PAST MASTERS 218

Achmed Abdullah
Damon Runyon
Melville Davisson Post
G. G. Pendarves
"Sapper"
A. E. W. Mason
C. L. Pirkis
F. Anstey
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and more

PAST MASTERS 218

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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G. G. Pendarves

1885-1938

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ALAN CLOVA hid the winged exultant uprush of his emotion with habitual control. His face, thin to emaciation, dark and cleanly chiseled, was aloof and proud as a Pharaoh's. It was hard to believe he was only thirty.

So much experience, so much hard-earned knowledge, so much resolution and critical cool judgment was in his eyes. Beneath straight black brows they gleamed, steady, brilliant and serene. Here was a man of action no less than a man of in tellect. Breeding, dignity, pride of race had molded the features, but they were instinct with a tense fighting awareness that was the New World's gift to the Old.

His cousin, David Wishart Clova, Earl of Glenhallion, narrowly observed his young kinsman. Hope stirred in him once more; hope he had thought was dead— dead and buried with his three sons beneath the sodden earth of Flanders. The words of the creed he had so often repeated in the little gray chapel on his estate, beat in his brain like the portentous opening bars of a tremendous symphony. "I believe in the resurrection of the body and the life of the world to come." The words had never passed his lips since 1916, when his third and youngest son fell.

Now, looking at Alan's six feet five inches of brawn and muscle, the beliefs he had forsworn flashed up again. Here in the flesh once more was an heir to the great name, the centuries of tradition, the wild splendor of Glenhallion estates. Here, under the roof of Gorm Castle, stood a man who might well have been one of his own sons grown older, stronger, more mature. Resurrection!... Yes, it seemed a resurrection indeed.

Alan stood at a great window looking out over Glenhallion estate, from walled grounds about the castle to meadow, forest, craggy hills, and far-distant sky whose April blue darkened to hazy grays and purples above the Kaims of Vorangowl. His absorbed gaze traveled from point to point, then came back to rest on a square gray tower within the grounds, ivy-hung and partly obscured by beechtrees. He frowned at sight of a man who was pacing round its battlements. His appearance, a great hulking figure in outlandish-looking gray clothes, stirred a sudden cold antipathy in Alan and he turned abruptly back to the room and its two occupants.

Lady Maisry, the Earl's only surviving child, sat by a log fire. She had a fragile look and shivered now and then at sound of the wind's bluster round the castle of Gorm. She looked, Alan thought, with her golden hair and green sheath dress, as if she had been transplanted from the daffodil-beds in the grounds below.

Some unfathomable instinct of protection for her made him hesitate to speak of the man on the tower roof. He strolled back to the window. Yes, the man was there still, pacing to and fro, to and fro, a long cloak flapping in the wind, hair and beard flaming red in the evening light. Such a fury of rage shook Alan that it was a minute before he could command his voice. Then he asked, "Is that old tower a complete ruin? Or, do— do people live in it?"

Earl Glenhallion came over to the window. "Birds, bats, spiders! That's all you'll find living in the old Keep. Fine old stronghold, all that's left of the original castle; the rest was burned down about two hundred years ago. No, you'd not find man, woman, or child who'd go inside that tower for five minutes."

"I'm going."

Alan's remark had the effect of a pistol-shot on Lady Maisry. She got to her feet and moved quickly across to him, put a pleading hand on his arm.

"No— no— no! You mustn't! It's dangerous, very dangerous. There's something... there's someone... you never know if— it skips some generations! My father thinks it all nonsense, but—"

Alan almost promised never to set foot in the tower if it worried her. The distress in her gray eyes, the frightened pallor of her cheeks shook him. She interested and gripped his imagina- tion profoundly. Yesterday's first impressions of her were strengthened by today's. Her clear ivory-pale skin, wide gray eyes, gold thick shining hair, gentle slow ease of every movement, and above all to his critical sensitive ear, her low deliberate exquisite voice, immensely charmed him. Beyond these things, though, rare as he had found such physical perfection, he was deeply aware of a mind fully as alive and equipped as his own, of a nature as exacting, and a will as inflexible. But there was something about her that puzzled him. He had the impression of a deeply hidden preoccupation which she dreaded might be discovered.

"She looks as substantial as a dragonfly, but I believe she's made of steel covered with white velvet," he reflected. "I know that fragile-looking type of thoroughbred. She'd live through famine and earthquake— if she felt like living! I know horses and I know dogs, and that gives me a line on humans. She's letting go for some reason. And I'm going to know that reason."

All the same he found it difficult to remember she wouldn't die easily as he met her panic-stricken eyes. A grim thought struck him. Was that man on the battlements her lover?— was she hiding him there from the Earl?

"Why do you feel like that about the tower?" he asked.

Her father drew her to him, an arm about her shoulders. "She's had a queer life here in this old castle. You must forgive her fancies, Alan! The legend about that old Keep dies hard. Everyone on the estate swears by it. Maisry believes it, too."

"Just what is the legend?"

"A-a-ah! Hrumph!" The older man stalked over to the window and glowered at the gray Keep. "They say it's haunted by an ancestor of ours, who lived some two hundred years ago. He was known as the Red Earl of Glenhallion, or Red Alastair, because of his flaming red beard."

Alan felt his heart jump as if a mine had exploded under the polished flooring under foot. He tried to keep his glance from the old tower, and failed. He must look again; perhaps the setting sun had dazzled him, given a false illusion. He joined the Earl; his keen gaze followed the other's look.

A clear shaft of light struck across the glen from over the high moorland of Vorangowl and picked out the tower like a searchlight; every ivy-leaf stood out like carved metal, every irregularity of weathered stone showed up, discolorations of dripping rain from the roof, the gold patina of lichen, the rusty brown of winter leaves lodged in iron-barred windows— all was mercilessly clear.

And, on the breast-high battlemented wall that ran round the roof, a man leaned with face directly turned to Alan and the castle window at which he stood. The man's hair and beard flamed red as torchlight.

"The story of Red Alastair does us no credit," went on the Earl. "He was a wild, dissolute, savage man, from all the records. You can read him up in the library if you're interested. But as to haunting the Keep— that's nonsense, the talk of ignorant peasants, the sort of story that people like to invent about any old ruin."

"So no one lives there, no one climbs up to the roof to look round, not for any reason?" Alan's voice was harsh.

"No one. It stands there as you see it now— deserted! I've been up, of course. Jamie has the key— the only key. When I succeeded to Glenhallion there were constant scandals and wild tales because visitors were allowed to go over the Keep and explore it. I locked up the place, and since then there've been no more tales of ghosts and people being pushed off battlements or crushed behind doors and all the rest of it. I've not been inside for a year or more, and certainly no one else has. A good specimen of Tenth Century architecture it is, and that's all. If you see Red Alastair when you go over it, let me know. I rule here now; he's had his turn and made a very bad job of it, by all accounts."

The two men turned back to the fire, the Earl chuckling, Alan feeling more angry, more stupidly bewildered than he'd ever felt in his whole vigorous sane existence. He believed in ghosts no more than he believed in the Divine Right of kings, and he connected both illusions with forgotten centuries when people had no bathrooms, enjoyed heretic burnings in place of cinemas and nightclubs, and fought for "the Glory of God" or some such unpractical cause.

He thrust the whole thing out of his mind for future cogitation. Maisry was watching him with painful anxiety as if she divined his inner discomfort. He was

determined to share it with no one, and made up his mind to investigate the Keep before he slept that night.

The events apd revelations of that same evening salted his determination. In order to get the legend as it was bandied about the countryside before reading up a literary account, he tried to extract information from the dosemouthed Jamie, who valetted him as he dressed for dinner. Jamie shied away from the subject like a nervous horse from a white flapping sheet.

"It's not good to talk of him, not about this time of year, my lord." The man spoke the broad Scots of the countryside, and became almost unintelligible as his agitation and embarrassment increased.

Alan turned to the big swinging mirror on his dressing-table, pretending to examine his chin. He saw the reflected Jamie glance over his shoulder.

"Why at this time of year, especially?"

"Eh, my lord?— you that'll be next Earl of Glenhallion to be asking that!"

The thin dark face turned from the mirror with a smile, so pleasant and friendly a smile that the old servant relaxed to it with: "It's not you I'll be blaming, my lord; it's those that brought you up so far from your own land and kinsmen. You that were bom to all this!"

"But I wasn't! When I was born, exactly seven other heirs came before me."

"It's the Earl will be telling you all the family history, him and her Ladyship. It's not for me to be havering of the gentry."

"Tell me at least why April's a bad time to discuss Red Alastair? Must a ghost be in season like grouse or blackcock?"

"Wheest, wheest for pity's sake, my lord! You can't tell what's abroad these evenings. The master hasn't 'the sight';, he could go up into the Keep this very night and not see a thing to fright him. But there's others can— aye, there's others can see! And I tell you this, my lord: the Dark Star is up over the Kaims of Vorangowl again."

"You mean the high moors at the head of the glen?"

"No. Not the moors you've seen. The star's in the Picture, the cursed thing that he left in the Keep. Aye, the Picture I'm meaning of the moors and the cliff where the bride he stole from another man jumped to her death."

A deep sonorous booming distracted Jamie from his confidences.

"That's the dinner gong, my lord. I'll not weary you with my tales now. It's all writ in black and white, and every word's true, for all the master's fleering at the legend."

When he made his way down to the lofty shadow-filled dining-hall, exasperation had rubbed Alan's temper rather raw.

"Am I crazy— or am I crazy?" he demanded of himself, one hand lightly sliding over the broad baluster-rail for the sensuous pleasure of touching the lovely seasoned wood, undesecrated by varnish, worn by time. His reason was

floundering and plunging in heavy seas of unfamiliar and unpalatable sensations, ideas and thoughts.

"And, so far, there's nothing in the facts to justify my going up in the air like this," he complained to himself. "Even if I did see— and most certainly I did— a red-bearded man, what of it? They exist— especially here in Scotland; it's almost the hallmark of a Scot. Maybe porridge produces red beards! Jamie's daft about his old legend. Now there's a picture to reckon with, and a dark star, and a lady friend of Red Alastair's! Can you beat it? Even a Hollywood director couldn't think up this one. But the man— the man on the tower—"

A fighting look came into his dark eyes.

"Revolting sight! Don't quite know why— but somehow— filthy! Reminded me of that fat Greek in Paris, sitting like a blotchy swollen spider in his den, waiting for his doped girls to be brought along— bah! I'll get Red Beard! Hunt the hairy brute right off the map."

Poor Alan! In a few more hours he was to discover that a map, even a map of the world, was more than an affair of latitude and longitude as far as Red Beard was concerned.

Dinner rather took his mind off his troubles. There were guests he liked. One, an M. P. for one of the Border counties, met him more than half-way on the question of road development. Over some fine old brandy from the cellars of Gorm, the two men built bridges and tunnels and roads over Scotland; opened up Northern China; decided on the best type of car for use in desert country; and were passionately reclaiming, for Holland, vast new tracts of submerged country when their host brought them back to social duties of the moment.

Alan, however, was himself again, perfectly confident of being able to deal with life and its problems in his rational systematic way. The old tower and the man on its battlements no longer seemed ominous.

"Liver, I suppose," he told himself. "Never knew I had one before, though. I'll satisfy myself that beggar's not about before I go to bed, though. Might set fire to the trees with his flaming red beard."

In the big drawing-room, where lamps and fires made shadows dance on molded ceilings and white-paneled walls, on the faded coral of brocaded curtains that shut out sky and stars and wind-torn clouds, the Lady Maisry sang to them; of love, of death, of ecstasy, of bitter longing— ballads of olden times. She sang with the last perfect simplicity of a genuine artist; and with smiles, with tears, the listeners paid tribute to her gift.

As the last note echoed in the quiet, spellbound room, Alan knew! He knew he was in love, exquisitely, irrevocably, passionately. What he did not know was that, because of it, he would cross a barrier into the unknown, and there meet terror beyond conception of what terror could be.

A few hours later, when the guests were gone and the old Earl sleeping in his room, he and Maisry sat and talked together. Her low, shaken voice confided in him the horror that had thrust itself into her life, and he listened with a mounting love and pity and fear for her that carried him like a tidal wave far, far beyond every intellectual boundary his mind had ever recognized.

He wanted to think that she was ill, that her nerves were playing tricks, that the old castle of Gorm with its memories and legends had worked on her, that change of scene would cure her, that she must marry him and come away and live and laugh in the sun and forget. His Sane logical mind clamored for such solution of her secret. But below the rational protests of his disciplined clear mind, deeper understanding stirred and apprehended.

The woman he loved looked at him, her haunted eyes besought him. He must make a decision. Now!

He got to his feet, bent down and drew her up beside him, her hands in his strong clasp. He did not kiss her— no, not even the cold slim hands that trembled in his own. But in the silence his very soul spoke to her, gave lasting deep assurance of his passion.

"I believe you," he said at last. "Every word you've told me. And I'm going to follow this up. It had never occurred to me that things like— like Red Alastair and his Picture could exist. You've convinced me."

"But Alan! Alan!" her low voice broke in fear. "I told you only because— your love gives you a right to know my secret, because I want you to see how useless it is to love me. It is hopeless, most dangerous to interfere. This is my fate. All these years, these centuries, he has waited, growing stronger. Perhaps, at first, he might have been sent back— back to his own place. Now it's too late. He's learned the trick of leaving his awful painted moorland and getting into our world."

She shivered at the fierce fighting light of battle her words brought to the dark eyes looking down into her own.

"Alan! It is fatal— quite fatal to oppose him. You must never put foot inside the Keep. Oh, can't you see, have I not explained it all? It is hopeless. I told my secret to prevent your interfering, running into hideous peril. To stop you going. Alan! Not you— not you —"

His grip of her hands slackened. He stooped, his eyes sought hers in sudden overwhelming wonder.

"D'you mean that you— that you care, too? Maisry! Maisry! If you do, nothing can separate us. No dream or ghost! Now I know the facts. I am prepared. You have armed me against surprize. I'm ready for Red Alastair. Do you think"— he held her softly, adoring her, sheltering her from all the world— "do you think I'd let man or devil take you from me— now?"

ii

ONE. TWO. THREE.

The strokes tolled out from a church-tower of some near-by village as Alan left the castle and made his way to the old gray Keep. The chimes brought a flash of self-mockery into his face.

"If the old crowd at home could see me now— trotting off in the moonlight at three a. m. to meet a fellow who died two hundred years ago! Mack's waistcoat buttons would shoot clear across Lake Huron with the laugh he'd get out of it!"

The wild clear sky, glittering stars and stinging wind were beginning to put a different complexion on the past few hours at Gorm— vast shadow-filled firelit romantic old castle that it was. Here, striding across the turf, trees tossing and creaking, clouds driving, the shrill mad pipe of the wind in his ears, Alan's body exulted in the challenge to his senses; his physical rather than psychical powers were called upon.

It was extraordinarily difficult for a man of his type to sustain the vision that Maisry's story had called up. With every step, old habits of reasoning took hold more firmly. When he reached the huge barred iron-studded door of the Keep he had once more put the Red Alastair legend into the realm of fantasy. He wondered at himself for accepting it at Maisry's valuation even for an hour. He recalled a bit of doggerel he'd chanced on that day, or, rather, the previous day:

Love, love, love, love,
Love it is a dizziness!
It winna let a puir body
Gang aboot his bizziness!

"And that explains me to myself." He fitted a big oiled key into the lock and gave a half-shamed laugh at his own expense. "What odds, though! If Maisry wants me to make a fool of myself in this particular way— I'm for it. Anyhow, I intended to see the ugly hairy beggar off the premises. Might as well take a look at the Picture too, while I'm here. There aren't many back home can beat me at sight-seeing, I'll say!"

He confided these conclusions to the inner side of the door as he closed and locked it behind him, in order to trap any vagrant lurking inside the tower. He switched on his torch, a large, powerful one with a new battery, and began his strangely timed visit.

"Better check up on the plan again."

He patted the wide pockets of his overcoat, drew out a folded piece of semitransparent tough paper familiar to architects, opened out the worn

crackling sheet and examined once more the scale-drawing and faded cramped letter press.

"H-m-m! Ground floor. This was where soldiers were lodged."

He forced back a narrow door on its rusted creaking hinges and went in.

Silence and darkness. The nine-foot thick walls were cut to north and south exposures, forming huge window-seats, broad and cold as tombstones. The windows were small, narrow, and heavily barred by iron grilles as thick as a man's wrist. A yawning fireplace like a roofless cupboard showed stained and blackened floor and a pair of massive iron dogs.

He stood on the hearth and peered up. A vast chimney gaped to the sky; he could see a pale moon with torn rags of cloud across her face. .And she was the last friendly familiar object he remembered that night.

SOUND of a shuffling heavy footstep somewhere above took him to the foot of the stairway; he craned his head to listen. The spiral stairs were steep and a bare two feet in breadth; his shoulders rubbed the outer wall as he climbed. He reached the next level and flashed his torch into the thick absorbent darkness of another hollow room. The door of it stood wide. He moved cautiously across the threshold; the brilliant spotlight of his torch showed no one there.

This was the dining-hall and a higher ceiling, more windows, a smoother flooring, and less rough-hewn fireplace distinguished it from the room below. Above the hearth, with its hollowed blackened stones and battered mantelpiece, a startling vivid thing brought Alan's traveling torch to an abrupt halt.

"For heaven's sake! Is that the Picture?"

His dark lean face regarded it with a positive glare of incredulous belief—unwilling furious belief.

"Land of Moses! Just a fake! It's as new as— as the Chrysler Building! The paint's as fresh as a ship's just out of dry-dock."

In the shock of discovery, he forgot the footsteps. He strode across the dusty floor, trained his torch full on the painted scene.

"Damn — and damn — and damn again!" he glowered, swearing in soft whispered fury, eyes narrowed under black impatient brows. ''Maisry was dead right about its infernal technique. It's more like Vorangowl than it's like itself. It's damnable!"

It was. The thing confronted him, exquisitely improbable, perfect beyond human hand or brain to conceive and execute. Some six feet square of the rough wall that formed the chimney-breast had been smoothed down and prepared to a surface even and fine as asphalt. Farreaching miles of country were compressed within that six-foot bit of wall, the whole of Glenhallion estates from castle grounds to the Kaims of Vorangowl — high brooding eagle-

haunted plateau of moor and rock and fir-woods that was the western limit. It was the view that stretched before the windows of the library at Gorm castle where he had watched yesterday's sun go down behind the same craggy ridge of rock portrayed on the painted horizon before him; the view he'd been watching before his eyes dropped to the Keep and that abominable tramp that lounged there on its battlements.

Stranger, newcomer he might be, but he knew that view very thoroughly indeed, and his trained falcon-keen eye recognized and acknowledged the astounding reproduction of one landmark after another.

"It's like looking through a window at the thing. If it weren't three a. m. and this wall facing due east instead of west, I'd take my oath that I was staring through a sheet of plate-glass at Vorangowl itself as it looked yesterday about five o'clock! The same effect to the last detail— the same feathery cloud-shape over the pointed hill— and blue haze over the patch of wood to the north. It's not just an April evening, it's the identical evening I watched yesterday."

He started, frowned, looked more intently at the Picture on the wall.

"This cursed torch ... if it were only daylight! The infernal thing— why— it looks like mist rolling up over the road— actually rolling up before my eyes!"

And then his whole mind and body, every faculty and sense were suddenly sharpened to amazing perception. His breath came in deep sighs as though he were toiling up-hill with a weight to carry; his face hollowed and lost color; sweat stood in great beads on his forehead.

THE faint far-off figure of a man on the painted road— a stony track flung down across the heights— was coming nearer, nearer, nearer ... A figure that had been a vague shadow in the mist, when Alan first looked at the Picture, whose minuteness had served to emphasize the deserted aching loneliness of the moors. Now, the figure was moving forward, swiftly, swiftly over the stony endless road— past miles of dark woods, down the steep drop to the glen until it was swallowed up in the trees and shrubberies of Gorm which formed the foreground of the Picture.

A corner of the Keep itself shojved in this same foreground, a bit of the gray weathered battlements.

Alan stared, waiting with pulses beating heavy and slow, watching for the man to reappear. Abruptly he came. He was there on the battlemented roof of the Keep, his great red head and fiery beard sharply defined. He turned to look at Alan, flung up a great arm in menace or derisive greeting.

In that instant a sound of high hooting wind filled the Keep, shrieked through the barred windows, roared down the hollow shaft of the stairway. Alan whipped about, torch in hand, to see the door slam in his face. The wind dropped as he flung himself forward to pull and tug with mad violence at the

clumsy ring of iron that formed a handle. As he vainly struggled, there was a sound of heavy footsteps coming from above, halting outside his door, moving on downward and out of hearing.

Silence, heavy and sightless as a grave's, closed down on the Keep and its prisoner.

The shock of it roused Alan like a blow in the face. He'd stood bemused, dreaming, hypnotized by a bit of painted wall and let himself be trapped. Tricked! Some bit of ancient conjuring, some ingenious contraption in the chimney-flue had caused the illusion.

And the uproar of the wild and sudden wind? He shrugged that problem off. Whoever worked the Picture fake could take care of that too!

He flashed his light up the chimney but could see nothing beyond bare, grimed old stones rising in rough crumbling perpendicular. He examined the rooms opening off the dining-hall; they were merely cells, unlighted, full of dust and rubble. He returned to the main room and looked up at the windows with careful calculating eye; they were narrow, strongly barred, set high on the walls so that no arrow, glancing through, should strike a human target. No faintest hope from them, even could he climb like a fly or were possessed of the sharpest of files. Only an explosive could burst open his prison bars.

And now that cursed red-bearded man was at large while he was trapped and helpless here. What was the game? Robbery— the old plate at Gorm? Or jewels— would the beast go near Maisry, frighten her, hurt her? What had he plotted and planned as he hid here all those hours?

