for failing to notify them of this mysterious disappearance. This frightened the woman effectually, and she promised me that directly her husband came home— he was a clerk in an accountant's office— she would see to it that he went to the police immediately."

Sir Leopold paused, and I must frankly admit that at this point I was completely off the scent. The way I had figured it out in my own mind was that Sir Leopold feared to be involved in some way in the disappearance of his children's daily governess— that perhaps he had made love to her, even got her into trouble perhaps, and either he feared that the poor girl had thrown herself into the river, or he knew something about her fate, something that might land him in a criminal's dock. But, as I say, I was following the wrong scent. Sir Leopold Messinger had by now lost all traces of hesitation; his good-natured, doggie eyes were fixed with a pathetic, appealing glance on the chief, who sat behind his desk, immovable and coy, giving him no help in the unfolding of his narrative.

"I dare say you wonder, Mr. Mulligan," he went on more glibly, "why I have come to you with this tale. I won't talk platitudes and speak of your reputation. When I tell you that a man for whom I have the greatest respect, not to say affection, may be involved in this mysterious affair, you will easily understand my coming for advice to the one man who can throw light upon it. I am speaking of my confidential secretary, Mr. Newton Dampier. He has been with me for over two years. A finer, straighter character it would be impossible to conceive."

Sir Leopold paused once more; his cigar had gone out, he groped in his pocket for matches, struck one or two unsuccessfully, put down the cigar, pulled a handkerchief out of his pocket, and mopped his streaming forehead. But Skin o' my Tooth's fat, pink face expressed nothing at all. He glanced down in that

coy, Early-Victorian manner of his on his highly polished finger-nails, then he said with apparent indifference:

"And what about this Mr. Newton Dampier, Sir Leopold?"

"He was passionately in love with Mlle. de Mery," Sir Leopold replied slowly. Then he dropped his voice almost to a whisper and added: "On the Sunday afternoon in question he had arranged to call for her at her flat. They were going out for a walk together. This arrangement was rather vexing to me, because my family and I were spending the week-end with some friends at Brighton, and, as I had a great many arrears of correspondence to attend to, I wanted Dampier to come down with us. However, he put the matter of his engagement with Mlle. de Mery so urgently before me that I did not like to stand in the way of young lovers. My wife, the children, and myself motored down to Brighton on Saturday afternoon and returned on Monday morning. As I told you, we saw nothing of Mlle. de Mery either that day or the next. I questioned Dampier. He declared that he knew nothing about her— had, in fact, not seen her that Sunday afternoon; when he arrived at her flat, he rang and knocked in vain. She was obviously not at home, and had apparently forgotten her appointment with him. Dampier's manner was very strange." Sir Leopold continued with a grave shake of the head: "Even my wife, who is not at all observant, remarked upon his gloominess and obvious abstraction. During the next two or three days, whenever I tried to question him, he answered me evasively, sometimes almost rudely. Of course, I made allowances for all that—"

Sir Leopold gave a deep sigh; when he spoke again there was a quiver in his gentle, even voice, but he looked Skin o' my Tooth very straight in the face.

"One thing," he said slowly, "that Mrs. Tomkins, or Hawkins, told me was that on the Sunday afternoon she saw a young gentleman, whom she had often seen before in the company of Mlle. de Mery, on the stairs, as if coming away from the girl's flat. Mrs. Hawkins described him to me as looking very agitated and flushed, and as he went downstairs he was muttering incoherent words to himself."

"Disappointment," Skin o' my Tooth murmured gently, "at finding the lady gone."

"So it would appear, Mr. Mulligan," Sir Leopold admitted with a sigh, "at first sight. But I must tell you that all along I was very uneasy about Dampier; his manner was so very strange. But what brought my anxiety to a head, and actually caused me yesterday to drive over to Mlle. de Mery's flat, was that in the morning, after I had dictated a couple of letters to Dampier, he told me that he had a terrible headache and asked me if I would mind his going home to rest for an hour or two. He hoped to be better by the afternoon, and would then return. Naturally, I urged him by all means to go and rest. After he had gone I had occasion to go to the room in my house where he has his desk and

typewriter and does his work for me. There was a fire in the grate and some charred papers among the ashes. One of these, only partially burned, was lying in the fender. What prompted me to pick it up I could not for the life of me tell you. But I did pick that paper up, and I glanced at it. Here it is, Mr. Mulligan," Sir Leopold concluded, and his trembling fingers fumbled in the pocket of his overcoat, drew out a pocket-book, and, extracting a creased, half-charred scrap of paper from it, held it out to my chief.

That letter— it was a mere fragment— was subsequently photographed, and here is a reproduction of it:

... no longer love... think it would be... at we do not meet... Sincerely your... Florine

My chief looked at the fragment carefully, turned it over and over between his fat fingers, then asked briefly:

"The handwriting?"

"Unmistakably that of Mlle. de Mery," Sir Leopold replied. "I know it well."

"Anyone else know it?"

"Oh yes! My wife— the children—"

"And the signature?"