Not even hidden, though, Alan reflected. The creature had brazened it out on the battlements in full light. How was it no one but himself had seen? The Earl had been standing beside him when- Hastily averting his mind's eye from the thought that leaped out of ambush to answer his question, Alan said aloud in clearest, concisest tones:

"That's an easy one! The old man's sight is failing!" and this in spite of knowing that only tweLve months ago the Earl had once more carried off the Fofarshire trophy for target shooting at the annual sports. "And, after all, it's not likely that people who live here go poking about and staring as I've been doing. It's *perfectly* simple that I happened to be the only one to see that infernal tramp."

Other explanations buzzed in his brain and he beat them back like a cloud of noisome flies. There was no other explanation.

Maisry's words sounded in his memory. "Only some have the sight. Father hasn't got it, and that's why he's never seen Red Alastair and doesn't believe in the legend— but it's fact and no legend at all. I have the sight. And you have it too, Alan. I knew at once; I always recognize this wonderful, this terrible power

in anyone else. You will see Red Alastair, most certainly you will see him, and that is why I can explain to you about his Picture that he lives in."

For some minutes he closed his eyes, recalled deliberately scenes and images and places he had left behind in America. He wanted to shake off illusion, to steady his swirling thoughts, to forget the dark disturbance that swelled and rose and battered at his sanity.

He thought of a holiday he had spent loafing in the sun and warm salt water in Florida. He remembered a day in the woods near a logging-camp when an angry she-bear had chased him as he made off with her cub. He saw himself rocking and smoking and yarning on the broad screened porches of his aunt's country-house in the White Mountains; flashed through the hours of last Christmas day, spent with old Friedland in New York... the fires and friends and brilliant dinner-table....

He opened his eyes on the Picture, and had the sensation of dropping from heaven to hell. On the road— returning, retreating to the misty Kaims of Vorangowl— the man was back again. But this time, and Alan watched with all his soul although he denied the thing he watched, a faint shadowy second figure followed after the man. Beyond a rocky cliff-face far up on the Kaims the red-haired figure halted, turned about to beckon the weary shadow that toiled after him, a shadow that grew clearer with every step it took. Suddenly Alan knew it.

"Maisry! Maisry! Maisry! Come back— come back to me!"

HIS full-throated anguished cry beat and echoed against the high cold walls of his prison. Again, again he called. He must bring her back, he must, before she set foot on that high narrow trail skirting the precipice.

That meant death to her, lasting, damnable, eternal death. He was conscious of a single overmastering passion of determination to bring her back— back from the cliff-face where she would slip to darkness, where he would lose her in this world and the next.

With a new shock, he recognized that his will was locked with the will of the red-haired man who waited for Maisry beyond the cliff path. The Picture darkened. Mist rolled gray and baffling down from the heights, and in the leaden skies a dark star shone, a star of evil copperred that changed the green woods and April grass to somber purples.

Old Jamie's warning darted across his memory: "The Dark Star is up over the Kaims of Vorangowl."

He saw Maisry move forward, saw Red Alastair beckon with insistent hand. Deathless love. Deathless hate. The twin fires leaped up, all his conscious being focused to a single point— to conquer Red Alastair.

He knew his antagonist, acknowledged him at last. He knew his weapon too. His only weapon. The Will. A clean strong sword that all hell tried to tear from his grasp.

And now Maisry was coming back, back to him from the dark cliff, from engulfing mists, from Red Alastair, slowly, moving wraith-like past wood and glen and through the enfolding trees in the grounds at last. As she vanished, she turned to smile at him.

His torch fell from his nerveless hand. He sagged to the ground, huddled with head on knees; he felt old and worn and done. His next recollection was of light at the windows. Dawn, and the high sweet note of skylarks on the wing.

And the Picture showed a fresh and verdant April evening, an empty road wound up over far-distant heights, a clear tender sky shone above all. It was a magic tender exquisite study of a northern spring. Alan looked and experienced emotions he had never dreamed of possessing.

"And that was her dream! That child caught— held— dragged to hell!

"Maisry!" he addressed the Picture as if she were still on the road before his eyes. "Forgive me. My faithlessness, my stupidity. You shall never tread that road again. It is my fight now. It is between me and Red Alastair. *And— I— will— win."*

The last words fell with slow, deadly emphasis, a vow abruptly extinguished, the echo of the last word torn from his lips by an inferno of wind. The Keep Kbcked in its fury, vibrating ominously to its high tremendous shriek.

He turned to the door, prepared for assault, and was faced by a new shock of surprize. The door stood wide open. Cool morning air, bearing a tang of pine and a freshness of young wet leaves and grass, met him as he ran to the lower floor, to find the outer door unlocked and opened to the misty morning.

Soberly, slowly, thankfully he returned to Gorm, deeply aware that the Keep was solitary now; no need to search. Its demon was not there. For the moment there was no enemy, no battlefield.

There was only Maisry, and he must go to her.

iii

"AND Maisry?" Alan looked at the breakfast table laid for two and his eyes lost their eagerness. "Not joining us, Cousin David?"

"No. Her maid says she had a bad night. I don't know what to make of it; these last weeks she's altered beyond recognition. I've tried to persuade her to go away for a change. Our local man, Doctor Shields, says she's well enough but makes no effort; he thinks there's something on her mind."

Alan regarded the fish on his plate with a stem frown. He'd been doing some hard, intensive thinking and saw a gleam of light on the very dark horizon of his thoughts.

"I met a chap on the ship coming over. Lives in Stirling. Several people on board knew him well. Seems he's made a great reputation as a nerve specialist. Broome, Eliot Broome's his name."

The Earl's unhappy face lightened.

"Ah, that's a household word in Scotland, and in other countries too. A nerve-man, yes! I didn't think of him for Maisry. D'you suppose she—"

"It's hard to do anything but guess. This fellow Broome impressed me more than anyone I've met in years. Got to know him fairly well— y'know how it is on board ship. We yarned several nights away together. Made a good team for discussions, as he always took a diametrically opposite viewpoint from mine. I'm for fact, the proven fact."

His voice weakened-as he proclaimed his lifelong standard. How foolishly short it fell of measuring up with last night's phenomenon!

"Maisry might be upset, imagine there was something seriously wrong if I called in Broome."

"Let me go to Stirling and talk to him. I could bring him back as a friend, not introduce him professionally. Let him see Maisry off guard."

It was quickly arranged. By ten o'clock, Alan was speeding along the road south, a great relief in his mind that there was someone likely to listen to his fantastic improbable story and discuss it without prejudice. As far as he knew Eliot Broome, the impossible and fantastic interested him profoundly. If only he'd come, and at once! Maisry must not endure last night's horror again.

He found Broome at home, and the specialist listened with immense concentration.

"Yes, I can come, and now!" he gave assurance. "I returned by an earlier ship than I had intended— meant to finish off some laboratory experiments before seeing patients. A few days in retreat, y'know. But this won't wait an hour; we'll talk on the drive back."

After lunch, at which Maisry did not appear, the Earl took the two younger men into his study. The father's idea was that Maisry needed a change of scene, that she was moping here at Gorm; and it was evident he knew nothing of her dream, or the fear that shadowed her life. He would strongly have resented the idea of his daughter sharing the vulgar superstitions of the countryside; he appreciated Red Alastair as a picturesque legend but not as an existent contemporary.

After their conference, Alan took his ally over to the Keep.

"God! It's altered again!"

Alan, who had made straight for the Picture, regarded it with angry incredulity.

"It was a clear late afternoon scene when I left it. There was no figure. Just bare spring landscape. Now the man's back in it again! He was right up in the mist when I first saw this infernal thing; I thought it a clever dodge of the painter— that solitary tiny figure emphasized the vast desolate moor. Now— look at that, will you!"

The two stared. On the road, not a mile from the entrance-gate to Gorm, and facing toward it, a man's figure was painted. Insolently, he seemed to dominate the lovely lonely Glen, and his uncovered head burned red as fire under leaden skies.

A lan's face set like a mask. With k- loathing, he noted the changed aspect of the Picture, its gloom and shadow and brooding horror; a scene from Dante's purgatory rather than the living burgeoning earth.

"Even the star is in it again," he muttered. "The Dark Star."

His companion looked long at the blood-red portent over Vorangowl.

"The star is Red Alastair's signal, then! A sort of challenge."

In striking contrast with Alan's quicksilver energy, Broome stood regarding the Picture; his massive proportions, leonine head, and slow deliberate movements typical of the man. Alan was all speed and movement and quick fiery courage, lean and swift and dangerous in anger as a black panther. Broome's was a slow, deadly, precise strength that makes no mistakes, that waits to strike and never misses; superbly master of himself, he was a man to seek as desert-travelers turn to the shelter of a rock.

"You consider this," Broome's quiet voice began, "the work of a man, some tremendous work of genius?"

The other looked at him, his lean face, his black eyes cold, furious, implacable.

"It's a trick, a damnable hellish trick— to put the wind up— to unnerve me. Why not? He's had two hundred years to learn, to practise his infernal game."

The specialist regarded him with pity, with comprehension.

"I was prepared to accept your theory, that Red Alastair was a miracle-man, a marvel who had discovered the secret of perpetuating life. The secret could— it will— be discovered! But this Picture is not the work of a man. It proves that Red Alastair died— in the flesh."

Alan turned an impatient eye on his companion. "What proves it?" he demanded.

"He couldn't accomplish that," Broome's eyes narrowed on the Picture, "while he was still bound by human limitations in his body. He had to say good-bye to that body before journeying to the hell where such magic was learned.

Red Alastair is dead. The Picture is an open door by which he comes and goes to that far hell of his."

Alan flung a defiant look at the painted moors. "If there's a way to open a door, there must be a way to close it."

"Undoubtedly! As we saw in the records, though, a door of this nature can't be manipulated in any obvious way."

The other nodded gloomy assent. "They seem to have tried everything. Painting it out— cutting it out— every sort of destruction—"

"And each failure gave new advantage to the enemy."

"How's that?"

"Because," Broome answered, "they actively acknowledged Red Alastair's power. Without defense or understanding, they offered combat and he won. His existence in our world depended, and still depends, on such victories."

The Picture gleamed sullen, threatening, unchanged upon the wall. Unchanged! Not quite. The man's face was lifted, flung back, its eyes green as a storm-wave in the lightning's glare.

Alan's eyes met them unflinching, he gave back look for look, he seemed to project his very soul to thrust back the power in that painted evil face. Broome, acutely aware of the sudden impact of will against will, stood like stone: he bent the whole weight of his strong disciplined mind to Alan's need. Then, like the snapping of a twig, it was over. The strain, the tension, the unbearable pressure ceased. Alan's breath was expelled in a long quivering sigh, he leaned his weight on Broome's shoulder, turned a gray face and sunken eyes.

"Let's get out— away from this."

With eloquent gesture he turned and left the tower, his companion close behind. They walked across the intervening space in silence, stood at the castle entrance to look back at the gray, ominous Keep.

"I was wrong!" Alan's voice was hoarse. "Reason— fact— logic— all wrong! It's neither genius nor science behind Red Alastair's devilish Picture. It's black magic, it's from hell."

"Don't blame yourself; no sane man

would accept the true explanation without proof— the sort of proof you've had." Broome put a hand on Alan's shoulder. "Can you arrange for us to see Lady Maisry now, and be undisturbed for the next hour? There's only a bare margin of safety for her; she must never, as you said, follow him on that road again; she'd not survive it."

"If she went away, now, at once, within the hour! Out of the country! She could fly across to— "

Alan stopped at tihe other's decisive gesture.

"Physical distance is a factor that does not count. The man, the devil she follows on that moorland road can summon her at will— from across the world.

It is the soul, the ego, the flame within the lamp of clay that is subject to Red Alastair: the body is a thing apart, governed by different laws and limitations."

iv

THEY WENT UPSTAIRS and were admitted by a maid to Lady Maisry's apartments. Alan sent a message.

The girl quickly returned. "Yes, my lord, at once! And this gentleman, also. Will you come to her sitting-room, please?"

The two waited in a room that hung like a nest high up in the southwest wing of Gorm castle. It's window thrust out in a semicircular sweep over a bit of wild uncultivated ground below— long grass and daffodils tossed together, and bushy willow-stumps flashed in sun and wind beside a shallow stream whose soft chuckle sounded in the room through widely opened windows.

How like Maisry, how like her strange lovely self, this room! Straight from the devil-haunted tower, it seemed to Alan as velvet-sweet and fresh as a copse of wood-violets. She came in to them at once. Her eyes, their cloud-gray beauty repeated in the chiffons of her dress, showed immense fatigue— dark pools no fresh quick source could stir, no sun touch to happy life again. Her face was pale as ivory; she moved across the room slowly, with trained habitual grace, but could not hide her deathly weariness.

Eliot Broome made up his mind at once. Here was one who deserved no less than truth. She was a fighter, strong, and able to endure. He explained himself without preamble, begged her to let him put what knowledge and resources he had at her disposal. She met him with equal directness.

"It is good of you— quite extraordinarily kind— to have come so quickly. Everyone knows your fame, your skill. Tell me one thing, first, and I want the absolute truth, please, Mr. Broome. Alan has told you about my dream?"

The specialist nodded.

"And that I connect it with Red Alastair and his Picture?"

Again he gave grave assent.

"You know, then, that I consider myself to be haunted by this ancestor of mine; and, knowing this, do you believe that I am unbalanced, my nerves deranged, my brain, affected?"

"Dear Lady Maisry, I believe you to be as sane as I am, very sane and unusually well-balanced. That is the reason you can bear to hear the truth from me."

She grew very white. "I understand. I am in danger— in deadly peril?"

"Yes," he agreed. "In more than mortal peril; yet, courageous as you are, I would not confess this if I did not know you could be rescued."

Light flashed, died out again in her eyes, gray as lake-water at dawn. She shook her golden head.

"Please, not that! I dare not, dare not think along those lines. I am one of the ill-fated of my line. In life, in death, he cannot be defeated."

Broome rose to his feet, took her two hands, and drew her up to face him. His eyes, his voice, were stern.

"Listen to me, Lady Maisry. That is a piece of unwisdom I had not dreamed you could say, or believe. It is just such unquestioning belief in Red Alastair that has enabled him to remain earth-bound, expanding his mad rapacious ego to colossal dimensions. His existence depends utterly on people's faith and fear."

She stood rigid in his grasp, her face fixed in tense abstracted thought.

"But he— he is more than man! He is a devil— served by devils. It is not one human soul against another, it never has been that. You do not know Red Alastair's history, nor does Alan; there has been so little time."

"No. We have only glanced at the records. Is there any special reason why you are haunted? Are all the women of your family tormented?"

"No. I am the first; the first woman that has had 'the sight And the reason why he— why he calls me, draws me after him, is this— "

She took up a small shabby leather case from a table at her side and opened it to show an oval miniature set in pale gold with rim of pearls. The two men looked at it and at her.

"A lovely portrait of you," Alan said.

"No— not of me. That was painted in 1700. It is a portrait of an ancestor of mine on my mother's side— Lady Jean Haugh. Red Alastair stole her on her wedding-day, snatched her from the bridegroom's side as the pair stood before the priest, and rode off with her. To escape him, she flung herself off the cliffpath on the Kaims of Vorangowl. He was riding recklessly, as always, and no doubt his grasp of her loosened as he held up his frightened horse. This is all in the records, and there were many witnesses to this particular crime; for it was April and shepherds were all out on the moors tending the ewes and lambs."

"Then Lady Jean Haugh did actually defeat him for once!"

"Not finally. She merely postponed his victory. He has waited some two hundred years for her. And now— here am I."

"Exactly. Here are you. And you are not the Lady Jean Haugh."

"Physically I am, to the last gold hair. And more than that Red Alastair would not recognize. There is no time now to tell you more fully of his life; one year was like another to him, blood and battle, riding and fighting. But chiefly women— the records are black with their names— their unspeakable fate."

Eliot Broome watched the girl narrowly. His next question made Alan start and lean forward with hands suddenly cold and shaking, the pulses throbbing at his temples.

"And you? You have not thought of escaping as Lady Jean escaped?"

Maisry did not shrink. The idea was evidently a familiar one.

"My unwisdom, as you call it, is not so great as that. Nor do I count suicide escape— from anything."

Broome's square rugged face lightened.

"Ah, now you are wise, indeed. If you will continue to think with such intelligence and courage, I repeat— Red Alastair can be defeated."

Again she shook her head.

"You scarcely know how truly monstrous he is, and was from the beginning. Oh, they are not old wives' tales, the records of his birth and life and death. They come from varying sources, perfectly sound and authentic, and all agree that he was monstrous, devil-possessed from birth."

"And his death? What is recorded of that?"

"It was never recorded as proved fact. He lived alone at Gorm after Lady Jean's death; entirely, mysteriously alone, cut off from every human being. No one took food to the castle, no one saw him outside its walls. But at night the Keep would blaze with light— and books say 'ringed about with most infernal fire', and thin high pipings and whistlings echoed to the hills. It was a terror in the countryside for three years."

"And then?"

"The old castle of Gorm was burned to the ground. It blazed and smoldered for nights and days. No one would go near it. Only the Keep was left standing."

"And the Picture? Is it mentioned in the early records?"

Alan, listening, strained forward to hear her reply.

"Yes." Loathing dawned in her eyes. "Duncan, tenth Earl of Glenhallion, inherited after Gorm was burned. Red Alastair had vanished, although his bones were never found, and the popular belief was that he had not died in the fire. Duncan rebuilt the castle as it stands now, and attempted to destroy what was recorded in those days as 'a most strange and foule magick'. Instead, he was himself destroyed, his body found on the battlements with a broken back."

Alan frowned, turned to Broome.

"At least, Alastair was living then! He must have been responsible for that murder."

"But many have died like that," Maisry went on. "Many have tried to destroy the Picture. For almost two hundred years men have tried, and failed, and died most horribly."

"Opposing the psychical with the physical." Broome's massive head was hunched between his shoulders, his abstracted gaze bent on the carpet. "Red Alastair died. He exists in another state of being. He must be met, opposed, conquered in that other state."

Alan's words came slow and weighted. "I would not acknowledge that before. I've been bluffing myself. I knew he was something— not human— when first I saw him on the battlements. I dared not admit it. It seemed too difficult, too dangerous. I was afraid."

Tears came to Maisry's eyes. Broome's smile, however, was a benediction.

"Now you've come to grips with yourself. Of course you're afraid. What do you expect? You're human, not a devil like Red Alastair."

"What I mean, more precisely," Alan continued in the same slow painful way, "is that I recognize at last what must be done— and I'm prepared to do it. I know in the main, that is; I shall leave details to you."

"I can give you protection. I can prepare you for the journey. Beyond that none can help."

"What journey? What are you both talking about?" Maisry broke in with quick breathless words. "Alan! You mustn't— you're not dreaming of—"

He took her hand, kissed the fingers that clung to his. She turned to Broome, her hand still holding fast to Alan's.

"Tell me! Tell me! What are you going to let him do? Protection, you said. Oh, what are you going to do?— where is Alan going?"

"Don't break now, my dearest." Alan rose and stood before her. "I need your help, all you can give."

"All you can give," echoed Broome, and his tone touched her to profound stillness. "You have a capacity for faith. It is a two-edged quality. You brought Red Alastair into the compass of your existence by your faith in him and his power to do you harm. You can transfer that faith to Alan and his power to conquer Red Alastair. You must choose. There can be no compromise. Do you believe in Alan's power to defeat your enemy, or do you not?"

Her look turned to Alan's straight, tall figure. He was changed, much changed since his surrender to the deep-hidden unconscious self he had so long ignored. His dark Pharaoh look of impenetrable command and dignity added a decade to his years.

As she watched him, amazement swamped her fear. It was not possible to conceive defeat for this regal-looking man.

"I fight for you, Alan. I believe in you."

He looked long into her eyes, saw all that lay behind her spoken words, and took her hand as if to seal a compact. "Then we're ready now for the fight— for the victory."

He turned to Broome.

"We are of one mind now, one resolve, utterly and completely one."

TWO GREAT seven-branched candelabra, on massive stands, reached tall as young trees on either side of the fireplace. Their candles showed the Picture in warm golden light. Through the barred unglassed windows, night air drifted mild and sweet with scent of hawthorn, mingling with tang of wood and leaves that glowed and sizzled in a brazier upon the hearth.

A truckle-bed showed dimly in a corner of the dining-hall; two light gardenseats and a great pile of wood and many thick white candles were also visible. "You are sure, you swear, that Maisry is safe? To wait here while she, perhaps,

Broome interrupted him.

"I know she is safe. For her I can absolutely vouch. For you, it is different; I can only protect you up to a point; the issue depends entirely on yourself after that. Your will against his. You are taking the most fantastic risk, as I warned you. If you lose, if your endurance and courage are mastered by him for an instant, you are mastered for all time. You will become what he is— a devil; you will work for him, yes, even if it means helping to bait the Lady Maisry to hell!"

"Never!" There was none of Alan's wonted fire and scorn in his voice; emotion was stripped from him, human attributes consumed by divine unbending will. "You are sure, then? She is tired, ill, she may fall asleep. And in sleep Red Alastair calls her."

"You don't know the laws that govern other states of being, but, believe me, Red Alastair is restricted in his activities as we are ourselves. Laws of gravity, of magnetism, of attraction and repulsion, of growth and decay, of tides and winds and electricity— all the myriad laws that govern us and our objective world have their parallels in other worlds."

"Who makes them?"

"Who makes ours?" was the quiet response. "Fire bums you; a fall from a height will break you in pieces! Why?"

"Because we're made of human stuff, perishable matter."

"And do you imagine that, free of your body, you cannot suffer or perish? Red Alastair, I repeat, has no power to pass the barriers that protect Lady Maisry for this one night."

"And after that?"

"Her protection will be in your power."

Broome turned abruptly to the wall. "Watch! Watch the Picture, on your life! He mustn't see you first. He mustn't call you to him. The attack must be from you."

The two men stood shoulder to shoulder, their gaze sternly set upon the Picture. A faint copper tinge darkened its evening sky, gray haze began to cloud the heights, shadows fell across the wide moors, the woods, and glen; the long

road seemed a net flung down— a trap— a sinister living thing that coiled and waited for its prey.

Mist thickened and spread upon the heights, and Broome's hand went to his breast pocket. He drew out a small phial and unstoppered it, pressed it into Alan's hand.

"Keep your eyes on the mist, on the mist above Vorangowl. He is coming. Drink this, on the instant, when his figure appears. He must not catch you in the body."

The coppery gleam deepened in the sky, focussed, concentrated to a center. The Dark Star shone out over the broad estate of Glenhallion; and, on the far horizon of the Picture, mist rose, wreathed, and crept across the sullen moors... blind herald of doom.

Alan stood with the phial to his lips, breathing slowly, evenly. The hand that held the little clouded glass was steady, his dark brows met in a frown of concentration over eyes black as a deep tarn in winter, and as cold. The fine bones of his face showed under taut muscles and sunken cheeks.

On the heights of Vorangowl, on a craggy spur of rock above the fatal gorge and dizzy cliff-path, the mists grew thin... parted... swirled aside. A figure, a mere black speck, but infinitely menacing, was visible.

Swift as a bird's flash, Alan drank. The phial slipped, crashed to the stone floor.

Broome's strong arms were about him instantly, supporting him, lifting him to the truckle-bed in the corner. Blind, deaf, empty shell, his body lay there as Broome turned quickly back to the Picture.

Watching it, his heart seemed to turn over in his breast. The dread he had concealed from Alan racked him now.

"Gone. Beyond all help, all knowledge now. Fighting alone, unaided. Following — following that devil — even to hell."

Then, in the Picture, he saw Alan signal from the Keep, across the gulf of time and space the painted surface bridged; signal from the battlements with imperious command. Good! He had flung down his gage to battle. Next moment, Broome saw his tall light figure running through the grounds, through the gates, along the road that led to Vorangowl. Swiftly, swiftly Alan's feet carried him, borne by the impetus of his strong will.

Now the glen lay behind him; the wooded Kaims closed about him jealously. On, on he went, past threat of glooming trees, past barren reaches of the upper glen.

Broome watched, his heart going as if he himself ran across the fatal spellbound moors. He could see Red Alastair fighting his way downward— restrained by Alan's stronger impetus— taken unawares. Ah, Red Alastair was

gaining ground now! If he reached the cliff-path, if he crossed it first, then Alan must suffer terribly. It was clear the fact was apprehended by both adversaries.

All Red Alastair's unbridled longing, his mad unappeasable desire, had focussed on the scene of his defeated lust. For two hundred years his restless terrible ghost had wandered there, watching, waiting. The cliff and rocky narrow trail were deep imprinted with his torment, his deathless hate.

Swifter, swifter Alan ran, up the steeps, over heather and stony tracts, on— on— on. And, from the mists, Red Alastair loomed larger; the balefire of hair and beard gleamed. From either end, the two antagonists approached the fatal wall of rock.

Broome leaned forward, his whole consciousness centered on Alan's last tremendous effort.

"He's done it! He's there first!"

The quiet thankful voice rang in the still room and the candles flared in answer, showing every detail on the painted wall.

On the dizzy edge of space, Alan took the path lightly, easily; and, on its further side. Red Alastair bulked gigantic, the mist recoiling— leaving him in space — alone— waiting....

Alan had crossed, flashed upon his enemy— closer, closer, until to Broome's sight there scarcely seemed a yard between them. Then, for a long moment of torture, both figures were motionless. Broome well understood the meaning of that titanic pause. Will battled with will. One must retreat, one pursue.

The Picture suddenly assumed the look of some vast amphitheater: hollow curving mountain ranges, their crested heads upreared, closed in upon the combatants. Beyond them, screened by vaporous mist, Broome was aware of watchers, felt the pressure of their blind malevolence.

"So," he whispered, "Red Alastair is not come alone!"

A knife seemed to twist in his heart as he watched; every moment was a year of horror; every instant of the grim rigid contest meant unspeakable effort to Alan.

The mist rolled blindingly, it wrapped about Red Alastair, drew him back, back to the heights. And Alan followed on.

Broome was aware that he followed with sure and steady purpose, more and more slowly, growing smaller, dimmer at every step. The Kaims of Vorangowl were being blotted out. Mist rose on every side. The hills, the glen, the woods were only smears of vague color. Now the foreground and the corner of the old Keep vanished. Only the Dark Star shone with metallic copper glow and showed Alan's tiny toiling figure going upward— upward. It reached the farthest peak, showed for a flashing second, black, tiny, remote; then it was lost.

Broome's eyes ached; he closed them, opened them again. No, it was really over now. The Picture on the wall was only a gray dull blur of moving swirling

mist. Not a stone, not a leaf, not a blade of grass was visible. Even the Dark Star had sunk, its blood-red gloom wiped out. Mist — impenetrable, blinding, moving mist hid everything.

vi

TWO LONG DAYS dragged to evening.

The weary terrifying hours of a third night closed on Gorm. Maisry, sleepless and worn, went at midnight to share Broome's vigil.

Nothing was changed. The candles, burning in a windless night, showed nothing more— only gray surging clouds of mist in ceaseless movement. The Picture was like the crater of a volcano where smoke eddied and swung in the void before the destroying fire burst up from its depths.

The watchers saw no change in Alan's face except, perhaps, a deeper shadow of repose. It was a sign, Broome knew, that he was further and further away with every passing hour— following— following through space— on and on to dim uncertain perilous horizons where the finite mind can no longer function.

Broome faced his thought steadily, though it was overwhelming in its horror. Had Red Alastair the power to lead on to voids no mortal spirit can endure? His straining eyes grew more intent.

"Something is moving behind the mist,'' he said.

A rift showed at the top of the Picture; a glimpse of pale sky, a tooth of jagged rock appeared. Thin wispy trails floated across the rift. Gradually, as if rent and shredded by a furious wind, the whole horizon cleared to show a colorless cloudless sky and moorland heights, below which a sea of mist still whirled and eddied to and fro.

But no figure was visible. Until long past dawn the two kept watch, their eyes red-rimmed and aching, but a cold pale sky and desolate peaks of Vorangowl mocked them with their emptiness.

Broome had watched narrowly in all the long hours for some change in Alan, too; but it did not come. The day passed and the fourth night passed. Dawn of the fifth day approached. Broome and Maisry once more shared the vigil, for he had warned her it was the most pregnant of the twenty-four hours.

The Picture showed the same chill breadth of sky and sharp-toothed crags. The rest was veiled. It was in Alan's face that Broome read indication of a crisis. Its indescribable look of sphinxlike, age-old remoteness was softened. The eyelids no longer gave the impression of carven lids that covered sightless eyes; they seemed merely to have drooped in sleep. A warmer, fuller outline curved cheek and jaw and temples.

"Alan! Alan!"

"No." Broome curtly stopped her. "It is the Picture you must watch. It is the door he must pass through to his body."

Round a tall spur of rock they saw a dark speck moving. Slowly— oh, very slowly— it came on. Impossible to see its face, its outline, or any distinguishing mark at all, but both knew at once who struggled there up on the heights of Vorangowl.

"Bring him back! Bring him back with all your will." Broome spoke to the trembling girl beside him but kept his eyes on the Picture. "He's done! You and I must give him strength— his is spent, and overspent."

They watched the efforts of the far-off lonely figure and tried to fight back their own despair. The road stretched so endlessly— so endlessly. . . . Would that halting, stumbling traveler, so miraculously returning— would he ever reach his bourn?

Now it was full dawn in the green leafy actual world outside the Keep. Birds shook the spell of silence into sound. Long rosy fingers of sunlight thrust through an east window and touched the dusty floor. The candles, paling ghostly sentries, burned on.

Dawn too, it seemed, in the changing Picture. Behind Alan the sky grew light, throwing sun and shadow on the heights he had passed. But in front of him the road wound into mist and shadows— shadows that fell blackest and most impenetrably into the deep gorge which the cliff-path skirted.

Once more that haunted cliff-path must be crossed. Could Alan traverse it? Could he control his swooning weariness on its sharp edge?

"Good, ah, good! His will holds firm."

Broome's voice sank to a deep exultant note as they saw Alan drop on hands and knees to crawl along the path. Maisry watched with pain too overpowering for tears. She spoke to him as if he were close beside her, as if she trod the path before him.

"Dear— it is half-way now. We will rest on the other side. Follow, follow me— a little more— a little more. Ah, you will not let me go alone— Alan! Alan! Come with me... come...."

Broome marveled at her. And Alan's face lifted as if he saw her on the path before him; now and again he put out a hand as if to touch her own. It was full noon when at last he reached the end of the path and lay on the heather slopes beyond.

Until sunset, Maisry coaxed and pleaded and besought the figure on the painted Picture. With Broome beside her, aiding her strength, her wisdom, she fought for Alan, bringing him mile after weary mile along the dark glen, road, bringing him back across the cursed painted miles from hell, back to the warmth and beauty of his own green earth, to her and to her love.

The sun sank low, and lower. And still Alan was outside the gates of Gorm. Candlelight showed him on the endless road, swaying and lurching with weariness beyond control. More than once he fell, but rose and stumbled on in answer to Maisry's low entreating words of love. Then at last he fell and did not rise; he seemed deaf to her voice, her pleadings, her tenderness.

Behind him, the long road was clear of mist and shadow, but the foreground he had not yet passed still lay obscure and dark.

Maisry turned imperiously to her companion.

"A chair! Put one close that I may touch him, help him up again."

He saw her climb and lean close until her hands could touch the exhausted broken figure lying on the road. Close, close to the painted wall, her moving tender hands seemed to raise, to lift him to his feet. Once more, miraculously, he dragged himself forward— on— on to the gates of Gorm. He reached them, passed through and was swallowed up in velvet darkness of the trees.

No shred of mist remained in all the Picture. In its foreground, the gray Keep abruptly thrust up, grim, boding, expectant.

Dimly in the starlight, someone bulked faintly, uncertainly upon the battlements. Broome's lips formed a word:

"Alan!"

The name died on a sudden breath of horror. It was not Alan who so monstrously obscured the stars. It was a heavier figure. It moved, turned, thrust forward a great head. Ah, that demon's face, that flaming beard and hair!

Broome leaped to Maisry's side, to draw her away, to interpose himself between her— leaning forward, her golden head and lovely face not a foot from the painted Keep— and the peering lustful mask. But she resisted him, thrust back his hands, turned a changed face and eyes that flashed like swords full on Red Alastair. She was a golden flame of anger.

"Go back!" her voice rang in the echoing room like bugles blown for war. "Dead cursed thing— go back to your own hell! Dead— defeated— forgotten ghost! I am not afraid! Back— back to hell!"

The thing upon the tower roof shrank, wavered, dwindled in the starlight. Maisry's eyes pierced it, followed it, tortured it. The monstrous bulk grew vaporous, insubstantial as a web, a dusty cobweb flung on the massive wall. The web, caught by a breath of wind, was torn from its last slight moorings— tossed from the Keep— drifted from sight....

At it vanished, the Picture cracked across and across. Its painted scene faded, dissolving, disintegrating, obliterated by the all-pervading dust of centuries. In a moment, nothing remained of outline or of color. Above the hearth, a cracked and moldering wall showed in the golden candle-light.

Maisry sprang down, caught Broome's arm.

"Now he can come to, me! Now I am free! Alan! Alan! Alan!"

She knelt beside the truckle-bed. Alan lay still. He seemed to sleep, to dream. A faint smile curved his lips, and his heavy eyelids quivered. Maisry kissed the curving lips, the fluttering eyelids, until the dark eyes opened wide. His voice was a faint exhausted whisper.

"You came for me. You brought me home. I could not have won back— alone. Your voice— dearest— I followed it— your voice— your little hands...."

His eyes closed in weakness, then opened once again.

"I tried to warn you, to tell you he was coming too. It was forbidden— I was not allowed! If you had been afraid — he would have had power— to stay. We had to fight— together, my beloved— together...."

He sank back to deep oblivion and sleep. Maisry, crouched beside him, let her head fall on the hands that clasped his own. Sleep folded her too, softly, suddenly.

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2: Dream Street Rose

Damon Runyon

1880-1946

Collier's, 11 June 1932

Collected in: *More Than Somewhat*, 1937

OF AN early evening when there is nothing much doing anywhere else, I go around to Good Time Charley's little speak in West Forty-seventh Street that he calls the Gingham Shoppe, and play a little klob with Charley, because business is quiet in the Gingham Shoppe at such an hour, and Charley gets very lonesome.

He once has a much livelier spot in Forty-eighth Street that he calls the Crystal Room, but one night a bunch of G-guys step into the joint and bust it wide open, besides confiscating all of Charley's stock of merchandise. It seems that these G-guys are members of a squad that comes on from Washington, and being strangers in the city they do not know that Good Time Charley's joint is not supposed to be busted up, so they go ahead and bust it, just the same as if it is any other joint.

Well, this action causes great indignation in many quarters, and a lot of citizens advise Charley to see somebody about it. But Charley says no. Charley says if this is the way the government is going to treat him after the way he walks himself bow-legged over in France with the Rainbow Division, making the Germans hard to catch, why, all right. But he is not going to holler copper about it, although Charley says he has his own opinion of Mr. Hoover, at that.

Personally, I greatly admire Charley for taking the disaster so calmly, especially as it catches him with very few potatoes. Charley is a great hand for playing the horses with any dough he makes out of the Crystal Room, and this particular season the guys who play the horses are being murdered by the bookies all over the country, and are in terrible distress.

So I know if Charley is not plumb broke that he has a terrible crack across his belly, and I am not surprised that I do not see him for a couple of weeks after the government guys knock off the Crystal Room. I hear rumours that he is at home reading the newspapers very carefully every day, especially the obituary notices, for it seems that Charley figures that some of the G-guys may be tempted to take a belt or two at the merchandise they confiscate, and Charley says if they do, he is even for life.

Finally I hear that Charley is seen buying a bolt of gingham in Bloomington's one day, so I know he will be in action again very soon, for all Charley needs to go into action is a bolt of gingham and a few bottles of Golden Wedding. In fact, I know Charley to go into action without the gingham, but as a rule he likes to drape a place of business with gingham to make it seem more homelike to his

customers, and I wish to say that when it comes to draping gingham, Charley can make a sucker of Joseph Urban, or anybody else.

Well, when I arrive at the Gingham Shoppe this night I am talking about, which is around ten o'clock, I find Charley in a very indignant state of mind, because an old tomato by the name of Dream Street Rose comes in and tracks up his floor, just after Charley gets through mopping it up, for Charley does his mopping in person, not being able as yet to afford any help.

Rose is sitting at a table in a corner, paying no attention to Charley's remarks about wiping her feet on the Welcome mat at the door before she comes in, because Rose knows there is no Welcome mat at Charley's door, anyway, but I can see where Charley has a right to a few beefs, at that, as she leaves a trail of black hoofprints across the clean floor as if she is walking around in mud somewhere before she comes in, although I do not seem to remember that it is raining when I arrive.

Now this Dream Street Rose is an old doll of maybe fifty-odd, and is a very well-known character around and about, as she is wandering through the Forties for many a year, and especially through West Forty-seventh Street between Sixth and Seventh Avenues, and this block is called Dream Street. And the reason it is called Dream Street is because in this block are many characters of one kind and another who always seem to be dreaming of different matters.

In Dream Street there are many theatrical hotels, and rooming houses, and restaurants, and speaks, including Good Time Charley's Gingham Shoppe, and in the summer time the characters I mention sit on the stoops or lean against the railings along Dream Street, and the gab you hear sometimes sounds very dreamy indeed. In fact, it sometimes sounds very pipe-dreamy.

Many actors, male and female, and especially vaudeville actors, live in the hotels and rooming houses, and vaudeville actors, both male and female, are great hands for sitting around dreaming out loud about how they will practically assassinate the public in the Palace if ever they get a chance.

Furthermore, in Dream Street are always many hand-bookies and horse players, who sit on the church steps on the cool side of Dream Street in the summer and dream about big killings on the races, and there are also nearly always many fight managers, and sometimes fighters, hanging out in front of the restaurants, picking their teeth and dreaming about winning championships of the world, although up to this time no champion of the world has yet come out of Dream Street.

In this street you see burlesque dolls, and hoofers, and guys who write songs, and saxophone players, and newsboys, and newspaper scribes, and taxi drivers, and blind guys, and midgets, and blondes with Pomeranian pooches, or maybe French poodles, and guys with whiskers, and night-club entertainers, and I do not know what all else. And all of these characters are interesting to look at,

and some of them are very interesting to talk to, although if you listen to several I know long enough, you may get the idea that they are somewhat daffy, especially the horse players.

But personally I consider all horse players more or less daffy anyway. In fact, the way I look at it, if a guy is not daffy he will not be playing the horses.

Now this Dream Street Rose is a short, thick-set, square-looking old doll, with a square pan, and square shoulders, and she has heavy iron-grey hair that she wears in a square bob, and she stands very square on her feet. In fact, Rose is the squarest-looking doll I ever see, and she is as strong and lively as Jim Londos, the wrestler. In fact, Jim Londos will never be any better than 6 to 5 in my line over Dream Street Rose, if she is in any kind of shape.

Nobody in this town wishes any truck with Rose if she has a few shots of grog in her, and especially Good Time Charley's grog, for she can fight like the dickens when she is grogged up. In fact, Rose holds many a decision in this town, especially over coppers, because if there is one thing she hates and despises more than somewhat it is a copper, as coppers are always heaving her into the old can when they find her jerking citizens around and cutting up other didoes.

For many years Rose works in the different hotels along Dream Street as a chambermaid. She never works in anyone hotel very long, because the minute she gets a few bobs together she likes to go out and enjoy a little recreation, such as visiting around the speaks, although she is about as welcome in most speaks as a G-guy with a search warrant. You see, nobody can ever tell when Rose may feel like taking the speak apart, and also the customers.

She never has any trouble getting a job back in any hotel she ever works in, for Rose is a wonderful hand for making up beds, although several times, when she is in a hurry to get off, I hear she makes up beds with guests still in them, which causes a few mild beefs to the management, but does not bother Rose. I speak of this matter only to show you that she is a very quaint character indeed, and full of zest.

Well, I sit down to play klob with Good Time Charley, but about this time several customers come into the Gingham Shoppe, so Charley has to go and take care of them, leaving me alone. And while I am sitting there alone I hear Dream Street Rose mumbling to herself over in the corner, but I pay no attention to her, although I wish to say I am by no means unfriendly with Rose.

In fact, I say hello to her at all times, and am always very courteous to her, as I do not wish to have her bawling me out in public, and maybe circulating rumours about me, as she is apt to do, if she feels I am snubbing her.

Finally I notice her motioning to me to come over to her table, and I go over at once and sit down, because I can see that Rose is well grogged up at this time, and I do not care to have her attracting my attention by chucking a cuspidor at me. She offers me a drink when I sit down, but of course I never drink anything

that is sold in Good Time Charley's, as a personal favour to Charley. He says he wishes to retain my friendship.

So I just sit there saying nothing much whatever, and Rose keeps on mumbling to herself, and I am not able to make much of her mumbling, until finally she looks at me and says to me like this:

'I am now going to tell you about my friend,' Rose says.

'Well, Rose,' I say, 'personally I do not care to hear about your friend, although,' I say, 'I have no doubt that what you wish to tell me about this friend is very interesting. But I am here to play a little klob with Good Time Charley, and I do not have time to hear about your friend.'

'Charley is busy selling his poison to the suckers,' Rose says. 'I am now going to tell you about my friend. It is quite a story,' she says. 'You will listen.'

So I listen.

IT IS A MATTER of thirty-five years ago [Dream Street Rose says] and the spot is a town in Colorado by the name of Pueblo, where there are smelters and one thing and another. My friend is at this time maybe sixteen or seventeen years old, and a first-class looker in every respect. Her papa is dead, and her mamma runs a boarding-house for the guys who work in the smelters, and who are very hearty eaters. My friend deals them off the arm for the guys in her mamma's boarding-house to save her mamma the expense of a waitress.

Now among the boarders in this boarding-house are many guys who are always doing a little pitching to my friend, and trying to make dates with her to take her places, but my friend never gives them much of a tumble, because after she gets through dealing them off the arm all day her feet generally pain her too much to go anywhere on them except to the hay.

Finally, however, along comes a tall, skinny young guy from the East by the name of Frank something, who has things to say to my friend that are much more interesting than anything that has been said to her by a guy before, including such things as love and marriage, which are always very interesting subjects to any young doll.

This Frank is maybe twenty-five years old, and he comes from the East with the idea of making his fortune in the West, and while it is true that fortunes are being made in the West at this time, there is little chance that Frank is going to make any part of a fortune, as he does not care to work very hard. In fact, he does not care to work at all, being much more partial to playing a little poker, or shooting a few craps, or maybe hustling a sucker around Mike's pool room on Santa Fe Avenue, for Frank is an excellent pool player, especially when he is playing a sucker.

Now my friend is at this time a very innocent young doll, and a good doll in every respect, and her idea of love includes a nice little home, and children

running here and there and around and about, and she never has a wrong thought in her life, and believes that everybody else in the world is like herself. And the chances are if this Frank does not happen along, my friend will marry a young guy in Pueblo by the name of Higginbottom, who is very fond of her indeed, and who is a decent young guy and afterwards makes plenty of potatoes in the grocery dodge.

But my friend goes very daffy over Frank and cannot see anybody but him, and the upshot of it all is she runs away with him one day to Denver, being dumb enough to believe that he means it when he tells her that he loves her and is going to marry her. Why Frank ever bothers with such a doll as my friend in the first place is always a great mystery to one and all, and the only way anybody can explain it is that she is young and fresh, and he is a heel at heart.

'WELL, ROSE,' I say, 'I am now commencing to see the finish of this story about your friend, and,' I say, 'it is such a story as anybody can hear in a speak at any time in this town, except,' I say, 'maybe your story is longer than somewhat. So I will now thank you, and excuse myself, and play a little klob with Good Time Charley.'

'You will listen,' Dream Street Rose says, looking me slap-dab in the eye.

So I listen.