"Likewise. Her name was Florine. There must be a specimen of it in the children's exercise books." There was silence for a moment or two after that, Skin o' my Tooth sitting with his podgy hands clasped before him. I could hear the ticking of the old clock on the mantelpiece. Somehow I did not feel great interest in this commonplace tale of lovers' quarrel culminating in crime. One hears so many tales of that sort these days. I thought, too, that Mr. Mulligan looked bored, and was marvelling whether he would refuse to take up the case on some pretext or other. Presently he asked his client: "And what is it, Sir Leopold, that you wish me to do in the matter? For the moment I don't quite see—"

"Of course you don't," Sir Leopold broke in eagerly. "I should have told you at once, but I am so upset, you understand? Newton Dampier is like a son to me, and, Mr. Mulligan, I am as convinced as that I am alive that the boy is innocent, that I foresee trouble for him, and I want you to see that he gets out of it. Spare no expense, Mr. Mulligan; I am footing this bill."

Once more there was silence in the fusty old room. I imagined that the chief was weighing the importance of the affair in his mind. Personally I didn't think that Sir Leopold's request stood much chance. Skin o' my Tooth at the moment had several Crown cases on hand notably one relating to some mysterious cases of cocaine smuggling; this in addition to his other work was taking up so much of his time that I had often recently heard him declare that he would not

undertake any more work, unless it were of a specially interesting character. My astonishment was great, therefore, when, after a moment or two, he broke the silence which appeared to be weighing down Sir Leopold's spirits.

"Do you happen to know, Sir Leopold," he said, and with one podgy finger tapped the scrap of paper which he still held in his hand, "what caused Mlle. de Mery— is that the name?— to write this letter to your friend?"

Sir Leopold appeared to hesitate before he replied: "I don't know, Mr. Mulligan— that is—"

"Had she another lover?"

"Yes!" Sir Leopold replied more resolutely. "She had, I am certain. Otherwise she never would—"

"Could he, for instance," Skin o' my Tooth went on as his client paused, obviously irresolute, as if unwilling to put his thoughts into words, "could he have been the man whom Mrs. Hawkins saw on the stairs that Sunday afternoon?"

"I'm afraid not," Sir Leopold replied. "She described the man to me: tall, fair, curly hair, hazel eyes, slight toothbrush moustache. The description was unmistakable. Whereas the other man whom Mlle. de Mery had favoured of late was very dark and foreign looking—"

"Do you know him? Personally, I mean?"

"Yes! Horatio Dreyfus. He is a distant relation of my wife's. He came to lunch one day at my house, and there met Mlle. de Mery."

"And he lives?"

"Abroad mostly. But just now he is staying at the Majestic."

Without any further comment, Skin o' my Tooth touched the bell-push on his desk. This was the signal for me to slip out of my cubby-hole through a door behind me, and then ostentatiously to knock and enter by the main door of the office.

"Ring up Mr. Alverson at Scotland Yard," the chief said to me, as soon as I appeared, "and ask him what has been done in connection with the disappearance of the French girl which was reported to the police last night."

I don't, of course, know what occurred between the chief and his new client in the interval while I was on the telephone, but when I returned I found Sir Leopold on the verge of tears of joy and gratitude.

"If you get the boy out of this mess, Mr. Mulligan," he was saying, "there is no fee that you could ask me that I would find too high."

Skin o' my Tooth was twiddling a cigarette between his fingers, his eyes were downcast, and there was a gently coy smile playing round his lips. He listened apparently unmoved to Sir Leopold's expressions of exuberant gratitude then, and his calm appeared in strange contrast to the other man's excitement. He asked quietly:

"What did you know of this Mlle. de Mery, Sir Leopold, before you engaged her as governess for your children?"

"I didn't engage her," Sir Leopold replied; "my wife did. She had put an advertisement in *The Times*. Mlle. de Mery presented herself. She appeared pretty, refined, very well read: she had what the French call her Brevet Superieur, which showed her to have had a splendid education; she also had some warm letters of recommendation from the Mother Superior of a convent in Belgium who had known her intimately."

"And on the strength of these facts you engaged her?"

Sir Leopold shrugged his massive shoulders. "My wife took to her," he said, "and I must say that she never had cause to regret her choice. We were all of us very fond of Mlle. de Mery."

"And what about this convent in Belgium? Where is it?"

"Ah!" Sir Leopold replied with a quick sigh, "that's the trouble. My wife and I were trying to recollect the name and address. We questioned the children. But alas! neither name nor address impressed itself upon our minds."

At this point Skin o' my Tooth looked up and caught my eye. I had, of course, to deliver the message which had come to me over the phone.

"What is it, Muggins?" he queried curtly. It was his pleasure, you understand, to call me Muggins, though my name is, as you know, Alexander Stanislaus Mullins. I gave him the message which I had received from Mr. Alverson, a personal friend of my chief who is on the staff of the C.I.D. at Scotland Yard. He told me that, as a matter of fact, the body of an unknown young woman had been lying for two days at the Thames Police Court mortuary pending identification. The body was found under Wapping Bridge, and, according to the divisional surgeon's testimony, had then been in the water three days. The face had been so battered in by some heavy instrument that, in consequence of the terrible wounds so inflicted, decomposition had already set in very rapidly. Undoubtedly it would prove unrecognizable save to a very intimate friend or near relative. The body, on the other hand, had one distinguishing mark, a circular scar something like a large vaccination mark, on the right deltoid, which, in the opinion of the divisional surgeon, had been made comparatively recently by the application of corrosive acid.

There was no clothing of any kind on the body, but it was wrapped round from neck to foot in several yards of black material, like swaddling clothes, held in place by a large metal brooch of hammered metal, triangular in shape, with, in the centre, a large inverted FIVE. A stained linen handkerchief was knotted loosely round the throat— it had no initial on it, only a laundry mark— and underneath the handkerchief the neck showed the marks of a thin cord wound round with sufficient force to cause strangulation.

The police had already taken the usual steps to try and establish the identity of the victim of this terrible outrage when Mr. and Mrs. Hawkins, of Harberton Mansions, called with their story of the disappearance of a neighbour of theirs, a French girl living alone in the flat next to theirs. They were asked to view the body, but entirely failed to identify it. Mrs. Hawkins had immediately fainted, and all Mr. Hawkins could say was that the French girl certainly had hair the same colour and texture as that on the head of the deceased. Questioned as to the curious brooch found upon the body, they both said that they had never seen Mlle. de Mery wearing it.

While I delivered this message. Sir Leopold Messinger showed signs of the greatest distress; his agony of mind was pitiable to see, and when I had finished speaking he exclaimed in a voice broken with sobs:

"That brooch! I can identify it, Mr. Mulligan, so can my wife and the children. The poor girl had it on one day, I remember. I was very much interested in it because I had once seen one exactly like it somewhere abroad. I forget where. For some reason or other my wife got the idea that it was unlucky, and told Mlle. de Mery so, who laughingly promised that she would never wear it again."

"You didn't by any chance ask her at the time how she came by that brooch?" Skin o' my Tooth asked presently.

"Yes," Sir Leopold replied, "we did ask her. Naturally. But she answered rather curtly that it was a present."

"She did not say from whom?"

"No. But I remember that Horatio Dreyfus' name was mentioned in connection with the thing, and that both my wife and I remained under the impression that the brooch was given her by Horatio Dreyfus."

"Was Mr. Dampier present when this episode occurred?"

"No. He was away at the time; he had gone up North for a couple of days for me on business."

After that there was a long pause. My chief was weighing the matter in his mind, and Sir Leopold's kind, doggie eyes were fixed more and more hopefully upon him. He had sufficient tact— I could see that— not to press his plea any further. Another word from him might have upset his chances altogether. As it was, after some two or three minutes of absolute silence, which must have seemed an eternity to the anxious man, Skin o' my Tooth said quietly:

"You may send Mr. Newton Dampier to me tomorrow, Sir Leopold; I'll see him."

Once more Sir Leopold showed himself tactful and understanding. He did not indulge in profuse expressions of gratitude. Almost without another word, he rose to take his leave.

"At what hour shall I send him?" was all he asked.

"In the early part of the afternoon. Say at three o'clock."

Sir Leopold's whole expression had undergone a change. He appeared comforted now, almost cheerful. His last words to my chief before he left the office were spoken most solemnly: "The boy is innocent, Mr. Mulligan," he said. "I would take my dying oath on that."

When I returned to the office after escorting him to the door, I found Skin o' my Tooth rubbing his podgy hands contentedly together.

"This is going to be an exciting case, Muggins," he said. "Just ring up Mr. Alverson again, will you?"

What passed over the phone between my chief and his friend of the C.I.D. I didn't know at the time. When next I saw Skin o' my Tooth he was absorbed in the perusal of M. Victor Margueritte's latest French shocker.

ii

AT THREE O'CLOCK precisely the following day Mr. Newton Dampier came to see the chief. I, of course, was "behind the arras" during the interview and could study the young man's face and his manner. He appeared to me both dejected and "jumpy," but as far as I could judge he was not at present conscious of being in any kind of danger. No wonder that the poor young man was "jumpy." He had just been through the terrible ordeal of viewing the dead body of the girl to whom he had been so passionately attached. He had, however, been quite unable to swear positively as to her identity, although he, too, declared that the hair was certainly that of Mlle. de Mery.

Sir Leopold and Lady Messinger, who had also magnanimously come forward, could not do more either. But they did identify the brooch, and for the time being the police appeared satisfied that the deceased was indeed Florine de Mery who had disappeared from her flat in Harberton Mansions the previous Sunday.

Questioned by Skin o' my Tooth, Mr. Newton Dampier managed to give a clear and straightforward account of his sentimental friendship with Mlle. de Mery. It had been an entirely happy one until that Sunday afternoon when he received a curt letter from her, telling him, in effect, that she no longer loved him and thought it would be best that they should cease to meet.

"How did you get that letter, Mr. Dampier?" Skin o' my Tooth asked him. "There is no post in London on Sunday."

"I found it in my letter-box," he replied, "just as I was starting out to keep my appointment with Mlle. de Mery. How it got there I do not know."

"What have you done with it?"

"Carried it in my pocket the first few days," the young man replied with a sigh, "then threw it in the fire in an access of rage."