Moreover, I notice now that Good Time Charley is standing behind me, bending in an ear, as it seems that his customers take the wind after a couple of slams of Good Time Charley's merchandise, a couple of slams being about all that even a very hardy customer can stand at one session.

OF COURSE [Rose goes on] the chances are Frank never intends marrying my friend at all, and she never knows until long afterward that the reason he leads her to the parson is that the young guy from Pueblo by the name of Higginbottom catches up with them at the old Windsor Hotel where they are stopping and privately pokes a six-pistol against Frank's ribs and promises faithfully to come back and blow a hole in Frank you can throw a watermelon through if Frank tries any phenagling around with my friend.

Well, in practically no time whatever, love's young dream is over as far as my friend is concerned. This Frank turns out to be a most repulsive character indeed, especially if you are figuring him as an ever-loving husband. In fact, he is no good. He mistreats my friend in every way any guy ever thought of mistreating a doll, and besides the old established ways of mistreating a doll, Frank thinks up quite a number of new ways, being really quite ingenious in this respect.

Yes, this Frank is one hundred per cent heel.

It is not so much that he gives her a thumping now and then, because, after all, a thumping wears off, and hurts heal up, even when they are such hurts as a broken nose and fractured ribs, and once an ankle cracked by a kick. It is what he does to her heart, and to her innocence. He is by no means a good husband, and does not know how to treat an ever-loving wife with any respect, especially as he winds up by taking my friend to San Francisco and hiring her out to a very loose character there by the name of Black Emanuel, who has a dance joint on the Barbary Coast, which, at the time I am talking about, is hotter than a stove. In this joint my friend has to dance with the customers, and get them to buy beer for her and one thing and another, and this occupation is most distasteful to my friend, as she never cares for beer.

It is there Frank leaves her for good after giving her an extra big thumping for a keepsake, and when my friend tries to leave Black Emanuel's to go looking for her ever-loving husband, she is somewhat surprised to hear Black Emanuel state that he pays Frank three C's for her to remain there and continue working. Furthermore, Black Emanuel resumes the thumpings where Frank leaves off, and by and by my friend is much bewildered and downhearted and does not care what happens to her.

Well, there is nothing much of interest in my friend's life for the next thirty-odd years, except that she finally gets so she does not mind the beer so much, and, in fact, takes quite a fondness for it, and also for light wines and Bourbon whisky, and that she comes to realize that Frank does not love her after all, in spite of what he says. Furthermore, in later years, after she drifts around the country quite some, in and out of different joints, she realises that the chances are she will never have a nice little home, with children running here and there, and she often thinks what a disagreeable influence Frank has on her life.

In fact, this Frank is always on her mind more than somewhat. In fact, she thinks of him night and day, and says many a prayer that he will do well. She manages to keep track of him, which is not hard to do, at that, as Frank is in New York, and is becoming quite a guy in business, and is often in the newspapers. Maybe his success is due to my friend's prayers, but the chances are it is more because he connects up with some guy who has an invention for doing something very interesting in steel, and by grabbing an interest in this invention Frank gets a shove toward plenty of potatoes. Furthermore, he is married, and is raising up a family.

About ten or twelve years ago my friend comes to New York, and by this time she is getting a little faded around the edges. She is not so old, at that, but the air of the Western and Southern joints is bad on the complexion, and beer is no good for the figure. In fact, my friend is now quite a haybag, and she does not get any better-looking in the years she spends in New York as she is practically all out of the old sex appeal, and has to do a little heavy lifting to keep eating.

But she never forgets to keep praying that Frank will continue to do well, and Frank certainly does this, as he is finally spoken of everywhere very respectfully as a millionaire and a high-class guy.

In all the years she is in New York my friend never runs into Frank, as Frank is by no means accustomed to visiting the spots where my friend hangs out, but my friend goes to a lot of bother to get acquainted with a doll who is a maid for some time in Frank's town house in East Seventy-fourth Street, and through this doll my friend keeps a pretty fair line on the way Frank lives. In fact, one day when Frank and his family are absent, my friend goes to Frank's house with her friend, just to see what it looks like, and after an hour there my friend has the joint pretty well cased.

So now my friend knows through her friend that on very hot nights such as to-night Frank's family is bound to be at their country place at Port Washington, but that Frank himself is spending the night at his town house, because he wishes to work on a lot of papers of some kind. My friend knows through her friend that all of Frank's servants are at Port Washington, too, except my friend's friend, who is in charge of the town house, and Frank's valet, a guy by the name of Sloggins.

Furthermore, my friend knows through her friend that both her friend and Sloggins have a date to go to a movie at 8.30 o'clock, to be gone a couple of hours, as it seems Frank is very big-hearted about giving his servants time off for such a purpose when he is at home alone; although one night he squawks no little when my friend is out with her friend drinking a little beer, and my friend's friend loses her door key and has to ring the bell to the servants' entrance, and rousts Frank out of a sound sleep.

Naturally, my friend's friend will be greatly astonished if she ever learns that it is with this key that my friend steps into Frank's house along about nine o'clock to-night. An electric light hangs over the servants' entrance, and my friend locates the button that controls this light just inside the door and turns it off, as my friend figures that maybe Frank and his family will not care to have any of their high-class neighbours, or anyone else, see an old doll who has no better hat than she is wearing, entering or leaving their house at such an hour.

It is an old-fashioned sort of house, four or five stories high, with the library on the third floor in the rear, looking out through French windows over a nice little garden, and my friend finds Frank in the library where she expects to find him, because she is smart enough to figure that a guy who is working on papers is not apt to be doing his work in the cellar.

But Frank is not working on anything when my friend moves in on him. He is dozing in a chair by the window, and, looking at him, after all these years, she finds something of a change, indeed. He is much heavier than he is thirty-five years back, and his hair is white, but he looks pretty well to my friend, at that, as

she stands there for maybe five minutes watching him. Then he seems to realize somebody is in the room, as sleeping guys will do, for his regular breathing stops with a snort, and he opens his eyes, and looks into my friend's eyes, but without hardly stirring. And finally my friend speaks to Frank as follows:

'Well, Frank,' she says, 'do you know me?'

'Yes,' he says, after a while, 'I know you. At first I think maybe you are a ghost, as I once hear something about your being dead. But,' he says, 'I see now the report is a canard. You are too fat to be a ghost.'

Well, of course, this is a most insulting crack, indeed, but my friend passes it off as she does not wish to get in any arguments with Frank at this time. She can see that he is upset more than somewhat and he keeps looking around the room as if he hopes he can see somebody else he can cut in on the conversation. In fact, he acts as if my friend is by no means a welcome visitor.

'Well, Frank,' my friend says, very pleasant, 'there you are, and here I am. I understand you are now a wealthy and prominent citizen of this town. I am glad to know this, Frank,' she says. 'You will be surprised to hear that for years and years I pray that you will do well for yourself and become a big guy in every respect, with a nice family, and everything else. I judge my prayers are answered,' she says. 'I see by the papers that you have two sons at Yale, and a daughter in Vassar, and that your ever-loving wife is getting to be very high mucky-mucky in society. Well, Frank,' she says, 'I am very glad. I pray something like all this will happen to you.'

Now, at such a speech, Frank naturally figures that my friend is all right, at that, and the chances are he also figures that she still has a mighty soft spot in her heart for him, just as she has in the days when she deals them off the arm to keep him in gambling and drinking money. In fact, Frank brightens up somewhat, and he says to my friend like this:

'You pray for my success?' he says. 'Why, this is very thoughtful of you, indeed. Well,' he says, 'I am sitting on top of the world. I have everything to live for.'

'Yes,' my friend says, 'and this is exactly where I pray I will find you. On top of the world,' she says, 'and with everything to live for. It is where I am when you take my life. It is where I am when you kill me as surely as if you strangle me with your hands. I always pray you will not become a bum,' my friend says, 'because a bum has nothing to live for, anyway. I want to find you liking to live, so you will hate so much to die.'

Naturally, this does not sound so good to Frank, and he begins all of a sudden to shake and shiver and to stutter somewhat.

'Why,' he says, 'what do you mean? Are you going to kill me?'

'Well,' my friend says, 'that remains to be seen. Personally,' she says, 'I will be much obliged if you will kill yourself, but it can be arranged one way or the other. However, I will explain the disadvantages of me killing you.

'The chances are,' my friend says, 'if I kill you I will be caught and a very great scandal will result, because,' she says, 'I have on my person the certificate of my marriage to you in Denver, and something tells me you never think to get a divorce. So,' she says, 'you are a bigamist.'

'I can pay,' Frank says. 'I can pay plenty.'

'Furthermore,' my friend says, paying no attention to his remark, 'I have a sworn statement from Black Emanuel about your transaction with him, for Black Emanuel gets religion before he dies from being shivved by Johnny Mizzoo, and he tries to round himself up by confessing all the sins he can think of, which are quite a lot. It is a very interesting statement,' my friend says.

'Now then,' she says, 'if you knock yourself off you will leave an unsullied, respected name. If I kill you, all the years and effort you have devoted to building up your reputation will go for nothing. You are past sixty,' my friend says, 'and any way you figure it, you do not have so very far to go. If I kill you,' she says, 'you will go in horrible disgrace, and everybody around you will feel the disgrace, no matter how much dough you leave them. Your children will hang their heads in shame. Your ever-loving wife will not like it,' my friend says.

'I wait on you a long time, Frank,' my friend says. 'A dozen times in the past twenty years I figure I may as well call on you and close up my case with you, but,' she says, 'then I always persuade myself to wait a little longer so you would rise higher and higher and life will be a bit sweeter to you. And there you are, Frank,' she says, 'and here I am.'

Well, Frank sits there as if he is knocked plumb out, and he does not answer a word; so finally my friend outs with a large John Roscoe which she is packing in the bosom of her dress, and tosses it in his lap, and speaks as follows:

'Frank,' she says, 'do not think it will do you any good to pot me in the back when I turn around, because,' she says, 'you will be worse off than ever. I leave plenty of letters scattered around in case anything happens to me. And remember,' she says, 'if you do not do this job yourself, I will be back. Sooner or later, I will be back.'

SO [Dream Street Rose says] my friend goes out of the library and down the stairs, leaving Frank sprawled out in his chair, and when she reaches the first floor she hears what may be a shot in the upper part of the house, and then again maybe only a door slamming. My friend never knows for sure what it is, because a little later as she nears the servants' entrance she hears quite a commotion outside, and a guy cussing a blue streak, and a doll tee-heeing, and

pretty soon my friend's friend, the maid, and Sloggins, the valet, come walking in.

Well, my friend just has time to scroonch herself back in a dark corner, and they go upstairs, the guy still cussing and the doll still giggling, and my friend cannot make out what it is all about except that they come home earlier than she figures. So my friend goes tippy-toe out of the servants' entrance, to grab a taxi not far from the house and get away from this neighbourhood, and now you will soon hear of the suicide of a guy who is a millionaire, and it will be all even with my friend.

'WELL, ROSE,' I say, 'it is a nice long story, and full of romance and all this and that, and,' I say, 'of course I will never be ungentlemanly enough to call a lady a liar, but,' I say, 'if it is not a lie, it will do until a lie comes along.'

'All right,' Rose says. 'Anyway, I tell you about my friend. Now,' she says, 'I am going where the liquor is better, which can be any other place in town, because,' she says, 'there is no chance of liquor anywhere being any worse.'

So she goes out, making more tracks on Good Time Charley's floor, and Charley speaks most impolitely of her after she goes, and gets out his mop to clean the floor, for one thing about Charley, he is as neat as a pin, and maybe neater.

Well, along toward one o'clock I hear a newsboy in the street outside yelling something I cannot make out, because he is yelling as if he has a mouthful of mush, as newsboys are bound to do. But I am anxious to see what goes in the first race at Belmont, on account of having a first-class tip, so I poke my noggin outside Good Time Charley's and buy a paper, and across the front page, in large letters, it states that the wealthy Mr. Frank Billingsworth McQuiggan knocks himself off by putting a slug through his own noggin.

It says Mr. McQuiggan is found in a chair in his library as dead as a door-nail with the pistol in his lap with which he knocks himself off, and the paper states that nobody can figure what causes Mr. McQuiggan to do such a thing to himself as he is in good health and has plenty of potatoes and is at the peak of his career. Then there is a lot about his history.

When Mr. McQuiggan is a young fellow returning from a visit to the Pacific Coast with about two hundred dollars in his pocket after paying his railroad fare, he meets in the train Jonas Calloway, famous inventor of the Calloway steel process. Calloway, also then young, is desperately in need of funds and he offers Mr. McQuiggan a third interest in his invention for what now seems the paltry sum of one hundred dollars. Mr. McQuiggan accepts the offer and thus paves the way to his own fortune.

I am telling all this to Good Time Charley while he is mopping away at the floor, and finally I come on a paragraph down near the finish which goes like this:

'The body was discovered by Mr. McQuiggan's faithful valet, Thomas Sloggins, at eleven o'clock. Mr. McQuiggan was then apparently dead a couple of hours. Sloggins returned home shortly before ten o'clock with another servant after changing his mind about going to a movie. Instead of going to see his employer at once, as is his usual custom, Sloggins went to his own quarters and changed his clothes.

'The light over the servants' entrance was out when I returned home,' the valet said, 'and in the darkness I stumbled over some scaffolding and other material left near this entrance by workmen who are to regravel the roof of the house to-morrow, upsetting all over the entranceway a large bucket of tar, much of which got on my apparel when I fell, making a change necessary before going to see Mr. McQuiggan.'

Well, Good Time Charley keeps on mopping harder than ever, though finally he stops a minute and speaks to me as follows:

'Listen,' Charley says, 'understand I do not say the guy does not deserve what he gets, and I am by no means hollering copper, but,' Charley says, 'if he knocks himself off, how does it come the rod is still in his lap where Dream Street Rose says her friend tosses it? Well, never mind,' Charley says, 'but can you think of something that will remove tar from a wood floor? It positively will not mop off.'

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3: The Dust of Shun-Ti

Charles G. Booth

1896-1949

Weird Tales, Oct 1925

WILDE sat up in liis bed and peered into the velvet blackness around him. Chills crawled up and down his spine; his skin tingled as if the tense pressing atmosphere of the room was electrically charged.

The scream was not repeated, and for several minutes he sat rigid, held so by his demoralizing uncertainty of its source, whether it had come from his own lips or from the room next

He was in a small, weather-scarred hotel on the precipitous shore of one of the purple inlets that fret the ironbound British Columbia coast from Vancouver to Alaska, where he had come to report on a copper property for the Continental Company. His report— an unfavorable one— was ready; he intended to leave the next

Quite suddenly, and for no explainable reason, Wilde knew instinctively that he had not uttered the cry, and that it had come from the room next door. A flow of warmth poured through him; his sun-browned face, with its suggestiveness of high adventure eagerly sought and recklessly encountered, glowed again beneath its tan. He leaped out of bed and lit the lamp. Listening intently, with his head inclined toward the north wall, he heard a faint pattering in the nest room, as if someone was moving softly and quickly upon the floor.

Wilde went into the corridor. A lamp set in a bracket at the end of the passage shed a fitful light upon the gaunt, shabby interior. There was no sound whatever, now. But the horrible cry still rang in his ears. It had been short and clear; then it had terminated abruptly. Wilde knew instinctively that the one who had uttered it would never utter another.

The door of the room next to his was shut; no light showed beneath it, and for several moments Wilde stood before it indecisively. Believing as he did that someone had been killed in the room, he yet hesitated to try the door. One has that feeling about breaking into another man's room at dead of night.

His indecision vanished, however, when a light shone suddenly from beneath the door, then flashed out again. He turned the handle. The door was locked as he had expected. He stepped back and flung his great body at it, shoulder first. The lock snapped and the door shivered, but held its place. A second and a third time he had to fling himself upon it before the door, and the chair which had been placed against it, crashed into the room. As the door splintered he had glimpsed a man in the room— a lithe, compact man with his face toward the window. Then the light, which streamed from an electric torch,

flashed out. When he got into the room he had to feel about on the bureau for matches before he could get a light.

The murderer had gone— through an open window, beneath which a small shed was built against the side of the hotel; on to this he had evidently dropped from the window-sill.

On the bed lay the man he had killed— a Chinaman. About his throat deepened a crimson smear. The crumpled bedding, red-blotted here and there as with the splashings of an unruly pen, suggested the terrific struggle that must have terminated only with that dreadful scream.

WILDE went to the window again and peered into the blackness, but a hundred murderers could have hidden within a dozen yards of him. The mountains, their presences felt rather than seen, seemed nearer; more than ever did they suggest black brooding personalities pondering the impertinence of this intrusion into their solitude.

On the floor was a traveling bag, and a satchel of the sort used for carrying legal documents. Both had been slashed with a knife as if the murderer suspected the existence of some secret compartment. Clothing, and papers covered with Chinese characters, were strewn around the room.

Wilde scrutinized the Chinaman intently, his big hands clasping and unclasping, a vast indignation boiling within him. The man's face must have been placid and smooth and expressionless before the dreadful realization of his danger had come upon him. But now it was contorted in the sharp agony of death. The narrow, dark eyes, forced wide open, stared upward appealingly. The man's hair was spare and gray, and Wilde estimated his age at sixty. His broad flat face was dignified, even in death. That he was no common coolie Wilde could see at a glance.

The man's head had sagged to one side and Wilde raised it and pillowed it. As he did so the man's pajama coat opened, the two top buttons having come out of their loops, and Wilde noticed that the breast of his undervest bulged slightly as if some object lay beneath it. Unbuttoning it gently, he found a pocket sewn on to the inner side of the vest, fastened with a tiny button, and filled with papers which he took out. It was fortunate that he did so, for they were blood-soaked and would soon have been indecipherable.

Wilde spread them on the dressing table so they could dry out. All of them but one were covered with Chinese characters and were as unintelligible as those scattered on the floor. This one he took up with an exclamation of surprize. It was a rough map of the inlet. But when he discovered a small cross upon it, his surprize deepened into amazement. The cross was marked squarely on the center of the waterfront of the copper property Wilde had come north to inspect!

At that moment he heard the patter of feet on the stairs, and thrusting the paper into the pocket of his pajama coat, he strode into the corridor, marveling at the variety of emotions one may experience in the space of three minutes; for no more than that space of time had elapsed since the Chinaman had screamed in his death

Nolan, the proprietor of the hotel, a lanky, thin man in a very short gray flannel nightgown and dilapidated slippers, topped the staircase and hurried toward him.

"What's wrong!" he grunted. "Seems like I heard something."

"Probably you did!" said Wilde, dryly. And he led the man into the Chinaman's room.

Nolan's jaw fell. "Murder!" he gasped. Then his face brightened. "Oh," he exclaimed, in relief. "It's only one of those Chinks!"

"Chink or white man," Wilde rapped out, "he's been killed in your house!"

"Sure, that's right," Nolan agreed, scratching his head and looking at the shattered door. "That was a good door, too," he said regretfully.

"Look here!" Wilde roared impatiently. "When did this man come in! What's his name?"

Nolan pondered. "Yes," he said. "He came on last night's boat. His name? Let me see, now." Nolan scratched his head again. "There was two of 'em came last night. This one, and another that came later on. Now this one'll be Sun Yet. The other one signed himself something like that, too."

"Who else is here?" Wilde demanded.

"Well, there's me and the missis and the Chinee cook. We does it all ourselves."

"But guests, man?" Wilde shouted. "Who's staying here?"

"Sure, I was a-comin' to that," Nolan rambled on. "There's you, this here Chink, and the other Chink that come after; and there's Bill Kelly, the miner, what lives here. He was dead drunk on red-eye last night. Then there's Prenchy Gaul; he came in yesterday for gas for his boat, and stayed. I guess that's about all. Nothin' less'n an earthquake would wake Bill, and Prenchy's deaf. We don't have many this time of the year," he went on apologetically.

"This other Chinaman," Wilde demanded. "What about him?"

"What has happened?" inquired a serene voice from behind them.

Wilde swung round sharply. In the doorway stood a Chinaman clad in silk pajamas, who regarded them mildly. His smooth bland face was as expressionless as a billiard ball, his eyes blinked a little, his attitude was that of a benevolent saint.

"One of your countrymen has been murdered," Wilde told him, and described what he knew.

The Chinaman came slowly into the room and Wilde stood back so that he might approach the bedside. For all his bland expressionlessness there was a certain quality about him that commanded respect. He was of medium height and had that admirable balance of body and limb that comes of physical perfection.

For nearly a full minute he looked at the figure on the bed, not a muscle of his face stirring. Then the man turned to Wilde.

"He is my brother," he said simply.

His undemonstrative grief affected Wilde deeply, infinitely more than the wildest protestations would have done.

"I'm sorry,'' he stammered. Wilde got the impression that he was standing in the presence of a tragedy with other, profounder aspects not yet revealed to him.

"If you will leave us?" the Chinaman suggested gently.

"But the murderer," Wilde protested. "We've got to do something—inform the police!"

"The police? Yes," the Chinaman agreed courteously. "No doubt you can telephone. But I'm afraid nothing can be done," he added sadly. His rather precise enunciation held no trace of accent.

Wilde nodded understandingly, and followed the hotelkeeper downstairs. There was nothing he could do. A search in that wilderness at dead of night was unthinkable.

"You'd better 'phone Vancouver at once," Wilde told Nolan.

"Seems to take it badly," the man whispered mournfully, going to the instrument.

A minute passed during which there came no response from the exchange. Wilde examined the wires emanating from the instrument.

"Look!" he shouted. "They've been cut." And he held up the severed ends.

"So they have!" exclaimed the man. "Whoever done it must have come through here."

Wilde nodded. This seemed probable, for the door of this house of occasional patrons was never locked, and the office was left to itself during the night.

"I'll get Frenchy to run down to Round Bay in the morning," the man went on. "They've got a 'phone there."

SINCE there was nothing more that he could do, Wilde returned to his room, where he could hear the strange Chinaman moving quietly on the other side of the partition. Once he was on the point of joining him, but thought better of it, for the Chinaman had propped the smashed door into place as if he wished to be alone with his dead.