Skin o' my Tooth drew the fragment of charred paper out of his letter-case and placed it before Mr. Dampier. "Is this a portion of it?" he asked.

"It is," the other replied. "But how did you come by it? I thought I had destroyed it completely."

"It was found— fortunately, by a friend who brought it to me."

"You mean Sir Leopold?"

"Yes! If it had come into the hands of the police—"

"The police?" young Dampier broke in excitedly. "Surely you don't mean—?"

"Well!" Skin o' my Tooth put in with his bland smile. "I put it to you— lovers' quarrels have led to murder before now."

Mr. Dampier's eyes, filled now with horror, were staring at Skin o' my Tooth, while he passed a trembling hand once or twice across his forehead.

"My God!" he murmured hoarsely. "Murder? I? I confess." he went on more calmly, "that after I had read the letter I flew round to Mlle. de Mery's flat in a frenzy of grief. But I only meant to argue and to plead. I would no more have injured one hair of her head than I would deny my own existence."

And suddenly, without any transition. Skin o' my Tooth came out with what seemed an irrelevant question.

"Did you know a Mr. Horatio Dreyfus?"

Dampier blinked his eyes once or twice like a man waking from a dream.

"Well, yes," he replied. "Slightly. Why do you ask?"

"Were you aware of his attentions to Mlle. de Mery?"

The young man appeared to hesitate a moment before he replied: "Yes, in a way I was, but I did not think that Florine— Mlle. de Mery, I mean— would ever respond to them."

"And do you know anything about the curious brooch with the inverted FIVE which was found upon her body?"

"No, Mr. Mulligan, I don't. As a matter of fact, that brooch puzzles me. I never saw Florine wear it."

Skin o' my Tooth was silent for a minute or two after that. I was watching young Dampier, speculating how he would take the blow which was about to fall upon him. Guilty or innocent, it would stun him, but how would he behave afterwards? I had received the message from Mr. Alverson not half an hour ago, so I knew what was coming, and I felt the tenseness of those few minutes; my nerves were taut as if stretched on a rack.

"Mr. Dampier," Skin o' my Tooth now resumed very quietly, "you read in the paper, did you not? or Sir Leopold must have told you, that a handkerchief bearing a certain laundry mark was found knotted loosely round the throat of the deceased?"

"Yes, I knew that, Mr. Mulligan," Dampier replied equally calmly.

"But you didn't know, did you? that the police had succeeded in tracing that laundry mark to a laundry which not only works for you, but which actually identified the handkerchief as one belonging to yourself."

I must say that he took the blow like a man. That he understood its full significance was undoubted, because his face became the colour of lead, and his eyes, which still stared at Skin o' my Tooth, became suddenly glassy.

"My Lord!" was all he said.

With this dramatic climax, and as far as important matters were concerned, the interview was practically ended, although Mr. Dampier remained another half-hour in my chief's office, asseverating his innocence and answering various questions put to him by Skin o' my Tooth in a dazed though for the most part straightforward manner.

That he was in a tight hole he quickly realized. Skin o' my Tooth warned him that a warrant for his arrest on the capital charge would certainly be out before evening. But my chief was in one of his best moods. There was no resisting his optimism, or his confidence.

"If you are innocent, Mr. Dampier," he said emphatically, "I will get you out of this hole. You may stake your life on that."

"My life is at stake," the young man rejoined. "But if you do not believe that I am guiltless of this foul deed—"

"I neither believe nor disbelieve," Skin o' my Tooth broke in with some impatience. "I haven't had time to think over that laundry mark yet," he added grimly.

When Mr. Dampier had gone my chief sent for me. "Ring up Sir Leopold Messinger," he said, "and ask him kindly to arrange a meeting between Mr. Horatio Dreyfus and myself. Tell him I would suggest his asking us both to lunch at his club tomorrow, as I don't want the meeting to appear pre-arranged."

iii

THAT MEETING, however, never took place, although Skin o' my Tooth actually went to lunch at Sir Leopold Messinger's house in Grosvenor Square. But the other guest was absent. The night before the body of a well-dressed youngish man of somewhat foreign appearance was found on a seat in Hyde Park with a silken cord tied tightly round the throat. Death was due to strangulation. The news reached Sir Leopold by telephone, just as he and Skin o' my Tooth were sitting down to lunch. No attempt had been made to conceal the identity of the victim of this terrible outrage. Visiting cards in his letter-case, which was untouched, revealed his name as Horatio Dreyfus, whilst "Majestic Hotel" was scribbled by hand in the corners. Inquiries at the Majestic elicited the

fact that Mr. Dreyfus had certainly been staying there, having arrived from Paris about a month ago. He went out a great deal, received some letters and telegrams. Beyond that nothing was known about him; and when the police searched among his effects, the one thing that was not found was his passport. But he had entered his name at the hotel as a British subject born in London. The hall-porter at such a large hotel as the Majestic was necessarily a very busy man, and apparently an incurious or unobservant one: he certainly did not remember, when questioned, the name of any person who at any time had called on Mr. Dreyfus.

The chief reception clerk, on the other hand, was able to give the name and address of the bank on which the deceased had drawn the cheques for payment of his weekly hotel bills. Inquiries at that bank elicited the information that Mr. Dreyfus had only been a customer for about a month, that he had been originally introduced by Sir Leopold Messinger, and that he still had a balance of about £200 to his credit. The police then got into touch with Sir Leopold, who had very little to say, except that the deceased was a distant relation of his wife's who had always been considered by the family as something of a rolling stone and a bad egg. Sir Leopold had only seen him very occasionally, either in Paris or some other Continental resort. About a month ago he turned up in London, apparently full of good resolutions— he was going to settle down in life, and he begged Sir Leopold to help him get something to do in the City or anywhere. He had about £500 loose in his pocket, which he professed to have won at Monte Carlo, and as a matter of goodwill Sir Leopold gave him an introduction to the manager of one of the banks with which he had business relations.

And beyond that, nothing. Neither Sir Leopold nor Lady Messinger seemed to know anything more about Mr. Horatio Dreyfus. Advertisements and notices were sent out in all directions by the police, solicitors kept an advertisement going for three days in the personal column of *The Times*, but no one came forward able or willing to throw any light on the recent habits or doings of Mr. Horatio Dreyfus. His personality remained as mysterious as the circumstances connected with his death. According to Lady Messinger's evidence at the inquest, he was an only child of parents long since dead, who at one time had considerable property in Germany. This they sold and settled down in London, where the boy was born. Lady Messinger knew them all, when they had a house in Lancaster Gate, but she had seen nothing of Horatio since his parents went back to Germany, which was over twenty years ago, when he was a boy of about fifteen.

The inquest in this case, as in that of the unfortunate Mlle. de Mery, was adjourned for a month to enable the police to collect further evidence. It was through his friend, Mr. Alverson of the C.I.D., that Skin o' my Tooth got two

remarkable pieces of information, which, so far as the Press was concerned, were still kept a secret: the one was that in this case, like in the other, the same shaped round scar caused by the application of some corrosive acid was found upon the body, on the right deltoid. The other strange fact was that the silk cord— a black one— with which the unfortunate man had been strangled was weighted with a metal pendant of exactly the same design as the brooch found on the body of Mlle. de Mery— namely, a triangle with, in the centre, an inverted FIVE.

And in the meanwhile my chief's latest client, Mr. Newton Dampier, had been arrested on a charge of murdering Florine de Mery on a certain Sunday in November; he had been brought up before the magistrate and remanded; but there was no doubt that within the next day or two he would be committed for trial. Was I not right when I said that here was a man literally with the hangman's rope around his neck?

iv

I MUST SAY that during the next few days Skin o' my Tooth appeared more interested in M. Dekobra's latest thriller than in the affairs of his client. Never once did he go and see him. He always sent me, and I would go and try and instil some measure of hope into the poor young man's dejected spirits. It was all very well for Skin o' my Tooth to say that he expected his clients to believe implicitly in him. But away from him such belief was liable to wear threadbare, and the first thoughts of despair would inevitably creep into the brain.

I alone knew that, as a rule, the more uninterested in a case Skin o' my Tooth appeared to be, the more passionate really was his enthusiasm for it; and the more trashy French novels he devoured— he never read the fine ones— the deeper were his thoughts in a wholly opposite direction.

During the third week in November, Newton Dampier, having, on Skin o' my Tooth's advice, pleaded "Not Guilty" and reserved his defence, was committed for trial on the capital charge. In the meanwhile the coroner's inquest on Mr. Horatio Dreyfus was concluded with a verdict of wilful murder against some person or persons unknown, and that on the unknown woman, presumed to be Florine de Mery, with a verdict of wilful murder against George Newton Dampier.

A day or two later, when I was coming away from an interview with our client, I happened to take a stroll along the Embankment when I was accosted by a disreputable-looking character begging for alms. I tried not to listen to his tale, which was supposed to be that of a broken-down gentleman on his beam-ends— an ex-officer and so on— the usual tale. I hurried on after I had

bestowed half a crown upon the creature, when an ironical laugh unexpectedly struck my ear. The broken-down gentleman on his beam-ends was none other than Skin o' my Tooth, so admirably made up that even I had failed to recognize him.

I was far too well trained to ask questions then; he took me by the arm and, whispering an address in my ear, he ordered me to meet him there in half an hour. I knew the place well, of course— a slum in Hoxton, where my chief rented a couple of rooms in an evil-looking lodging-house; here he kept every sort and kind of disguise, mostly filthy rags, also ragged uniforms and togs of all sorts. It was the sort of place where questions are never asked and where the police seldom penetrate.

When I arrived I found my chief already waiting for me. Without wasting time, he pointed to a bundle of rags and told me to put them on. Ten minutes later we emerged into the street once more, looking as seedy a pair of blackguards as anyone would wish to see.

Silently I followed Skin o' my Tooth as he threaded his way through the network of streets that lie around the river bank.