Remembering the map, Wilde spread it upon his bed and studied it closely; not without a sense of guilt, however, for he felt that he should have given it to the Chinaman. While he supposed that the murder had been committed for the map, Wilde felt sure that it had only a personal significance and in no way indicated unsuspected mineral wealth in the property he had come to investigate. Nevertheless, he decided that he would reinspect that part of the property indicated on the map by the cross. This much the interests of his company demanded. After that he would give the map to the Chinaman, or to the police when they arrived. The police, he rather thought.

It struck him as curious that the Chinaman had advanced no theory of the motive that had inspired the crime. No doubt he would, Wilde concluded, when the authorities arrived. This thought aroused in his mind a series of pertinent questions, none of which he could answer. Who were these Chinamen? What were they doing here? Why had they arrived at different times? Indeed, it occurred to Wilde that there were many questions he should have asked instead of falling so completely under the spell of this Oriental personality, questions which he determined to ask in the morning.

But when morning came the Chinaman was not to be seen, nor could the hotel-keeper enlighten Wilde as to his whereabouts.

"Oh, he's around somewhere," Nolan said.

"Did you see about telephoning Vancouver?" Wilde demanded.

"Sure. Frenchy's gone," the man went on.

A trail ran along the shore in the direction of the place indicated on the map, and Wilde set out on it at once. It was rough walking and he made slow progress. When he had gone about half-way he got the impression that he was being followed. He slowed down and presently turned around quickly once or twice in the hope of catching off guard whoever was behind him. But his strategy was unsuccessful, though once he thought he saw a man dodge back into the shadow of a cedar. Nevertheless, the impression that somewhere behind him, in that confusion of brush and rock and sand, was someone bent on discovering his destination, became certainty.

He drew up sharply and reviewed the tragic circumstances of the previous night. It was known that he was the first to discover the dead man and that he had been alone with him for about two minutes; and as he was convinced now that the murderer had intended to get the map, it seemed reasonable to suppose the murderer had concluded that either he or the Chinaman had it.

It occurred to Wilde that this mystery was deeper than he had at first supposed and that since he had become involved in it, possibly to a greater extent than he suspected, he had better retain the advantage possession of the map gave him. So, instead of continuing along the trail, he struck off up the

mountain and made a superficial reinspection of that part of the copper property which lay at some distance from the place indicated on the map.

When he had done this, Wilde returned to the hotel, confident that his shadower, whoever he was, had gained nothing for his pains.

TOWARD evening Wilde was in his room when there came a knock at the door. It was the Chinaman, the brother of the dead Sun Yet. In response to Wilde's invitation he advanced into the room. Advanced is the only word that describes the dignity of the man's approach to the chair Wilde indicated he should take. The sweep of his personality was immense; it gripped Wilde as it had done that morning.

The Chinaman was unobtrusively dressed, with the nicest possible sense of effect. No subtle, mystery-loving Oriental this, Wilde judged, but a man of culture, of refinement, who combined in his complex nature the decorous charm and ancient wisdom of his race, and the fresh virility of the western peoples.

"I feel that I owe you an explanation, Mr. Wilde," he began gravely. His words were soft and gentle, and Wilde thought of the uncounted centuries of which this man was the perfected product. His voice was low and even, a little musical, and unsuggestive of his nationality. A sublime example of the art of two civilizations, Wilde thought, as perfect in his ensemble as the painting of a master.

Wilde inclined his head in agreement; but so completely had he fallen under the spell of the man's personality that he would probably have agreed had the other said exactly the opposite.

"My brother's name," the Chinaman went on, "was Sun Yet; mine is Sun Wong. If it would not bore you too much I should like to tell you something of the duty that brought us to British Columbia."

He stopped, and Wilde murmured something quite inadequate to express his desire that he should continue.

"Mr. Wilde," the Chinaman resumed, fixing the other with his narrow dark eyes, which seemed a little less narrow, a little less slant than Chinese eyes usually are, "I think you have in your possession a map of this inlet which you found in my brother's room."

So astounded was Wilde at this unexpected turn that his hand went involuntarily half-way to the pocket in which he had placed the map, before he recovered himself.

"Ah, I see you have it," the Chinaman went on with the merest of smiles. "But I shall not ask you for it until you have heard my story."

Wilde felt that the decent and the courteous thing to do was to give him the map at once, and be done with it. But he remembered his decision and kept the

map in his pocket, though not without an accusing sense of shame in doing so. Had the Chinaman demanded it he would have felt justified in keeping it; as it was, he felt as if he was robbing an heir of his rightful inheritance.

"What I have to say, Mr. Wilde," Sun went on, "is inseparably entangled with the varied history of my country and goes back to the days of Jenghis Khan. I can well imagine that it will sound unbelievable to one unaccustomed to the thoughts and habits and customs of the Orient, so I must ask you to set aside for a minute or two, if you can, your western conceptions of the fitness of things and listen with the ears of the East."

In the small silence that ensued, Wilde had no difficulty in adopting this frame of mind. His imagination responded easily to the influence of Sun's soothing voice, to the bland wisdom emanating from him like an

"Seven hundred years ago," Sun continued, "Jenghis Khan came out of Mongolia and conquered the eastern world. Ruthless and cruel as he was, according to our modem standards, boasting as he did that his armies so utterly destroyed ninety cities that his horsemen could ride over their ruins, he nevertheless brought a rebirth of vigor and enterprise to the Chinese nation that reached a culmination of glory in the reign of Kublai Khan, the founder of the Yuen dynasty, of whom the poet Coleridge wrote immortally."

Sun's mellow tones ceased again, but their soothing music played in Wilde's ears. The pages of history turned back before his eyes; he rode the Mongol plains with the hosts of the great Khan.

"The last of the Yuen dynasty, Shun-ti," Sun went on, "who reigned scarcely less gloriously than Kublai Khan, in the Fourteenth Century was compelled to flee before Chu Yuenchang, a Buddhist priest and the son of a laborer. He died, and with his death the great Yuen dynasty passed away. The Mongols were expelled from China. And until 1912 his body lay in its tomb."

Sun Wong's voice rose to a higher, stronger key, as if its swift ascent of the centuries had had on it the renascent effect the hordes of Jenghis Khan had had on China.

"Then came the republic," he rumbled on, "and the troubles that still beset my country. It was thought at that time by those who called themselves the children of the great Shunti that his tomb stood in danger of desecration at the hands of certain of the republicans. No crime is more revolting to the Chinese than this. It involves family and state and religion; it is the quintessence of human infamy. So, until order, respect, and virtue returned to China, it was thought that another country should harbor the remains of Shun-ti; and my brother (for we rejoice in our descent from the Mongol chiefs) was chosen to bring them to British Columbia, where they might rest until they could be taken back.

"But peace is a gem beyond price," the voice swept en, "mid once it is lost, not easily found. Chaos prevailed in China, and the dust of Shun-ti remained far from the land of his birth. But recently a desire for peace has come upon my country. The dust of Shun-ti is to be returned to its tomb; and at a favorable moment, which is thought to be near at hand, the Yuen dynasty will be reestablished in the person of one of royal descent, when the fighting tradition of Jenghis Khan and the glory of Kublai Khan and Shun-ti will return to China."

Sun Wong regarded Wilde silently and gravely, his personality enhanced by the mantle of large affairs his unassuming words had cast about him. But only by a distinct effort of will could Wilde bring himself to break the peculiar silence of the room, peopled, as it seemed, by the ghosts of all the Khans.

"And the dust of Shun-ti?" Wilde asked breathlessly.

"The place is indicated on the map in your possession," Sun said. "Only my brother knew exactly where the casket is hidden."

"But who killed your brother?" Wilde demanded.

Sun Wong smiled faintly. "There are men who for no good purpose desire to learn the hiding place of the casket," he said. "It was for this reason that my brother and I did not come together. We were to meet here this morning, casually, as if the meeting had not been pre-arranged. But he was murdered in the night and I had to announce my relationship so that I could get his papers."

"How did you know I had the map?" Wilde asked, the thought having suddenly occurred to him.

"I merely considered the possibility of your having it, because you were the first to go into the room after the murder was committed," Sun explained. "And to disposer of this possibility I did what would have been an unpardonable thing were it not for the urgency of the undertaking I am on. I followed you this morning. Apparently you suspected this. Nevertheless, I was convinced, much to my surprise, that you had the map and that my brother's assailant had not got it, for which I am inexpressibly thankful. Now that you have heard my story, Mr. Wilde," he finished, "will you give me the map?"

If ever a man had truth and sincerity in his face, Sun Wong had at that moment; yet Wilde hesitated to grant his reasonable request. He did not doubt the truth of what this man had told him, for his manners, his breeding, his personality, convinced Wilde that he was dealing with a statesman, a leader of men, one passionately devoted to his country and who might yet cut an international figure in world politics.

But he recalled again his determination to keep the plan until the police came. It was the crux of the situation— murder had been done for it— and he felt justified in turning it over only to the authorities. He was the first to find the dead man; should the case take an unpleasant turn, it was his alibi.

As gently and as apologetically as he could, meeting Sun Wong's grave face with difficulty, Wilde explained his reasons for retaining the map.

"It's only another day," he said. "The authorities will be here tomorrow, and if I keep it, unpleasantness may be saved for both of us. " When Wilde had said this he waited the denunciation he expected, but it did not come.

"I understand your position," the other assured him. "My anxiety led me to forget it. You will forgive me, I am sure?"

He had Wilde's forgiveness all right, and the map, too, pretty nearly. The man's charm of manner was almost irresistible; had Wilde not been moderately strongi-willed, he would have surrendered then and

A s sun wonq passed through the door, after shaking Wilde's hand as if he was indebted to him, some quality that had come in with the man seemed to go out with him, leaving in the room only a faint mellowness, a richness, a savor of an accumulation of wisdom, which lingered like the elusive scent of a delicate perfume, then disappeared.

The thought that he had not treated this courtly gentleman as considerately as he deserved, haunted Wilde's mind throughout the evening. He felt that his excuses were paltry, and poor return for the other's frankness. Had he seen Sun Wong again that evening he would probably have given him the map.

When it was dark he went down to the pebbly beach that extended for a hundred yards or so in front of the hotel, and marched back and forth in the black solitude that enveloped the inlet. Presently, he sat on a cool rock that rose a dozen feet or so above the glassy surface of the water, and reviewed in his mind Sun Wong's astounding narrative. The romance of it held him and he surrendered himself to its mood. In his imagination the mountain-bound inlet became a vast arena in which the ghosts of the Mongol hordes wheeled and charged with silent shouts of triumph, and until the atmosphere seemed to vibrate with the impact of multitudinous ghostly hoofs and the clatter and rattle of uncounted ghostly weapons of war.

Soon afterward Wilde went to his room and to bed. For hours he tossed in the cool darkness, his thoughts continually turning upon Sun Wong, and what he had told him, until, deciding suddenly that he would give Sun the map in the morning, he fell asleep.

WILDE woke abruptly from a dream in which the roar and clatter and agony of war were a background for marching hordes, charging hordes, of disciplined barbarians that passed unendingly over a prostrate land. The room was silent. Nothing moved. Yet he had the impression that he Was not alone, though it took him a minute to be sure that whatever was in the room lived and breathed and was no creature of his dreams.

His body stiffened and grew cold; he held his breath until he could hold it no longer. His eyes, prodding the darkness, found nothing more tangible than a shadow, a scarcely imaginable shade denser than the others, at the foot of his bed; but suddenly he felt that the shadow was a man whose eyes hung upon his slightest movement.

A new moon had risen and a thin slice of white light lay upon the window-sill. There came a scarcely perceptible movement of the dark shadow at the foot of the bed. A glimmer of cold light twinkled in the darkness, and with a shiver of horror Wilde knew that the moonlight had touched the blade of a knife.

The shadow moved again and the twinkle brightened. Wilde distinguished the hand that gripped the knife, and behind it the vague outline of a man's form moving toward him with a menacing slowness that froze his blood and numbed his tongue. His muscles refused to respond to the frantic urging of his nerves; he lay inert, waiting the inevitable.

Then an unforeseen incident occurred. Wilde had left his boots at the side of the bed and the man tripped over them. He recovered himself instantly, but this break in the slow continuity of his approach released Wilde's stiffened limbs, and as the man lunged at him, he thrust the bedclothes above his head and against the sweep of the weapon. The hiss of the slitting fabric sang in his ears.

Wilde dropped the bedclothes, and as the knife swept back, caught the man's wrist and held it so that the blade, curved and ugly and Oriental, gleamed wickedly against his neck. He was still on his back and at a tremendous disadvantage, but he improved his position by turning on to his side, at the same time bending the man's wrist— it had the toughness of a steel bar— downward and backward until, with a sharp exclamation, he dropped the weapon.

Wilde released the man's wrist and jerked himself up. But he had not done with him yet. The man flung himself at Wilde, and as the latter went down on his back again, the other's fingers gripped his throat. They were like talons; long and narrow and sharp-nailed.

But Wilde had got a throat grip, too, and they threshed around on the bed, arms and legs and bedclothes whirling in confusion. Wilde was far the heavier and the stronger, however, and presently, with an immense effort, he flung his assailant back. The man came at him again, but they were on even terms now. Wilde dragged him to the side of the bed and they rolled on to the floor. The man's forehead struck the boards with a sickening thud....

Wilde got up and lit the lamp.

The man was face down. Wilde turned him over; an involuntary exclamation broke from his lips and he nearly dropped the lamp in amazement. Gone from the man's features were the charm and dignity and benevolence he had seen in them that evening, yet undoubtedly they were those of his Chinese gentleman, Sun Wong, now set in an expression of uncompromising hatred.

Wilde tied the man up with a bed sheet and sat down to await the coming of dawn.

THE POLICE came in the morning.

With them was a dour, grayfaced Scotsman named MacGregor, who described himself to Wilde as an agent of the federal government. He listened to Wilde's account of the affair with phlegmatic countenance, interjecting oily an occasional comment.

"So you believed that yarn, did ye?" he demanded, and a twinkle of mirth crept into his deep gray eyes.

"Yarn!" exclaimed Wilde. His big body stiffened. "It was a yam, then?" he demanded. "There's no casket? No— no dust of Shun-ti?" he went on, forcing a grin to his crestfallen face.

"There'll probably be a casket, I'm thinking," said MacGregor. "And there'll be dust in it, too. Dust of death! But I'm afraid yon are not up in Chinese history, young man. Shun-ti was a weakling, anything but illustrious— and no Chinee, whatever his politics, would invite a descendant of the hated Mongols to the Chinese throne. Ten years, ago, Ah Poo (to give your Mongol chief his real name) was a leading character actor on the Chinese stage. He left it for a more profitable business. This man he has killed, Sun Yet, was an agent of the British government. According to his papers, while working in his Chinese fashion, he intercepted the description of the location of the casket, and came north to examine it. Ah foo discovered Sun Yet's intention and followed him, determined to recover the map one way or another before Sun Yet could come upon the casket Evidently, the stuff was run in by another branch of the gang. Ah Poo merely had to arrange its distribution, I expect. Probably the map was the only record of its hiding place this side of the Pacific. If this is so, Ah Poo simply had to get it. "

"Hiding- place! Casket!" gasped Wilde, in bewilderment. "What were they hiding?"

"Cocaine," said MacGregor pleasantly. "When we bust open that casket (if it is a casket) I'm thinking we'll find a hundred thousand dollars or so, of the stuff. We'd better be getting over there."

MacGregor was right.

4: The '*Chiliman*' Tragedy

W. Clarke Russell

1844-1911

Collected in: *The Phantom Death and Other Stories*, 1895

IN THE YEAR 1863 I sailed as ship's doctor aboard the Chiliman, in the third voyage that fine Blackwall liner made to Melbourne. I had obtained the berth through the influence of a relative. My own practice was a snug little concern in a town some fifty miles from London; but a change was needed, a change for my health, such a change as nothing but the oceans of the world with their several climates and hundred winds could provide, and so I resolved to go a voyage round the world on the easy terms of feeling pulses and administering draughts, with nothing to pay and nothing to receive, a seat at the cabin table, and a berth fitted with shelves and charged with a very powerful smell of chemist's shop down aft in what is called the steerage.

I joined the ship at the East India Docks, and went below to inspect my quarters. I found them gloomy and small; but any rat-hole was reckoned good enough in those days for a ship's doctor, a person who, though of the first importance to the well-being of a ship, is, as a rule, treated by most owners and skippers with the same sort of consideration that in former times a parson to a nobleman received, until he had obliged my lord by marrying his cast lady.

First let me briefly sketch this interior of saloon and steerage, since it is the theatre on which was enacted the extraordinary tragedy I am about to relate. The *Chiliman* had a long poop; under this was the saloon, in those days termed the cuddy; cabins very richly bulkheaded went away down aft on either hand. Amidships was the table, overhead the skylights, and the deck was pierced by the shaft of the mizzen-mast, superbly decorated with a pianoforte secured to the deck just abaft it. There were no ladies' saloons, smoking-rooms, bath-rooms, as in this age, though the ship was one of the handsomest of her class. If you sought retirement you went to your cabin; if you desired a pipe you stepped on deck; if you asked for a bath you were directed to the head pump.

The *Chiliman's* cuddy was entered from the quarter-deck by doors close beside the two flights of steps which conducted to the poop. A large square of hatch yawned near the entrance inside, and you descended a staircase to the steerage where my berth was. The arrangement of this steerage resembled that of the cuddy, but the bulkheads and general furniture were in the last degree plain. I believe they charged about twenty-five pounds for a berth down here, and sixty or seventy guineas for a cabin up above.

Whilst I stood in my berth looking around me a little bow-legged man, in a camlet jacket and a large strawberry mark on his cheek, peered in and asked if I was the doctor.

'Ay, Dr. Harris,' said I.

'I'm the ship's steward, sir,' said he. 'That's where I sleep,' and he pointed to a cabin opposite.

I was glad to make this man's acquaintance, and was very civil to him. I would advise all sea-going doctors on long-voyage sailing ships to speedily make friends with the head steward. I remarked upon the gloominess of my quarters, and said I was afraid when it came to my making up draughts I might blunder for the want of light. He answered that the sailors never expected much more than strong doses of glauber salts, and that in his experience passengers as a rule managed very well without physic until they got ashore again.

I asked him if we were a full ship. He answered, pretty full. About half the steerage berths were taken, and the same number of cabins would be occupied in the saloon. The 'tween-decks were crowded, he told me.

After this chat I went on deck, where I made the acquaintance of the captain and the chief mate. The ship was still in the docks, and the captain had just come aboard, and was talking to the first officer when I walked up to them. The decks were full of life, and the scene was charged with excitement and interest. Groups of 'tween-decks people stood about, and numbers of drunken sailors were bawling and cutting capers on the forecastle; some saloon passengers who had joined the ship in the docks walked the poop; Blue Peter was streaming at our fore-royal-masthead under the grey sky of the Isle of Dogs; in all directions rose the masts of ships, a complicated forest, bewildering with the lace-work and tracery of rigging. Cargo was swinging in and out; pawls of capstan and winch were ticking like gigantic clocks to the thrust of the handspike and the revolution of the handle; the air was full of the smell of distant climes; I seemed to taste coffee and nutmeg and a pungent tickling of black pepper; but the perfume of the greasy wool-bale was dominant, and suggested nothing of the sweetness of the Arabian gale.

The captain went below, the mate fell a-shouting, I walked to the brass rail that ran across the break of the poop, and gazed about me. The steerage passengers on the main-deck looked a shabbily-dressed lot of poor, distressed people— men, women, and children. I took notice that certain young fellows, apprentices or midshipmen, with brass buttons on their jackets and brass badges on their caps, warned them off the quarter-deck whenever they stepped abaft the mainmast. One of these young fellows came and stood beside me. He was a gentlemanly, fair-haired, handsome lad, now making, as he presently told me, his second voyage. I asked him why those poor people were ordered off the part of the deck that lay immediately beneath us. He said because it was the quarter-deck, to be used only by the second-class passengers.

'That dirty rabble,' said he, looking with disgust at the third-class folks, 'must keep to the waist and forecastle if they want air.'

'And this fine deck of poop?' said I.

'Nobody uses this,' he answered, 'but the saloon nobs, and the officers and the midshipmen of the ship.'

Shortly before eleven the vessel hauled out of dock. There was much noise of yelling and swearing at this time; my sight and hearing were confounded, and I wondered that any mortal being should understand the exact thing to do in such a scene of clamorous distraction. People on the pier-heads shrieked farewells to those on board, and those on board sobbed and yelped in response. When we had floated over the cill, with the mud pilot on the forecastle almost apoplectic with unavailing wrath at some insult fired at him out of a hurricane lung on the wharf, a tug got hold of us, a couple of seamen lurched aft to the wheel, the hawser tautened, and away we went down the river in the fizzing wake of a pair of churning paddles.

The varied scenery of the Thames— I mean its maritime details of craft of twenty different rigs and steamers of twenty different aspects thrusting up and down, some staggering athwart, others making a bee-line through the reaches— charmed and interested me who was fresh from a long spell of inland, almost rural, life, and I lingered till I was driven below by the wet which came sweeping along in a succession of drenching squalls as we rounded out of Galleon's into Barking Reach. I spent the remainder of that day in putting my cabin to rights, examining the drugs (some of which, for antiquity, methought, might have gone round the world with Cook in his first voyage), and in providing for my own comfort as best I could, and at half-past six went into the cuddy to join the people at dinner, by which hour the ship had arrived at a mooring-buoy off Gravesend, and was lying motionless on her own shadow in the stream.

It was a sullen evening, already dark; and dirty blowing wet weather on deck. The muffled howling and hissing of the wind in the three towering spires of mast, and yard, and rigging communicated, I've no doubt, the particular brilliance and beauty I found in the appearance of the well-lighted cuddy, with its long table draped for dinner, sparkling with glass and plate, and a number of ladies and gentlemen, along with the captain and chief officer, issuing from their respective berths to take their seats. Thirteen of us sat down, and when this was remarked by an elderly lady next the captain, a midshipman was sent for to neutralize the sinister influence of that number by making a fourteenth. The lad took his place with a countenance of happy astonishment. He heartily wished, I dare say, that thirteen people would sit down to dinner every day.