No one knew his London better than Skin o' my Tooth, and within an incredibly short time that peculiar smell made up of hemp, tar, oil, and coal-dust revealed the fact that we were nearing one of the docks. Presently we came to a halt, at a distance of about twenty yards from a gaily lighted restaurant, from whence came the strains of a lively jazz band. Here we took up our stand, a pair of silent, motionless figures, with our backs to a greasy, dank wall. Skin o' my Tooth had drawn a bundle of bootlaces from his pocket, and these, together with boxes of Swan vestas, he was apparently offering for sale. Many people passed us by; sailors or soldiers with their girls, foreigners of every description, Orientals from every clime; some dropped a few coppers into my cramped hand, some went by with an ugly word for two able-bodied oafs. Skin o' my Tooth never said a word, and here we stood for nearly two hours, after which we went back to Hoxton, changed back into our own clothes, and returned home, hardly having exchanged a word.

The next evening we went through the same performance, and again the evening after that. On the third evening, however, there was a change in our adventure. A man, short and slender in build, dressed in perfectly tailored clothes, was about to pass us by when Skin o' my Tooth's voice was suddenly raised in pitiful appeal: "For the love of God, sir," he cried, "you are a gentleman. Have pity on a broken-down wretch of your own class."

The man paused— instinctively, I think, rather than from any sense of compassion. He peered quizzically into Skin o' my Tooth's face.

"A broken-down gentleman, are you?" he asked with a sneer. "Lots of 'em about these days, especially in Limehouse, eh?"

His speech betrayed what I had already guessed from his face, which was sallow and flat-featured, with almond-shaped, up-slanting eyes. Underneath the soft grey hat which he wore his hair appeared black as coal. In spite of his Western dress, it was easy to guess that here was a man born in China.

But Skin o' my Tooth was continuing his piteous appeal. He had served as a temporary officer in the war, had been twice wounded, and mentioned in despatches. His son— and he pointed to me— had been gassed twice and had lost hearing and speech through shell-shock. He was entirely on his beam-ends and would do anything in the world— anything— to earn a decent living.

"An honest one?" the Oriental queried with his habitual sneer.

"Not necessarily," Skin o' my Tooth retorted boldly.

By way of an answer the other nodded in the direction of the restaurant, then he said curtly: "Wait here till five minutes before closing time, then go in there and we'll talk."

With that he strode away, and presently disappeared within the restaurant.

At five minutes before eleven my chief and I duly entered the gaily lighted place. No one took any notice of us. Indeed, there were others quite as disreputable to look on as we were. We sat down at a vacant table. The band had just ceased playing and were packing up their instruments. There was the usual hubbub and bustle attendant on closing time in these sort of places, and presently we found ourselves alone in the now dimly lighted hall. Everyone had gone. A Chinese boy was busy putting up the shutters.

After a while he came back into the hall, gave us nod and a wink, which we took to mean that we were to come along with him. We followed on his heels and he led us along a dark passage to what appeared to be a room built over the backyard of the house. Our guide knocked at the door. It was at once opened, and I caught a transitory gleam of a well-furnished room with a large desk in the centre and leather-covered club chairs, also of our friend— the Chinaman in Western clothes— and of another man dressed in an elaborate Chinese garment and wearing a black mask over his face. The next moment our guide pushed Skin o' my Tooth into the room and I was about to follow when the door was incontinently slammed in my face, and I found myself alone and in semi-darkness. Knowin that I had the part of a deaf and dumb man to play, did not call out, only tried to grab the Chinese boy who had brought us here, by the sleeve. He wriggled away, however, like an eel, and soon his shuffling footstep died away down the long passage.

I glued eye and ear to the keyhole, but could neither see nor hear anything. But after a moment or two I heard my chief's voice raised for an instant and then immediately subdued. It was not raised in any way in distress, but you may well imagine that I stood on guard at that door ready to hurl myself against it, if I got the least idea that Skin o' my Tooth was in any danger. Frankly, I had no

fears for him. There was nothing about his person to suggest that he was anything but what he professed to be: a down-at-heel gentleman ready to undertake any shady job that would put a few pounds in his pocket.

I had been on the watch a quarter of an hour or so, when, feeling restless, I started pacing up and down the dark passage. There was a stairway at the end of it leading to the basement, and as I went by I heard the sound of crockery and banging of pots and pans, and above the din a man's voice speaking pigeon-English and raised in threatening accents. A second or two later there was a bang, a sound as of the smashing of crockery, followed by a woman's cry. Then a scuffle. I was on the point of running down the stairs to see what was happening down there, when a woman came rushing up, with touzled hair, eyes wild, and hands outstretched, who almost threw herself into my arms.

"Allee lightee!" came in sarcastic tones from down below. "Play the fool. Mr. Wang Sen, he here directly."

I don't pretend to be either an athlete or a preux chevalier, but by the feeble light of a solitary gas-jet on the stairs I saw that I was holding in my arms a woman in distress. That she happened to be young and pretty did not in any way add to my desire to help her.

"What is it?" I whispered hurriedly. "Can I do anything?"

But she only moaned: "Oh! why don't they kill me? Why don't they kill me?"

"Come, we'll get the police!" I urged, and tried to drag her away with me. There was no one else about, and the bully down below showed no signs of coming up in pursuit. But the girl resisted me with all her feeble might.