I understood that there were some eight or ten more passengers expected from Gravesend in the morning. I looked about me to see what sort of persons I was to be associated with on an ocean passage that might run into four months. No need in this brief record of a tragic event to enter into minute descriptions of

the people: enough if I refer now to two persons who sat opposite me, both of whom were to prove leading actors in what I have to tell.

One of them was a man of about six-and-thirty years of age. He wore a heavy moustache slightly streaked with grey. His eyes were dark, keen, and steadfast in their gaze— steadfast, indeed, to rudeness, for his manner of looking at you was scarcely less than a deliberate scrutinizing stare. His hair was thin on the top, bushy at the sides; his complexion dark as of one who has lived long under the sun. His voice was subdued, his whole bearing well bred.

His companion was a lady: a dark, very handsome woman of three or four and twenty. Her hair was black, without gloss, a soft, dark, rich black, and I never before saw a woman with so wonderful a thickness of hair as that girl had. Her large, fine, dark eyes had a tropic sparkle; there was foreign blood in the glances which flashed through the long lashes. Her complexion was a most delicate olive made tender by a soft lasting bloom, which rested like a lingering blush upon her cheeks. Her figure looked faultless, and doubtless was so. I put the man down as a happy fellow carrying a beautiful bride away with him to the Antipodes. You could not have doubted that they were newly married; his behaviour was all fondness; hers that of the impassioned young wife who finds difficulty in concealing her adoration in public.

I have thus sketched them, but I own that I was not more particularly interested in the couple than in others of the people who sat on either hand. The chief mate of the ship, however, Mr. Small, who occupied a seat on my left, concluded that my interest was sufficiently keen to justify him in talking to me about them; and in a low voice he told me that they were Captain and Mrs. Norton-Savage; he didn't quite know what he was captain of, but he had gathered from some source he couldn't recollect that he had made a fortune in South America, in Lima or Callao, and had been married a few weeks only, and was going to live in Australia, as his wife's health was not good, and the doctors believed the Australian climate would suit her.

Early next morning the rest of the passengers came on board, the tug again took us in tow, and under a dark blue sky, mountainous with masses of white cloud, the *Chiliman* floated in tow of the tug into Channel waters, where a long flowing heave despatched a great number of us to our cabins.

We met with nothing but head winds and chopping seas down Channel. The ship lurched and sprang consumedly, and the straining noises of bulkheads and strong fastenings were so swift and furious in that part of the vessel where I slept that I'd sometimes think the fabric was going to pieces at my end of her. I was very sea-sick, but happily my services were never required in that time.

I think we were five days in beating clear of the Channel; the weather then changed, the sky brightened into a clear azure, delicately shaded by clouds; a soft wind blew out of the west, and when I made my first appearance on deck I

found the ship clothed in swelling canvas from truck to waterway; her sand-white decks were lively with people in motion and the swaying shadows of the rigging; a number of ladies and gentlemen walked the poop, and the captain, with a telescope at his eye, was looking at a small steamer that was passing us at about a mile with a colour flying; Captain and Mrs. Norton-Savage stood beside him, also looking at the steamer; the foam spun along the ship's side in wool-white wreaths, and every bubble shone like a bit of rainbow, and the streak of the vessel's wake gleamed upon the flowing lines of the ocean astern as though she trailed a length of mother-o'-pearl.

All sights and sounds were beautiful and refreshing. I breathed deep, with exquisite enjoyment of the ocean air after my spell of confinement in my apothecary-shop of a cabin, and with growing admiration of the spectacle of the noble ship, slightly heeling from the breeze, and curtsying stately as she went, till you'd think she kept time to some solemn music rising up round about her from the deep, and audible to her only, such a hearkening look as she took from the yearning lift of her jibs and staysails.

Presently the captain observed me, called me to him, and we stood in conversation for some twenty minutes, I begged his leave to take a look round the ship, and he ordered a midshipman to accompany me. I peeped into the galley or ship's kitchen, then into the forecastle, a gloomy cave, dully lighted by a lamp whose vapour was poisonous with the slush that fed it, and complicated to the landlubber's eye by the glimmering outlines of hammocks, and the dark, coffin-like shapes of bunks and seamen's chests. I then descended into the 'tween-decks by way of the main-hatch, and took a view of the accommodation there, and found the cabins formed of planks roughly shaped into bulkheads with partitions which made mere pigeon-holes of the places. In truth the poor third-class folk were always badly treated in those days at sea. They were ill-housed; they were half starved; they were elbowed, sworn at, and generally tyrannized over by all hands, from the captain to the cook's mate; and in heavy weather, when the hatches were battened down, they were almost suffocated. Yet they were better off than the sailors, who were not only equally half starved, half suffocated, and sworn at, but were forced to do the treadmill work of the ship also.

I regained the deck, glad to get out of this gloomy region of crying babies and quarrelling children, and grimy groups in corners shuffling greasy cards, and women with shawls over their heads mixing flour and water for a pudding, or conversing shrilly in provincial accents, some looking very white indeed, and all as though it was quite time they changed their country.

As I went along the quarter-deck on my way to the cuddy, I saw a young man standing in the recess formed by the projection of the foremost cuddy cabins and the over-hanging ledge or break of the poop. I looked at him with some

attention; he was a particularly handsome young fellow, chiefly remarkable for the contrast between the lifeless pallor of his face and the vitality of his large bright, dark eyes. His hair was cropped close in military fashion; he wore a cloth cap with a naval peak. His dress was a large, loose monkey-jacket and blue cloth trousers cut in the flowing nautical style. On the beach of Southsea or the sands of Ramsgate he might have passed for a yachtsman; on the high seas and on the deck of a full-rigged ship with plenty of hairy sailors about to compare him with, nothing mortal could have looked less nautical.

I paused when in the cuddy to glance at him again through the window. He leaned in the corner of the recess with his arms clasped upon his breast and his fine and sparkling eyes fixed upon the blue line of the horizon that was visible above the lee bulwark-rail. My gaze had lighted upon many faces whilst I looked over the ship, but on none had it lingered. It lingered now, and I wondered who the youth was. His age might have been twenty; handsome he was, as I have said, but his expression was hard, almost fierce, and certainly repellant. Whilst I watched him his lips twitched or writhed three or four times and exposed a grin of flashing white teeth that was anything but mirthful, I can assure you. His clothes were good, his appearance refined, and I concluded that he was one of the cuddy passengers who had come on board at Gravesend. He turned his face and saw me looking, and instantly made a step which carried him out of sight, past the cabin projection.

The steward came up out of the steerage at that moment, and wishing to know who was who in the ship I asked him to peep through the door and tell me who the melancholy pale-faced young gentleman in the nautical clothes was. He popped his head out and then said—

'He's a young gent named John Burgess, one of the steerage people. He occupies the foremost cabin to starboard beside the foot of them steps,' said he, pointing to the hatch.

'Is he alone in the ship?' said I.

'All alone, sir.'

'Where do those steerage people take their meals?'

'Why, in the steerage, at the table that stops short abreast of your cabin.'

Nothing in any way memorable happened for a considerable time. The ship drove through the Atlantic impelled by strong beam and quartering winds which sometimes blew with the weight of half a gale and veiled her forecastle with glittering lifts of foam and heeled her till her lee-channels ripped through the seas in flashings fierce as the white water which leaps from the strokes of the thrasher's flails. The passengers had settled down to the routine of shipboard life. They played the piano, they sang, they hove the deck quoit, they formed themselves into whist parties. Both Captain Norton-Savage and his wife promised to become exceedingly popular with all the people who lived aft. The

lady sang sweetly; she sang Spanish, English, and French songs. It was understood that she was a South American, of pure Spanish blood on one side. Captain Norton-Savage told a good story. He smoked excellent cigars and was liberal with them. He came to me one day and talked about his wife, told me there was consumption in her family, and asked what I thought of a sea voyage for her and of the climate of Australia. I could find nothing to object to in the man except his stare. There was something defiant in his manner of looking at you; his speech was significant with it even when nothing more was meant than met the ear. I was misled at first, and sometimes troubled myself to look under his words for his mind; then I found out that it was his stare which was responsible for what his language seemed to carry, and so, with the rest of us, took him as he offered himself.

And still I never felt quite easy with him, though no man laughed louder at his humorous stories.

I was going one morning from my berth to the cuddy when, at the foot of the steps which conducted to the hatch, I met the young man called John Burgess. I had seen nothing of him for days. He came out of his cabin holding his cap. Plenty of light flowed through the hatch; he was very pale, and I thought seemed ill, and his eyes had a wild look. He was handsome, as I have said— at least, to my way of thinking; but there was an evil spirit in the delicate structure and lineaments of his face. I said 'Good morning.' He answered 'Good morning' in a low voice, but with a manner of impatience, as though he wished me to pass on or get out of his road.

'Are you going to Australia for your health?' said I, for the sake of saying something.

'No,' he answered.

'Are you English?'

'Pray who are you?' he exclaimed with a foreign accent.

'I am Dr. Harris,' I answered, smiling.

He looked uneasy on my pronouncing the word *doctor*, stepped back and grasped the handle of his cabin door, yet paused to say, 'Are you a passenger, sir?'

'I am the ship's doctor,' I answered.

Without another word he entered his cabin and shut the door upon himself.

His behaviour was so abrupt, discourteous, that I suspected his brain was at fault. Indeed, I made up my mind, in the interests of the passengers, and for the security of the ship, to keep my eye upon him— that is, by accosting him from time to time, and by watching him without seeming to watch whenever we should happen to be on deck together. And yet I was not altogether satisfied with my suspicion of his not being right-headed, either; I found my puzzlement

going another way, but in a direction that I could by no means make clear to myself.

However, not to refine upon this matter: I think it was next day that, happening to come along from the forecastle where I had been visiting a sick sailor, I spied the young fellow standing before the mainmast in a sort of peeping posture; his eyes were directed aft; he was watching the people walking on the poop. I stopped to look at him, struck by his attitude. The great body of the mast effectually concealed him from all observers aft. He turned his head and saw me; his face was ghastly white, the expression wonderful for the tragic wrath of it. On meeting my eyes he coloured up, I never could have credited so swift a transformation of hue; his blush was deep and dark and his eyes shone like fire. He scowled angrily, stepped round the mast, and disappeared through the cuddy door.

After this I saw no more of him for a week. I questioned the steward, who told me the youth was keeping his cabin.

'What's his name again?' said I.

'John Burgess, sir.'

'That's an English name, but he's not an Englishman,' said I.

'We don't trouble ourselves about names on board ship, sir,' he answered. 'There be pursers' names aft as well as forrard.'

'Does he ever talk to you?'

'No, sir, he might be a funeral mute for talk.'

'Does he come to the table for his meals?'

'No, sir; his grub's carried in to him.'

'When did you see him last?'

'About an hour ago.'

'Does he seem well?'

'Well as I am, sir.'

I asked no more questions. There was a cheerfulness in the steward's way of answering which promised me he saw nothing peculiar in the lad. This was reassuring, for I knew he was often in and out of the young man's berth, and anything eccentric in his conduct would strike him. As for me, it was no part of my duty to intrude upon the passengers in their privacy.

We took the north-east trade wind, made noble progress down the North Atlantic, lost the commercial gale in eight or ten degrees north of the equator, and then lay 'humbugging,' as the forecastle saying is, on plains of greasy blue water, scarcely crisped by the catspaw, and often, for hours at a time, without air enough to wag the fly of the vane at the masthead. One very hot night after a day of roasting calm I lingered on the poop for some while after my customary hour of retiring to rest for the refreshment of the dew-cooled atmosphere and the cold breath lifting off the black surface of ocean. The awning was spread

over the poop; a few shadowy figures moved slowly under it; here and there a red star indicated a smoker sucking at a cigar; the water alongside was full of smoky fire rolling in dim green bursts of cloud from the bends of the ship as she leaned with the swell. But the stars were few and faint; down in the south-west was a little play of silent lightning; the noises of the night were rare and weak, scarce more than the flap of some pinion of cloth up in the gloom, or the jerk of a wheel chain, or the subdued moan of water washing under the counter.

I smoked out my pipe and still lingered; it was very hot and I did not love the fancy of my bunk on such a night. The passengers went below one by one after the cabin lamps were turned down. Six bells were struck, eleven o'clock. I took a few turns with the officer of the watch, then went on to the quarter-deck, where I found Captain Norton-Savage smoking and chatting with two or three of the passengers under the little clock against the cuddy front. The captain offered me a cigar, our companions presently withdrew, and we were left alone.

I observed a note of excitement in Captain Savage's speech, and guessed that the heat had coaxed him into draining more seltzer and brandy than was good for him. We were together till half-past eleven; his talk was mainly anecdotic and wholly concerned others. I asked him how his wife bore the heat. He answered very well, he thought. Did I not think the voyage was doing her good? I answered I had observed her at dinner that day and thought she looked very well in spite of her pallor. These were the last words I spoke before wishing him good night. He threw the end of his cigar overboard and went to his cabin, which was situated on the port side just over against the hatch down which I went to my quarters in the steerage.

All was silent in this part. The hush upon the deep worked in the ship like a spirit; at long intervals only arose the faint sounds of cargo lightly strained in the hold. Much time passed before I slept. Through the open porthole over my bunk I could hear the mellow chimes of the ship's bell as it was struck. It was as though the land lay close aboard with a church clock chiming. The hot atmosphere was rendered doubly disgusting by the smell of the drugs. Yea, more than drugs, methought, went to the combined flavour. I seemed to sniff bilgewater and the odour of the cockroach.

I was awakened by a hand upon my shoulder.

'Rouse up, for God's sake, doctor! There's a man stabbed in the cuddy!'

I instantly got my wits, and threw my legs over the edge of the bunk.

'What's this about a man stabbed?' I exclaimed, pulling on my clothes.

The person who had called me was the second mate, Mr. Storey. He told me that he was officer of the watch; a few minutes since one of the passengers who slept next the berth occupied by the Savages was awakened by a shriek. He ran into the cuddy, and at that moment Mrs. Savage put her head out and said that

her husband lay dead with a knife buried in his heart. The passenger rushed on deck, and Mr. Storey came to fetch me before arousing the captain.

I found several people in the cuddy. The shriek of the wife had awakened others besides the passenger who had raised the alarm. Captain Smallport, the commander of the ship, hastily ran out of his cabin as I passed through the steerage hatch. Some one had turned the cabin lamp full on, and the light was abundant. The captain came to me, and I stepped at once to the Savages' berth and entered it. There was no light here, and the cuddy lamp threw no illumination into this cabin. I called for a box of matches and lighted the bracket-lamp, and then there was revealed this picture: In the upper bunk, clothed in a sleeping costume of pyjamas and light jacket, lay the figure of Captain Norton-Savage, with the cross-shaped hilt of a dagger standing up out of his breast over the heart and a dark stain of blood showing under it like its shadow. In the right-hand corner, beside the door, stood Mrs. Savage, in her night-dress; her face was of the whiteness of her bedgown, her black eyes looked double their usual size. I noticed blood upon her right hand and a stain of blood upon her night-dress over the right hip. All this was the impression of a swift glance. In a step I was at Captain Savage's side and found him dead.

'Here is murder, captain,' said I, turning to the commander of the ship.

He closed the door to shut out the prying passengers, and exclaimed—

'Is he dead?'

'Yes.'

Mrs. Savage shrieked. I observed her dressing-gown hanging beside the door and put it on her, again noticing the blood stains upon her hands and night-dress. She looked horribly frightened and trembled violently.

'What can you tell us about this?' said Captain Smallport.

In her foreign accent, strongly defined by the passion of terror or grief, she answered, but in such broken, tremulous, hysteric sentences as I should be unable to communicate in writing, that being suddenly awakened by a noise as of her cabin door opened or shut, she called to Captain Savage, but received no answer. She called again, then, not knowing whether he had yet come to bed, and the cabin being in darkness, she got out of her bunk and felt over the upper one for him. Her hand touched the hilt of the dagger, she shook him and called his name, touched the dagger again, then uttered the shriek that had alarmed the ship.

'Is it suicide?' said the captain, turning to me.

I looked at the body, at the posture of the hands, and answered emphatically, 'No.'

I found terror rather than grief in Mrs. Savage's manner; whenever she directed her eyes at the corpse I noticed the straining of panic fear in them. The captain opened the cabin door, and called for the stewardess. She was in

waiting outside, as you may believe. The cuddy, indeed, was full of people, and whilst the door was open I heard the grumbling hum of the voices of 'tween-deck passengers and seamen crowding at the cuddy front. The news had spread that one of the first-class passengers had been murdered, and every tongue was asking who had done it.

The stewardess took Mrs. Savage to a spare cabin. When the women were gone and the door again shut, Captain Smallport still remaining with me, I drew the dagger out of the breast of the body and took it to the light. It was more properly a dagger-shaped knife than a dagger, the point sharp as a needle, the edge razor-like. The handle was of fretted ivory; to it was affixed a thin slip of silver plate, on which was engraved 'Charles Winthrop Sheringham to Leonora Dunbar.'

'Is it the wife's doing, do you think?' said the captain, looking at the dagger.

'I would not say 'Yes' or 'No' to that question yet,' said I.

'She might have done it in her sleep.'

'Look at his hands,' said I. 'He did not stab himself. Will you take charge of this dagger, captain?'

'All bloody like that!' cried he, recoiling.

I cleansed it, and then he took it.

We stood conversing awhile. I examined the body again; which done, the pair of us went out, first extinguishing the lamp, and then locking the door.

The passengers sat up for the remainder of the night, and the ship was as full of life as though the sun had risen. In every corner of the vessel was there a hum of talk in the subdued note into which the horror of murder depresses the voice. The captain called his chief officer and myself to his cabin; we inspected the dagger afresh, and talked the dreadful thing over. Who was the assassin? Both the captain and mate cried, 'Who but the wife?' I said I could not be satisfied of that yet; who was Charles Winthrop Sheringham? who was Leonora Dunbar? It was some comfort anyhow to feel that, whoever the wretch might be, he or she was in the ship. There were no doors to rush through, no windows to leap from, no country to scour *here*. The assassin was a prisoner with us all in the ship; our business was to find out who of the whole crowd of us had murdered the man, and we had many weeks before us.

In the small hours the sailmaker and his mate stitched up the body ready for the toss over the side before noon. We waited until the sun had arisen, then, our resolution having been formed, the captain and I entered the berth which had been occupied by the Savages and examined such baggage as we found there. The keys were in a bag; our search lasted an hour. At the expiration of the hour we had found out, mainly through the agency of a large bundle of letters, but in part also through other direct proofs, that the name of the murdered man was Charles Winthrop Sheringham; that the name of the lady whom he had

known as Mrs. Savage was Leonora Dunbar; that this Miss Dunbar had been an intimate friend of Mrs. Sheringham, and that the husband had eloped with her and taken a passage from Melbourne in the ship *Chiliman*, promising marriage in twenty solemn protestations on their arrival in Australia, the ceremony to be repeated should Mrs. Sheringham die.

This story we got together out of the letters and other conclusive evidence. The captain was now rootedly of opinion that Miss Dunbar had killed Sheringham.

'It's not only the dagger,' said he, 'with her name on it, which was therefore hers, and in her keeping when the murder was done; for, suppose some one else the assassin, are you to believe that he entered the Savages' berth and rummaged for this particular weapon instead of using a knife of his own? How would he know of the dagger or where to find it? It's not the dagger only; there's the stains on her hand and bedgown, and mightn't she have killed him in a fit of madness owing to remorse, and thoughts of a lifelong banishment from England, and horror of the disgrace and shame he's brought her to?'

I listened in silence; but not yet could I make up my mind.

I met the stewardess coming to the captain with the key of the Savages' cabin; she wanted clothes for the lady. I asked how Mrs. Savage did, giving the unhappy woman the name she was known by on board.

'She won't speak, sir,' answered the stewardess. 'She's fallen into a stony silence. She sits with her hands clasped and her eyes cast down, and I can't get a word out of her.'

'I'll look in upon her by-and-by,' said I.

The body was buried at ten o'clock in the morning. The captain read the funeral service, and the quarter-deck was crowded with the passengers and crew. I don't think there was the least doubt throughout the whole body of the people that Mrs. Savage, as they supposed her, had murdered Sheringham. It was the murder that put into this funeral service the wild, tragic significance everybody seemed to find in it, to judge at least by the looks on the faces I glanced at.

When the ceremony was ended I called for the stewardess, and went with her to Miss Dunbar's cabin. On entering I requested the stewardess to leave me. The lady was seated, and did not lift her eyes, nor exhibit any signs of life whilst I stood looking. Her complexion had turned into a dull pale yellow, and her face, with its expression of hard, almost blank repose, might have passed for marble wantonly tinctured a dim primrose. She had exchanged her dressing-gown for a robe, and appeared attired as usual. I asked some questions, but got no answer. I then took a seat by her side, and called her by the name of Leonora Dunbar. She now looked at me steadily, but I did not remark any expression of strong

surprise, of the alarm and amazement I had supposed the utterance of that name would excite.

I said softly, 'The captain and I have discovered who you are, and your relation with Charles Winthrop Sheringham. Was it you who stabbed him? Tell me if you did it. Your sufferings will be the lighter when you have eased your conscience of the weight of the dreadful secret.'

It is hard to interpret the expression of the eyes if the rest of the features do not help. I seemed to find a look of hate and contempt in hers. Her face continued marble hard. Not being able to coax a syllable out of her, though I spared nothing of professional patience in the attempt, I left the cabin, and, calling the stewardess, bade her see that the lady was kept without means to do herself a mischief.

That day and the next passed. Miss Dunbar continued dumb as a corpse. I visited her several times, and twice Captain Smallport accompanied me; but never a word would she utter. Nay, she would not even lift her eyes to look at us. I told the captain that it might be mere mulishness or a condition of mind that would end in madness. It was impossible to say. The stewardess said she ate and drank and went obediently to bed when ordered. She was as passive as a broken-spirited child, she said. For her part she didn't believe the lady had killed the poor man.

It was on the fourth day following the murder that the glass fell; it blackened in the north-west, and came on to blow a hard gale of wind. A mountainous sea was running in a few hours upon which the ship made furious weather, clothed in flying brine to her tops, under no other canvas than a small storm main-trysail. The hatches were battened down, the decks were full of water, which flashed in clouds of glittering smoke over the lee bulwark rail. The passengers for the most part kept their cabins. The cook could do no cooking; indeed the galley fire was washed out, and we appeased our appetites with biscuit and tinned meat.

The gale broke at nine o'clock on the following morning, leaving a wild, confused sea and a scowling sky all round the horizon, with ugly yellow breaks over our reeling mastheads. I was in my gloomy quarters, whose atmosphere was little more than a green twilight, with the wash of the emerald brine swelling in thunder over the porthole, when the steward arrived to tell me that one of the passengers had met with a serious accident. I asked no questions, but instantly followed him along the steerage corridor into the cuddy, where I found a group of the saloon people standing beside the figure of the young fellow named John Burgess, who lay at his length upon the deck. I had not set eyes on him for days and days.

I thought at first he was dead. His eyes were half closed; the glaze of approaching dissolution was in the visible part of the pupils, and at first I felt no

pulse. Two or three of the sailors who had brought him into the cuddy stood in the doorway. They told me that the young fellow had persisted in mounting the forecastle ladder to windward. He was hailed to come down, as the ship was pitching heavily and often dishing bodies of green water over her bows. He took no notice of the men's cries, and had gained the forecastle-deck when an unusually heavy lurch flung him; he fell from a height of eight or nine feet, which might have broken a limb for him only; unhappily he struck the windlass end, and lay seemingly lifeless.

I bade them lift and carry him to the cabin that I might examine him, and when they had placed him in his bunk I told them to send the steward to help me and went to work to partially unclothe the lad to judge of his injuries.

On opening his coat I discovered that he was a woman.

On the arrival of the steward I told him that the young fellow called John Burgess was a girl, and I requested him to send the stewardess, and whilst I waited for her I carefully examined the unconscious sufferer, and judged that she had received mortal internal injuries. All the while that I was thus employed some extraordinary thoughts ran in my head.

The stewardess came. I gave her certain directions and went to the captain to report the matter. He was in no wise surprised to learn that a woman dressed as a man was aboard his ship; twice, he told me, had that sort of passenger sailed with him within the last four years.

'Captain,' said I, 'I'll tell you what's in my head! That woman below who styled herself John Burgess murdered Sheringham.'

'Why do you think that?'

'Because I believe that she's his wife.'

'Ha!' said Captain Smallport.

I gave several reasons for this notion; what I observed in the disguised woman's behaviour when hidden behind the mainmast; then her being a foreigner, in all probability a South American, as Leonora Dunbar was, and so on.

He said, 'What about the blood on Miss Dunbar's hand and night-dress?'

'She told us she had felt over the body.'

'Yes, yes!' he cried, 'doctor, you see things more clearly than I do.'

When I had conversed for some time with Captain Smallport, I walked to Miss Dunbar's cabin, knocked, and entered. I found her on this occasion standing with her back to the door, apparently gazing at the sea through the portholes; she did not turn her head. I stood beside her to see her face and said—

'I have made a discovery; Mrs. Sheringham is on board this ship.'

On my pronouncing these words she screamed, and looked at me with a face in which I clearly read that her silence had been sheer sullen mulish

obstinacy, with nothing of insanity in it, pure stubborn determination to keep silence that we might think what we chose.

'Mrs. Sheringham in this ship?' she cried, with starting eyes and the wildest, whitest countenance you can imagine.

'Yes,' I answered.

'Then it's she who murdered Sheringham. She is capable of it, she is a tigress!' she cried in a voice pitched to the note of a scream.

'That's what I have come to talk to you about, and I am glad you have found your voice.'

'Where is she?' she asked, and a strong shudder ran through her.

'She is in her cabin below, dying; she may be dead even now as we converse.'

She uttered something in Spanish passionately and clasped her hands.

'Now hear me,' said I, 'since you have your ears and have found your tongue. You are suspected of having murdered the man you eloped with.'

'It is false!' she shrieked. 'I loved him— oh, I loved him!'

She caught her breath and wept bitterly.

'In my own heart,' said I, touched by her dreadful misery, 'I believe you guiltless. I am sure you are so now that we have discovered that Mrs. Sheringham is on board. Will you answer a question?'

'Yes,' she sobbed.

'You know that Sheringham was stabbed to the heart with a dagger?'

'Yes.'

'It bears this inscription: '*Charles Winthrop Sheringham to Leonora Dunbar.*' Was that dagger in your possession in this ship?'

'No. Mr. Sheringham gave it to me. There was no such inscription as you name upon it. I left it behind when I came away. I swear before my God I speak the truth!'

Her voice was broken with sobs; she spoke with deepest agitation. Her manner convinced me it was as she represented.

I said, 'Come with me and see the woman and tell me if she is Mrs. Sheringham.'

She shrank and cried out that she could not go. She was perfectly sane: all her stubbornness was gone from her; she was now a miserable, scared, broken-hearted woman. I told her that the person I took to be Mrs. Sheringham lay insensible and perhaps dead at this moment, and, by putting on an air of command, I succeeded at last in inducing, or rather obliging, her to accompany me. She veiled herself before quitting the cabin. The saloon was empty. We passed into the steerage, and she followed me into the cabin where the woman was.

The poor creature was still unconscious; the stewardess stood beside the bunk looking at its dying white occupant. I said to Miss Dunbar—

'Is it Mrs. Sheringham?'

She was cowering at the door, but when she perceived that the woman lay without motion with her eyes half closed, insensible and, perhaps, dead, as she might suppose, she drew near the bunk, peered breathlessly, and then, looking around to me, said—

'She is Mrs. Sheringham. Let me go!'

I opened the door and she fled with a strange noise of sobbing.

I stayed for nearly three hours in Mrs. Sheringham's berth. There was nothing to be done for her. She passed away in her unconsciousness, and afterwards, when I looked more closely into the nature of her injuries, I wondered that she could have lived five minutes after the terrible fall that had beaten sensibility out of her over the windlass end.

I went to the captain to report her death, and in a long talk I gave him my views of the tragic business. I said there could be no question that Mrs. Sheringham had followed the guilty couple to sea with a determination so to murder her husband as to fix the crime of his death upon his paramour. How was this to be done? Her discovery at her home of the dagger her husband had given to Leonora Dunbar would perhaps give her the idea she needed. If Miss Dunbar spoke the truth, then, indeed, I could not account for the inscription on the dagger. But there could be no question whatever that Mrs. Sheringham had been her husband's murderess.

This was my theory: and it was afterwards verified up to the hilt. On the arrival of the *Chiliman* at Melbourne Miss Dunbar was sent home to take her trial for the murder of Mr. Sheringham; but her innocence was established by—first, the circumstance of a woman having been found aboard dressed as a man; next, by the statement of witnesses that a woman whose appearance exactly corresponded with that of 'John Burgess' had been the rounds of the shipping offices to inspect the list of passengers by vessels bound to Australia; thirdly, by letters written to Leonora Dunbar by Sheringham found among Mrs. Sheringham's effects, in one of which the man told the girl that he proposed to carry her to Australia. Finally, and this was the most conclusive item in the whole catalogue of evidence, an engraver swore that a woman answering to Mrs. Sheringham's description called upon him with the dagger (produced in court) and requested him without delay to inscribe upon the thin plate, 'Charles Winthrop Sheringham to Leonora Dunbar.'

And yet, but for the death of Mrs. Sheringham and my discovery of her sex, it was far more likely than not that the wife would have achieved her aim by killing her husband and getting her rival hanged for the murder.

———————

5: Cynthia Delmorton's Mistake

"Sapper"

H. C. McNeile, 1888-1937

The Strand Magazine, Sep 1926

CYNTHIA DELMORTON was a singularly beautiful girl, and for all I know is so still. Her figure was perfect: her face almost flawless. There were critics who said that her nose was a trifle too long: there were others, on the contrary, who denied the fact with oaths and curses. But seeing that she had been painted by three of London's leading artists who one and all declared that she was the most perfect thing they had ever seen, the nose question cannot have been very serious.

Her origin was a little obscure. She lived in a charming house in South Audley Street with an elderly lady who rejoiced in the name of Aunt Hester. Moreover she undoubtedly had money— lots of it. There was a rumour that the late Mr. Delmorton had really been Smithson and Co. Ltd.— one of those charitable firms whose aim in life is to ease other people's financial troubles by lending them money on note of hand alone. And if such a base rumour over the lovely Cynthia could possibly be true, she had certainly possessed the most notorious blood-sucker in London as her father— a man without a tinge of mercy or a thought of compassion.

The fact however remained, that she was extremely wealthy. Which was a far more important matter than the method by which the money had been obtained. And the result had been that divers men of all ages and positions had laid their hands and hearts at her disposal. Some of them had been genuinely infatuated by her beauty: others by her bank balance. But one and all of them when their offer was turned down, thanked almighty Heaven for their escape. Except one poor boob, who blew out his brains . . . For the beautiful Cynthia had one very unpleasant trait, which never manifested itself until the last moment. She would lead a man on until he was well-nigh crazy— and then laugh in his face.

Of course when the man she did decide to marry appeared, there would be no laughter. At least if there was it would be carefully concealed. But so far that lucky being had not arrived. And when he did he would have to be something pretty special. Cynthia Delmorton was essentially not one of those who— to paraphrase the well-known line— had danced with Princes and kept the common touch. Nothing under an Earl would be good enough for her final choice— and not a modern creation at that. But until that blissful day arrived, she saw no reason why good-looking men should not go wild about her, and throng her charming drawing-room.

And then one spring that complete disrespecter of persons— influenza, descended upon the house. Within an hour so did Sir William Harbottle,

London's most fashionable and futile doctor. He consumed a glass of port and ate a biscuit, and with deadly accuracy diagnosed the disease. He continued to descend at ten guineas a time, more port and more biscuits, and finally pronounced his lovely patient convalescent.

"But, my dear young lady," he announced as he stroked her arm, "we require setting up. We are a little run down."

The "we," needless to state, was a pleasing conceit of Sir William's: no one regarding his ample presence need have panicked unduly.

"We will take a sea voyage."

"Dear Sir William," she murmured. "A sea voyage?"

"Where the bracing ozone will set us up again. Restore our wasted tissues: remove our lassitude. And then we shall return fresh and invigorated for the ardours of June in London."

And the more she thought of the idea the more she liked it. Up to date her sea voyages had consisted of occupying a cabin whilst crossing the Channel: this was going to be something quite different. Some new frocks: a flirtation or two— there was bound to be some man on board who would fill the bill: and a real rest cure.

Aunt Hester proved the first obstacle. For that usually malleable woman having heard of Cynthia's decision, stuck in her toes and jibbed definitely. Nothing would induce her to go on the sea. She loathed it and detested it: she was always seasick— and in short, rather than do so she would resign her position as Cynthia's companion.

"If you must have someone with you, my dear," she said, "why not ask Marjorie. She's a nice girl: she won't get in your way and you'll be doing her a real kindness as well."

Cynthia cogitated. Yes: Marjorie Blackton would do. Better perhaps than Aunt Hester. Her idea of a companion was what most people would describe as an unpaid maid, and if her Aunt was continually sea-sick she would be more nuisance than she was worth.

"Write and ask her," she said thoughtfully. "Tell her that as far as clothes are concerned, she can send any reasonable bill in to me."

Marjorie Blackton was an old school friend of hers. At least she was the only girl at the very expensive place at which Cynthia had been "finished" whom she did not actually dislike. For even at that age she neither loved nor was loved by her own sex. But for some strange reason Marjorie bestowed on her one of those peculiar adorations which arise and flourish in girls' schools.

Strange, because it would have been impossible to find two more totally dissimilar characters. Marjorie was everything that her idol was not. Unselfish, utterly lovable, frank and open, she was the exact antithesis of Cynthia. And the latter, though slightly flattered for a time, soon took advantage of the state of

affairs. She practically made the younger girl her fag. It was "Marjorie, do this" and "Marjorie, fetch that," from the beginning of term till the end. And the same relationship had continued after they left school, though necessarily not to the same extent.

Then quite suddenly Mr. Blackton lost most of his money, and for a while Cynthia had debated whether to ask Marjorie to come as her companion. As far as she was capable of affection for anybody she was fond of her, but having given the matter due consideration she had come to the conclusion that an older woman would be more suitable from every point of view. And so she dismissed Marjorie from her scheme of things, as was her custom when a person was no longer of use to her. Now she proposed to bring her back temporarily into that scheme: a proposal which met with the other girl's delighted approval as soon as she heard of it.

And so, some three weeks later the two of them stepped into the boat train at Waterloo bound for Southampton. The most luxurious cabin in the *S.S. Ortolan*, 12,000 tons, of the Union Steamship Line had been engaged: a number of immaculately-clothed young men, who had pleaded in vain to be allowed to accompany them as far as the ship, clustered round the carriage door.

"Now you must all promise to be good while I am away," said Cynthia impartially. "And when I come back in June...."

It was at that moment that the train began to move, but she managed that every member of the group should think that her unfinished sentence was addressed to him personally.

"Thank God that's over, my dear" she said languidly. "What a bore they are. Do give me my rug, will you?"

She looked up with a sudden frown: a man was standing in the door leading into the corridor. Moreover he seemed to be on the point of depositing a weather-beaten suit-case on one of the spare seats.

"This carriage is engaged," she remarked haughtily.

The man turned round with a smile.

"Am I to understand," he said, "that you are the proud possessor of six tickets? I'm really very sorry but this is the only compartment in the train that isn't full."

"I gave orders that I required a carriage to myself," she said with her most freezing look.

"Dear me," he answered politely. "If it wasn't for the fact that you can't give orders for anything of the sort, I should say that someone had blundered. However, what would you like me to do? Stand in the corridor, or go into the guard's van?"

"If you persist in intruding," she said icily, "I would prefer that you do so in silence."

"Why— sure," he remarked genially. "Doubtless we shall have lots of time for conversation before we get to the Cape."

He buried himself behind a newspaper, leaving Cynthia gasping. The Cape? Was this odious mortal going to the Cape with her? True he was young, and of pleasing appearance, but he must clearly be put in his place and punished. And she was an adept at doing both.

It was at that moment that she got her second shock. Marjorie was undoubtedly smiling at the man behind her magazine; the man was grinning at Marjorie behind his paper. She knew it: she had done it so often herself with other men.

But what she could do was one thing: what Marjorie could do was quite another. For her companion and a strange man to indulge in mutual smiles at her expense was a state of affairs not to be tolerated for an instant. And the small fact that she was completely wrong— that all that had happened was, that Marjorie suddenly seeing him grinning at her had involuntarily smiled back just because it was good to be alive— cut no ice. She wouldn't have believed it anyhow; but then Cynthia Delmorton's joy in living lay, not in just life but merely in what she could get out of it.

They were running through Eastleigh when the man spoke again. Five times during the journey had Marjorie got up to do something for Cynthia— and three out of the five times she could far more easily have done it for herself. And five times during the journey had an amused and faintly contemptuous glint come into the man's eyes. But he remained buried behind his paper until the train began to slacken, when he folded it up.

"Would you care to sit at my table," he asked gravely. "I'm the second officer, and I generally manage to collect a cheery bunch."

For a moment Cynthia stared at him speechlessly; the second officer....

"Surprised at my not being on board, I suppose," he went on cheerfully. "Pretty exceptional, I agree. But the old man is a sportsman, and my business was sudden and urgent. However, would you like me to fix it up about the table?"

"I think it would be very nice," said Cynthia quietly, and Marjorie glanced at her in some trepidation. She knew that tone of old— knew what it portended. She knew that before the end of the voyage this poor young man was going to wish he had never been born. And it was a shame....

But she couldn't warn him, and he rushed into the trap.

"Splendid. I'll arrange it. But I warn you from what I hear we're going to have it a bit choppy as far as Madeira."

They did: and Marjorie for the first time began to see Cynthia in her true light. She was loyal clean through: she tried to make excuses— but the plain fact emerged that for selfishness her employer was in a class by herself. True, she

was ill— slightly, for a couple of days; but until they anchored off Funchal Cynthia treated her and the stewardess like a couple of slaves. Then she was graciously pleased to emerge from her cabin, and show herself for the first time to the admiring gaze of her fellow passengers.

"Well, well, how are you?"

A cheerful voice hailed the lovely invalid, and she looked up from her deck chair to see their travelling companion. He looked different in uniform; in fact honesty compelled her to admit that he looked extremely nice in uniform. So she gave him one of her most bewitching smiles, and confessed that she felt a little better.

"Good," he cried. "We shall be dancing to-night, and you must play a bit of deck tennis. Miss Blackton is a nailer at it."

He moved off and she watched him cursing four Portuguese lace vendors for blocking the gangway— watched him through narrowed eyes. How that young man was going to suffer before she'd finished with him! And what a lucky thing it was that he was really quite presentable; it made things so much pleasanter for her.

"My dear! that is Cynthia Delmorton. You must have seen her pictures in the *Tatler* and *Sketch*."

The words carried to her during a sudden lull in the raucous babel around her, and a sense of pleasant well-being stole over her. Yes; she was Cynthia Delmorton... And the sun was shining, and the water was blue, and the brown-skinned boys diving off the deck for threepenny bits thrown into the water amused her. Also there was an extremely bumptious and conceited young man to punish. She smiled slightly to herself... Fancy wasting her time on an officer in the Merchant Service. Still, she would do it quickly, and then turn to worthier game.

"Mr. Fraser," she called gently as he passed— Marjorie had found out his name— "won't you come and cheer me up? Besides I want to apologize. I'm afraid I was rather rude to you in the train."

"Rude!" he laughed. "Not a bit. You were just natural. Sorry I can't stop now, but I've got to see a man about a dog in the smoking room. You shall apologize at lunch... You're sitting next to me."

And with that he was gone leaving Cynthia Delmorton utterly speechless. Never in the course of her life had any man spoken to her like that before. "See a man about a dog in the smoking room." When she had invited him to sit by her... "Not rude: only natural." Was the man mad?

He certainly showed no signs of insanity at lunch. He included her breezily in the conversation; chaffed Marjorie Blackton, who had been ashore and done the time-honoured toboggan trip over the cobbles from Terreiro da Lucta, and finally challenged her to a game of deck quoits later on.

"When you're a little stronger," he remarked, "you must play tennis."

And there was a twinkle in his eyes as he spoke, the sort of twinkle a parent might have when dealing with a fractious child.

And so it went on. The trouble about the man was that he seemed impervious to snubs. He had a hide like a rhinoceros; delicate satire flew off him like water off a duck's back. Of course he missed the point of it all— that was the reason. Completely lacking in breeding, he was unable to understand her subtle irony.

And Marjorie, who understood it only too well, felt her heart grow sick within her. At last her final delusions about Cynthia were gone. Coming out to Madeira they had began to totter; by the time they were crossing the line the crash was complete. Thank Heavens! Jim Fraser didn't appreciate the position of affairs: that was her only compensation.

And then one evening something occurred which brought her up with a start. She was sitting out by herself on the boat deck, in the shadow of one of the funnels, when two people passed her. They didn't see her, but she recognized them at once... They paused between two of the boats, not three yards away from her, and she heard Cynthia's voice.

"You really are the most attractive man, Jim."

Marjorie could have screamed. It was too cruel. Surely, surely she needn't carry her vindictiveness to such a point as that. The poor devil had done her no harm: she cared not the snap of a finger about him. But just to gratify her petty spite, she was going to lead him on— and then shake with laughter in his face. Marjorie half rose; then with a little gasp that was half a sob she crouched back again. For Cynthia was in his arms.

With a sick numbness she watched him kiss her: heard Cynthia's low triumphant laugh: heard her whispered "Darling."

Then she was gone, leaving him standing by the boats. For a second she paused by the top of the companion, and her words floated back— "There is always to-morrow."

For a little while he stood there; then suddenly with a little start he saw Marjorie. He came over to her slowly, and sat down beside her.

"You saw," he said quietly. "I'm sorry."

"So am I," she answered gravely. "Very sorry. Oh! Mr. Fraser," she went on impulsively, "don't think me impertinent and foolish. But I— oh! it's so difficult to say."

He was staring at her steadily, and she went stumbling on bravely.

"You see— I know Cynthia. And I don't want to be disloyal to her— after all, she's paying everything for me. But please, please be careful. She's— she's different to most girls. She's been spoilt, I suppose— and she doesn't mean to be cruel."

"No," he agreed quietly. "It's just natural."

But she hardly heard.

"She just plays with men... And then she turns them down without a thought. Can't you see— oh! can't you see? I don't want to hurt your feelings, but you must realize that she has the world at her feet, and... and...."

"And therefore is hardly likely to pay serious attention to the second officer of the good ship *Ortolan*," he said, lighting a cigarette.

She looked at him surprised: he seemed singularly calm about it.

"That's why I am so sorry you saw," he concluded.

"But I don't want you to be hurt," she cried. "And you will be."

"Why don't you want me to be hurt," he said gently.

"Oh! because... Of course, I don't. I hate to see anybody hurt."

"You dear! You dear girl." And now she was staring at him in genuine amazement, and dimly realizing that both her hands were in his. "I'm only sorry you saw it, Marjorie, because I can't now do what I would like to. At least not at this moment."

And then he too was gone, and after a while Marjorie got up a little stiffly and went below. What on earth had he meant?

"My dear," said Cynthia, "too humorous! Our worthy pachyderm has kissed me. Up on the boat deck."

"I saw you," she answered dully. "Oh! Cynthia— can't you leave him alone?"

"What on earth do you mean?" cried the other. And then she suddenly burst into a peal of laughter. "Why I believe you're in love with him yourself."

"I am," said Marjorie gravely, and started to undress.

Of course this was too much of a scream altogether: it really added relish to the jest. That Marjorie— demure little Marjorie— should have fallen in love with the second officer was too exquisite.