"I can't, I can't," she whispered hoarsely, "I must go back."

Finding persuasion useless, I tried force. Here was clearly a case for the police to interfere for the protection of this woman who was obviously in the hands of bullies. So without more ado I picked her up in my arms— she looked half starved, poor thing, and was as light as a feather— and hastened along in the direction of the restaurant and the front of the house. It was pitch-dark, but by groping with one hand along the jamb of the door, my hand encountered the electric switch, and I turned on the light. The girl had by now partly lost consciousness. I deposited her on a chair and went round inspecting the place. The iron shutters were up all along the front, and the door through them was padlocked and immovable. I felt like a rat in a trap, and looked round despairingly at the unfortunate girl, marvelling what in the circumstances I could do for her. She half lay, half sat in a chair, her head down, her eyes closed: her dress, I forget of what it consisted, had slid off her right shoulder. And suddenly I felt myself giving a gasp, for there on the right deltoid was a round scar, in shape like a large vaccination mark.

I felt dazed and stupid for the moment, face to face, as I knew now, with some ugly bypaths of mysterious crime. If only my chief were here! And

suddenly the comforting thought came to me that he would be here— soon— if only I had time to warn him, and he had time to think and to act.

I picked up the girl as if she were a bundle of goods and deposited her behind a screen which masked an iron stove in one corner of the room. I then groped in my pockets for a pencil and a scrap of paper, and scribbled the few words that would enlighten my chief— these had to be as few as possible, of course. After which I switched off the light, registering a silent prayer that the girl might not recover consciousness before we had an opportunity to get her away from this den of brigands.

A few seconds later I was back at my post against the door at the end of the passage. I squatted in the corner feigning to sleep, my nerves on the rack. How long my ordeal lasted I know not. Presently I heard some kind of hubbub and then a shuffling. The door was opened. Our original friend stood silhouetted under the lintel against the light. He clapped his hands three times. My chief was immediately behind him, and sitting straight upright at the desk was the man with the mask and the elaborate Chinese costume.

In answer to the clapping the Chinese boy presently appeared, shuffling along the passage, and the man I call our original friend said something in a language I did not understand— presumably Chinese. He then gave me a vigorous kick, whereupon I struggled to my feet. My chief helped me to get up, and I was thus able to pass the note which I had scribbled into his hand. All I had written was: "*Girl in distress, behind screen in restaurant. Immediate case for police*."

v

THE DOOR of the back room had closed behind us. Our guide led the way along the passage once more through to the front restaurant. As we passed the top of the back stairs I thought I saw a grinning face peering upwards at us. Our guide switched on the light in the restaurant and then made for the iron door in the shutter. While he busied himself with the padlock, Skin o' my Tooth quickly glanced at my message, then, without any warning, threw one arm round the neck of the Chinese boy, smothering his screams. The scuffle was of the briefest, for my chief is both athletic and heavy. While he brought the boy to the ground, I made my way round to the back of the screen. The girl was slowly struggling back to consciousness. At sight of me a look of terror crept over her face, and before I could stop her she gave a piercing shriek.

Skin o' my Tooth had just silenced the Chinese boy by banging his head against the floor, but in a moment the house appeared alive with footsteps— shuffling footsteps hurrying, scurrying up and down stairs. We were indeed

caught like beasts in a cage, our only apparent means of egress barred by iron shutters. But my chief is a man whose inductions are as swift as his actions. He picked up the girl who now was struggling like a wild cat, and shouted to me to follow him. He had reckoned, you see, that those devils over in the end room had secured for themselves a means of escape that way, in case the police ever came in by the front.

Scared, no doubt, by the woman's shriek, the two men in there had just opened the door when my chief, still carrying the woman, hurled himself against them and pushed them back into the room.

"Close the door. Muggins," he shouted to me as I slipped in in his wake, and he allowed the woman to slide out of his arms.

I had just time to close and bar the door. And there followed a scuffle such as I had never experienced in all my life. The man in the Western clothes very nearly did for me, I must say, while there was a veritable tornado going on at the further end of the room where the masked man and Skin o' my Tooth were at close grips. I do think that my last hour on this earth would effectually have sounded at one moment, but for a double hoarse cry which suddenly stayed the hand of my antagonist.

"Sir Leopold Messinger! by all that's wonderful!"

"Patrick Mulligan! by all that's damnable!" The tornado had momentarily subsided, but all I could see for a moment were two hands held aloft, one brandishing a black mask and a Chinese mandarin's hat, and the other clutching the wig and false beard which had so effectively transformed my beloved chief into a seedy, out-at-elbows gentleman.

At this point, fortunately for both of us, the girl seemed suddenly to realize that we were her friends. I only knew later why she had struggled so violently against our attempts to save her; for the moment I had only thought that she was either demented or just a fool. But now, when above the tattered Chinese mandarin's garments she saw the hot, steaming face and round Pekingese eyes of Sir Leopold Messinger, she seemed suddenly to recover her senses, and while the struggle between us four men still continued, she ran round and round the room, until she discovered a doorway, which she promptly threw open.

"This way," she cried, and in an instant she had switched off the light and plunged us all into darkness. But the outside air guided us. After a final desperate effort, I succeeded in breaking loose from my opponent. Skin o' my Tooth, by far the finest fighter of the lot of us, had rendered the over-fed, over-indulged plutocrat quite helpless already. The next few minutes saw us speeding out in the open toward the Commercial Road, the girl bravely keeping up with us.

vi

IT WAS A curious story which Skin o' my Tooth unfolded before the coroner at the resumed inquest on the body of the unknown woman presumed to be Florine de Mery. She was not Florine de Mery at all, and has remained unknown, poor wretch, to this day.

Sir Leopold Messinger was the head of a gang of cocaine smugglers. This gang consisted entirely of men and women who had been gentle people, who were on their beam-ends and were ready to do any dirty job for the sake of earning a competence. These Messinger would pick up mostly in the streets of London, Paris, or any other Continental city. Florine de Mery was one. Pursued, when quite a young governess in her first place, by the attentions of the son of the house, she had been put in the wrong by her employers and dismissed without character or reference. For a time she supported herself by teaching, but the relentless enmity of her employers, who were influential people, pursued her, and she fell on evil days. Messinger picked her up outside a squalid little cabaret in Paris where she had been working as kitchen-maid, and had just been turned out by the proprietress for refusing to accept the attentions of drunken customers.

So much for poor Florine de Mery. Horatio Dreyfus, rolling stone, gambler, out-at-elbows, was such another. He was no relative to Lady Messinger, who was as clever a liar as her husband. Wah Sen, who acted as butler in the Messinger household, was the instrument which Sir Leopold used for the punishment of any of the gang who dared to show signs of breaking away or of revolt. While he secured for himself an unimpeachable alibi, Wah Sen, silken cord in hand, would see to the effectual silencing of the recalcitrant.

During the interview which Skin o' my Tooth had with those scoundrels in the back room of the Limehouse restaurant, he learned some of the conditions which governed the enrolment of unfortunates into the gang of malefactors. They had to submit to being branded on the right deltoid with a distinguishing mark which would be recognized by every cocaine smuggler throughout Europe or the Far East. They were to play a lone hand, and never enter into any intimacy with their fellow-criminals. Obedience was, of course, to be implicit. At the slightest hint of an attempt at betrayal, death would follow, swift and sure. Wah Sen never failed. The inverted FIVE was the mark he left upon his victims to show to the others that his sinister hand had been at work. Thus by terror he held them. The poor governess, the out-at-elbows gentleman, the cashiered officer, were all equally held in bondage.

What caused Sir Leopold Messinger to engage Florine de Mery as governess to his children is difficult to say. She may have been peculiarly clever at the nefarious deed, and he may have wished to keep her under his own eyes and

hand. She confessed later to Skin o' my Tooth that Sir Leopold had promised her some very special work, which would have brought her handsome remuneration, and ultimately gained her her freedom. But in the meanwhile he had discovered Dreyfus' growing admiration of the girl, and fearing that a secret intimacy would spring up between them, he decided on the death of both of them. It seems, however, that Wah Sen had also cast eyes of admiration on the pretty governess, and when the time came to execute the abominable orders of his chief, he chose some other unfortunate member of the gang for the foul deed, taking care to obliterate all traces of her identity. He kept Florine de Mery a prisoner, threatening her with the death of Newton Dampier unless she consented to link her fate permanently with his own. Whether she would ultimately have yielded to this threat, for she was very fond of Newton Dampier, I don't know. Skin o' my Tooth and I certainly arrived on the scene in the nick of time. The death of the young secretary had anyhow been decided on, as it was feared he may have learned something through his intimacy with Mlle. de Mery. But Messinger conceived the diabolical idea of first manufacturing such evidence against him as would prove him guilty of murder, and so put the police off any track which may have led to himself or to Wah Sen. I mean, of course, the handkerchief with the tell-tale laundry mark, and the fragment of the letter, which, it seems, was never written by Mlle. de Mery. He played the part of the distracted friend to perfection, and there is no doubt that had chance led him to any other lawyer or to an ordinary detective his last villainous schemes would have been completely successful.

Leopold Messinger was indicted at the Central Criminal Court for being in possession of I don't know how many ounces of cocaine. Other crimes, still more unavowable, were brought home to him, including that of being an accessory to the murder of one Horatio Dreyfus, and of an unknown woman. Wah Sen, committed at the same time on the capital charge, was duly hanged. Messinger got fourteen years. His wife and unfortunate children have disappeared.

But young Newton Dampier proved himself a true Briton, for he remained loyal, in spite of everything, to the girl he loved, and married her. He has gone out to Canada and is doing very well, I believe.

It was the black silk cord and the brooch of Oriental design which had first given Skin o' my Tooth an inkling of the truth. After that, the Chinese butler in the Messinger household set him thinking. He had Wah Sen shadowed, until he discovered that he was in the habit of frequenting a certain restaurant in Lime-house. Sir Leopold Messinger's identity as the leader of the gang was a revelation in the end. Skin o' my Tooth owned to me that he had not suspected this denouement.

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