"My dear," she cried, "but this is Romance with a capital R. Does he reciprocate your feelings?"

"Of course he doesn't," answered the other flushing. "And Cynthia— you won't say anything, will you?"

"My dear— trust me. Perish the thought that I should spoil love's young dream. But I must insist on being allowed to deal with the dear man just once. I'll let him down mildly, I promise you, but he has been exceedingly rude to me— and he's got to take his gruel like a good boy."

"But I'm sure he didn't mean it, Cynthia," said Marjorie miserably.

"Then he's got to learn. And anyway, my dear," she went on with a smile, "you have the remedy in your own hands. Get him to take *you* up on the boat deck to-morrow night."

"You know I don't stand a chance if you're about," said Marjorie simply. "Anyway I'm nothing to him. But I don't think you're playing the game. He's— he's not the type of man... It's not fair to a man like him, Cynthia: it's not fair."

"Then he had better not go and see people about dogs, my dear, when I've asked him to come and talk to me," said the other softly. "I don't like men who do that. Besides he must be trained— if you're going to marry him."

She got into her bunk and opened a book, and with a little shiver, though the night was tropical, Marjorie followed her example. And when at last she did fall asleep, she got no rest. For she dreamed without cessation— dreams in which she saw Cynthia, gloating and devilish, and a white-faced sobbing man— a man she tried to comfort, but who always turned away from her.

It was the day after that a piece of information arrived in the *Wireless Bulletin*, which for nearly six hours annoyed Cynthia thoroughly. Marjorie saw it first, just as she was going in to breakfast, and thought no more about it. The news that the Earl of Axminster had been killed in a motor accident interested her but little more than the fact that the French exchange was 129.47. It was otherwise with Cynthia. Not that the death of that well-known and sporting nobleman at the early age of fifty-six distressed her in the slightest, but merely because it made her wish that she had acted otherwise. And it is annoying when one cannot rectify a mistake. She might now have been the Countess of Axminster. And she wasn't. Which was a distressing thought— most distressing. Had not Hedderton— his eldest son— sat in her pocket for a complete season? In fact she had almost— but not quite— become Viscountess Hedderton. And if she had, Hedderton would not have gone his fool journey to Central Africa, picked up some horrible tropical disease and died. Undoubtedly most annoying.

She recalled that last evening perfectly. She had known he was coming for her answer, and during the afternoon she had finally made up her mind— balancing the points for and against. And the result had been against. Hedderton's father, she had decided, was more than likely to live another thirty years, and that was too long to wait even for one of the oldest titles in England. The fact that he was utterly infatuated with her was his misfortune and not her fault. And so without the smallest tinge of compunction she turned him down. She could see him now— white-faced and stammering... He couldn't quite understand: he'd been so sure... He had kissed her so often... And she had laughed softly.

"My dear man," she had said, "if I married all the men who have kissed me, I'd want an hotel to stow them in."

And he had failed to see the cheapness of the remark because, poor devil, he was still infatuated. Instead he had gone off to Africa and died. Not four months previously... Most annoying... In fact when she went in to lunch she was feeling thoroughly irritable.

Jim Fraser was already there, and he bowed to her gravely. He was looking strained about the eyes, she noticed: all through lunch he hardly spoke. Hooked already: hardly worth powder and shot. Still in her present mood she felt like making someone suffer, so she gave him her sweetest and most alluring smile.

"I'm feeling terribly depressed," she murmured. "Poor Lord Axminster is dead. Such a charming man."

A woman opposite looked at her with interest.

"Of course you knew him well, Miss Delmorton."

"Naturally," remarked Cynthia languidly. "You see, Hedderton and I were very great friends."

Marjorie squirmed, and when Jim Fraser leaned forward with a puzzled frown she could have screamed. She guessed what was coming.

"Hedderton," he said. "I don't quite follow."

"Viscount Hedderton," she explained politely. "Axminster's son. They have different names, you know."

"I see," he answered. "I suppose that is done to make it harder."

She smiled, and glanced round the table.

"What funny ideas you have, Mr. Fraser. Yes— Hedderton died in Africa."

"And who is the heir?" asked someone.

"I really don't know," she answered. "He had no brothers. There was a cousin of sorts, I believe."

She relapsed suddenly into silence; what was it Hedderton had said on that point? It was a cousin— a very charming fellow, but a rolling stone. Unmarried. Of course he might be impossible, but it was worth while bearing in mind against her return to London. She would write Aunt Hester a letter from Cape Town telling her to make enquiries... It would be funny if, after all, she did pull it off. The thought of it put her in quite a good temper again.

"Don't forget you promised to show me the Southern Cross to-night, Mr. Fraser," she said as he rose from his seat.

"Am I likely to," he answered fervently.

And across the table her eyes met Marjorie's mockingly. Really life wasn't so bad after all: it had its humorous side.

But it was a side that was taxed to the uttermost that evening. The pachyderm was so terribly intense and gauche. And he would persist in harking back to Lord Axminster's death.

"It must be wonderful," he said humbly, "to know all those people who are just names to us, as intimately as you do."

He was holding her hand at the time, and gazing at her adoringly.

"I very nearly married Hedderton," she said softly. "But I'm glad I didn't— now."

"And if you had," he puzzled it out, "you would be the— the Earless of Axminster."

She gave a delighted gurgle of laughter.

"Countess," she corrected him. "But then, you see— the poor fellow is dead."

"But I'm sure he wouldn't have gone to Africa if you had married him," he said gravely.

"Well, if he hadn't and was alive, and I had married him— then I should be the Earless of Axminster. You delicious person."

"And instead of that," he cried eagerly, "you're going to be..."

Really, she'd die of suppressed laughter in a second. The pachyderm was on the verge of proposing: she looked round to see if by any chance Marjorie was about. This was going to be a thing too good to be missed.

"What am I going to be?" she whispered.

"Cynthia— wouldn't you rather be my wife than the Countess of Axminster?"

That finished it: self-control could stand it no longer. She burst into a peal of laughter: then she pulled herself together. The thing had become a bore; so she'd punish the pachyderm now and finish with it.

"This," she said as soon as she had recovered herself sufficiently to speak, "is the funniest thing that has ever occurred to me. My poor dear young man, are you mad? Do you really imagine, even for one second, that I should marry you?" Laughter again overcame her.

"But you deserved a little lesson, you know. As a matter of fact I intended to give you a longer one, but I couldn't help laughing. You were so supremely ridiculous."

Once more she began to shake.

"No, Mr. Fraser, I am afraid that I must decline the riotous future you offer me. I feel it would be too much for my nerves. But as a reward for having made me laugh, I'll tell you a secret. Put the excellent alternative you gave me before Marjorie... Not that the poor dear is ever likely to be Countess of anything, but still...."

She rose with a smile— a smile which suddenly faded from her face. For this uncouth boor was lying back in his deck chair, literally holding his sides.

"Rich," he almost sobbed. "Not to say ripe and fruity. You're quite right, my dear woman; we've hurried matters. This jest would have stood another three days."

"What on earth do you mean?" she said.

And then he, too, rose to his feet, and stood facing her.

"Listen to me, Cynthia Delmorton," he said quietly. "In the course of my wanderings round the globe I've met some pretty rotten women. You're just about the rottenest."

"How dare you?"

In her stunned rage she could hardly get the words out.

"You're going to hear one or two home truths now," he went on calmly. "You're a calculating, mercenary snob— and you killed Hedderton as surely as if you'd shot him yourself. Only no jury, unfortunately, could convict you. I happened to see him the night before he left for Africa, poor devil."

"Will you kindly take me straight to the captain," she said icily. "I can only conclude that you're drunk, and I wish to make a complaint."

"Certainly," he answered. "What are you going to tell him? That I was drunk last night, too— when I kissed you?"

For a moment or two she stared at him white and rigid with rage. He had got her, and she knew it: this common man had beaten her at her own game. Why he had done it was beyond her: her brain was still too dazed at the sudden turning of the tables to think clearly.

"You set out to teach me a lesson." He was speaking again. "I fully intended that you should. Your only miscalculation was that I had already determined to teach *you* one— one that you richly deserved. But I admit that I never even dreamed that the lesson would prove quite so subtly successful until this morning. And I'm profoundly sorry it has. I was very fond of my uncle."

"Your uncle," she stammered. "What do you mean?"

"There was a cousin of sorts, I believe," he said gravely. "There was, and— is. And he happens to be the second officer of the *Ortolan*."

"You mean," she almost screamed, "that you're Lord Axminster?"

"Precisely," he answered. "And since you have mercifully refused my invitation to become my Earless, I think we might conclude the interview. You see I want to follow your advice, and put the alternative I gave you in front of Marjorie... Er— good-night. Oh! and the captain's cabin is the fourth from this end... It's the big one... And incidentally— one other small point. Had I not been perfectly certain that you didn't know who I was, I should never have risked proposing. The danger of your acceptance would have been too great. Still it was kind of you to explain about us having different names."

A moment later he was alone: Cynthia Delmorton still retained sufficient thinking capacity to realize that, if she was going to have hysterics, her cabin was the most suitable place. For a while he stood looking after her: then half consciously he turned and stared over the water towards Africa.

"Yes, old man," he muttered, "she killed you. And I loved you. Life's a funny thing."

Then with a faint smile on his lips, he strolled down to the main deck. They were dancing, and he stood in the smoking-room door watching. Life, indeed, was a funny thing. And then he saw her, coming towards him with a startled look on her face.

"What on earth has happened to Cynthia?" she cried. "She's in the most extraordinary condition."

"Biting the bed clothes," he said lazily. "Splendid. I asked her a question, you see, and she got the answer wrong. I asked her if she would sooner be my wife or Countess of Axminster."

"Jim— you proposed. But I don't understand. Did she refuse you?"

"My dear," he cried, "you don't suppose I'd be as pleased as I am if she'd accepted me. And now I want to ask you the same question...."

And then suddenly he grew serious.

"Marjorie— Marjorie darling, come up on the boat deck. I don't make a hobby of this, my dear— and there's a lot you don't understand. But I haven't got time to explain it to you now— not until you've answered that question. Will you marry me?"

"Jim— you're mad," she whispered. "And you can't propose in the smoking-room."

"Can't I? I've just done it. But come up above and I'll do it again."

And she went. And she stayed. And an hour later he still hadn't explained; explanations are tedious things. In fact it wasn't until the following morning that she thought about the explanation, and then for a while she couldn't grasp it.

For Jim wasn't at breakfast, and a note lay on her plate. She tore open the envelope, and read the contents.

Second Officer Jim Fraser presents his compliments to the future Countess of Axminster, and trusts that the beautiful Miss Delmorton is not still biting the bedclothes. He further solicits her company at the eleven o'clock issue of beef tea.

Jim.

P.S. You're an adorable darling.

———————————

6: The Man at Solitaria

Geik Turner

fl 1890s

The Black Cat April 1896

Nothing is known of this author other than handful of short stories in The Black Cat *magazine beween 1896-1899.*

SOLITARIA will be found indicated on the map by a circle half as large as that which represents Chicago. That is Solitaria as it is advertised. In reality it consists of a side-track and watering tank on the Great Western Railroad, and a little wooden box opposite, courteously called a station, which is inhabited by a man whose aim in life is to watch the side-track and telegraph along the line how it is occupied at various hours of the day and night. Just to the east the Great Western makes its only distinct curve for miles through a little piece of woods. To the west it stretches straight across the face of Indiana, mottled with a million half-burned stumps, and cut into big squares by incalculable miles of rail fence.

The man at Solitaria got to thinking it over—he had a great deal of time to do this— and he made up his mind that matters were going all wrong. In the first place, he thought he ought to be allowed more than twenty-five dollars a month for his services, and that, considering he had been running Solitaria alone for fifteen years, they ought to give him an assistant to talk to—to talk to and to allow him an occasional chance to sleep. These were, of course, entirely personal matters. But finally he made up his mind the whole thing was run wrong. It stood to reason; they never gave it any rest. Day after day and night after night they had sent freight trains and express trains, and express trains and freight trains chasing each other along the road till they had got it so it was all going to break down pretty soon,— the road, and the cars, and the men, and he himself— especially he himself; he saw that plainly. They were all going to stop short, one of these days, and fly to pieces.

Now, take himself, for instance: was it right that they should have kept running their trains by his door twenty-four hours out of the day, and 365 days a year, for fifteen years, disturbing him and depriving him of what little sleep belonged to him? Yet all night long they persisted in sending their freights jarring and clanking by and their express trains shrieking and making up time along the level grade. He got so he knew those whistles by name—he could hear them shriek for miles and miles in either direction—coming nearer and nearer, till the train rushed by in a cloud of yellow light. Then the next one came. It was bad enough at that, but when they got to calling him names it was more than he could bear.

Besides, there was the electricity those trains kept making and storing up in his station, faster than he could ever hope to get rid of it. It was taking his life away. He went out and watched the wheels of the freight trains crunching, and grinding, and squealing by, and he could see it just rolling off and running into the station. Then nights it came stealing over him, and numbing him, just as soon as he tried to get a little sleep, which, heaven knew, he was entitled to. Anybody knows that trains running by like that, day and night, store up more electricity in a station than a man can bear, especially if he is all alone. But they paid no attention to that. He often thought he would write to the division superintendent, who had been a telegraph operator himself, and ought to think of such things, and tell him to stop it. But this plan he never carried out; he had asked for things before.

Now, whatever might be said, no one could accuse the Man at Solitaria of not giving the matter sufficient thought. For months during the summer he sat out on the platform of his box, in the baking sun daytimes, and through the close, airless Indiana nights, looking down the tracks between train times, and considering the question. He saw clearly they did not recognize the power and importance of the man they were wronging. He knew perfectly well, for instance, that any time he chose he could turn the switch to the side-track and stand an express train on its head in the ditch. That would be fascinating, certainly. Indeed, he considered the proposal seriously for a number of weeks, and figured carefully on what train he would better take; but finally thought better of this plan, too. It would only stop one train, which wasn't what he wanted at all. The Man at Solitaria felt the responsibility of his position; he decided to run the whole railroad himself.

Of course, he recognized that there would be opposition to this scheme on the part of the president and directors of the road, and the division superintendent,— especially the superintendent,— the Man knew the division superintendent. But that railroad must be run right. As a first step in that direction the Man saved up money and laid in a large supply of canned meats; he also secured two forty-four caliber revolvers and half a dozen boxes of cartridges.

Of course, the management of the Great Western Railroad didn't know what was going on in the mind of the Man— especially as he carried on most of his communication with human beings by telegraph. It didn't care much, either, as long as he kept awake eighteen hours a day and watched the side-track and told them how it was occupied. Consequently, no one knew of his intention of operating the road, and no one knew or probably ever will know why he chose such an unpleasant day for starting it.

It wasn't unpleasant in the sense that it was rainy— it was merely hot. Along down the track the heat rose in great zigzags, where the yellow sun beat down

and baked a crust over the surface of Indiana. There was not a breeze in the air, not a sound except the occasional call of a quail from some distant rail fence, or the cry of a seventeen-year locust in a dead tree. On the sunny side of the station at Solitaria the thermometer took its stand at 118 degrees, and refused to be moved, and the air was a semi-solid mass of cinders.

The Man at Solitaria made up his mind he would shut down his railroad at six o'clock. He laid in a good supply of water and loaded up his revolvers; then he shut up the station and made a kind of barricade of old ties around his telegraph instrument, and sat down inside and waited.

No. 64, the fast freight from the West, was due at 6.10 o'clock to draw up on the siding. No. 24, the fast express from the East, was due at 6.17. At 6.03 the Man telegraphed the station east that the freight was on the side-track and the main line was clear. The freight was not yet in sight. At 6.13 it reached the station, hurrying to make up lost time, and ran off the track; some one had turned the switch half way. The big engine jumped the rails, crashed up on the station platform, and stopped, without being overturned; three cars went off with it. The brakemen came running up along the train, and the engineer and fireman climbed down out of the cab, swearing and looking for the operator. Just then the express could be heard rushing along from the east, and two brakemen started up the track to head it off, on the dead run. At 6.16 the train appeared in sight. When she came around the curve and saw the freight she just stiffened right out and slid. It wasn't quite soon enough, however. She struck the freight cars just before she came to a stop, smashing a cylinder and nearly jerking the heads off the passengers. All the windows and doors of the coaches flew open with a slam, and the train hands and passengers began to swarm out like hornets out of a hornets' nest. The trainmen started forward on the run to see what was the matter and to look up the operator and find out what he was trying to do.

The Man opened a window in front of the station, with a revolver in his hand, and told them that what he was trying to do was none of their business. He was operating this damned road now, and he wanted them to understand it. Besides, he didn't want them on his platform. By way of emphasis, he fired a couple of shots as close to their feet as he could without hitting them. They got off, and he shut down the window with a bang. Somebody went around and tried a window in the rear, and he fired two shots through the glass. It was just as well they didn't try it again, for he would have nailed them the next time.

Then the trainmen went off to a respectful distance and discussed the situation, and the passengers retreated behind the coaches. The Man sat down and telegraphed that the express had gone by, but that No. 64 had a hot box on the side-track, which might keep it there for some time, so that No. 31, the westbound freight, had better be sent along. He would hold No. 64 for it. So No.

31 came along. It nearly paralyzed the passengers of the express train when they heard it on the line, but the brakemen stopped it all right in time to prevent it from landing on the back of the coaches.

By this time the station at Solitaria presented an unwonted and active scene. Three trains were huddled up around the place, two of them tangled together in a heap. The engine of No. 64 stood up inquiringly on the station platform, like a big dog waiting to be let in. The trainmen and the passengers still stood around and discussed ways and means and swore at the Man and the infernal heat. Several times they had tried to approach the Man, but the Man at Solitaria was unapproachable. A big passenger from the West had declared he would go up, anyway, as a little thing like that had a comparatively mild effect on his nerves, and a small passenger from the East had tried the effect of kind words and moral suasion; but the big six-shooters of the Man had an equally discouraging effect on both.

In fact, the exhilaration of running a railroad was beginning to exercise a strange fascination on the Man at Solitaria. This was only natural, after all. The way he ran things was a good deal like firing railroad trains at a mark, with the certainty of hitting it, if nobody interfered. He recognized, however, that there was need of great discretion and intelligence in the matter. The train despatcher was already making the telegraph instrument chatter like a sewing-machine, asking the station to the west what had become of the express, which, of course, the station west didn't know.

The Man sent word down the line that a brakeman had come into the station and said there was a big wreck at a culvert three miles west. It was a bad wreck, with a great many killed, and the wrecking train should be sent at once. The train could run right by his station to the place, as the line was clear. In fifteen minutes the wrecking train was drawing out of the Centerville station, seventeen miles east, with all the doctors that could be raised in the vicinity, and coming down the line sixty miles an hour in a halo of hot cinders. If it hadn't been for a line of brakemen stationed up above the curve, there would have been a great opening for young doctors in Centerville. As it was, the train stopped so short on the curve that the front trucks of the engine ran off and the one passenger coach was jolted full of a mixture of frightened doctors and medicine vials.

By this time the Man had been operating the road for an hour and a half, and the excitement of the thing was growing intense, especially among the disgruntled officials he had superseded. Trains were beginning to stack up at the stations east and west, waiting for developments, and the train despatcher was beating such a devil's tattoo on his instrument, trying to find out what was going on, anyhow, that the Man used up a great deal of patience and ingenuity trying to shoot him. As for the division superintendent, who had come on the wrecking

train, his hair was rapidly growing white. But, as long as he could not effect a compromise with the Man, there was nothing he could do. The Man was engaged at present furnishing information on Solitaria to the outside world, and it was futile to try to conceive what his rich imagination would prompt him to do next. On the other hand, the freight engine on one side and the engine of the wrecker on the other cooped up the only able engine on the track, and made advance or retreat impossible as long as the wrecker couldn't turn to and haul itself up on the track. But the Man refused to compromise. The division superintendent finally gave it up and started overland for the next telegraph station, ten miles away.

In the meanwhile matters were coming to a desperate crisis in the parade before the station at Solitaria. It was growing dark. Under the circumstances there was cause for excitement, although there was a line of brakemen, armed with lanterns, stretched out half a mile either way. It was generally agreed that the lamps in the cars should be left unlighted in deference to the opinion of the women, who thought lights would afford too good a mark, supposing the Man should decide to turn his attention to a little target practise. The engineers and express messengers lit theirs, however, and the headlights on the two middle engines were started, and threw a yellow glare on the cars before them. The Man paid no attention to matters of this kind, so long as he saw they did not interfere with his plans for operating his road.

About this time a couple of brakemen put their heads together and, getting in back of the tender of the express engine, began to fire chunks of coal through the window at the Man when he was telegraphing. They figured that it would make the Man mad and that he might exhaust his ammunition upon the tender. It did set him going for awhile, and the sound of smashing glass, the crack of the revolver, and the spat of the bullets up against the tender roused considerable interest, especially among the women. Then the Man made up his mind not to shoot any more; they couldn't do him much harm, anyway, from behind the tender, and he decided to devote no more of his official time to them. So they knew no more about his supply of ammunition than before. Besides, the thing was beginning to be too much for the women in the cars, who got an idea from the noise that something was going on or was about to, and the conductors called the brakemen off. They were afraid they might get the Man too much excited.

As it got darker, however, the ideas of the men on the outside began to crystalize. About everything possible had been tried and failed. At 8.30 o'clock a determined minority decided to go gunning for the Man. It seemed a rather inhuman thing to do, but there was no knowing what was going to turn up. It was really a case of self-defense. Accordingly a messenger was sent across the fields to a farmhouse for a shotgun.

At this time a ridiculous thing happened. The Man went to sleep. This seems incredible until it is remembered that he had been up very late the night before arranging the schedule for his road. As for the men on the outside, they thought at first he was merely leaning forward over his instrument; then some one suggested that he might be asleep, but the crowd was against him, the popular theory being that he was probably playing some trick. The beams of one of the headlights streamed in the front window of the station and showed him very plainly. He made an interesting, if not entirely charming picture in the yellow light— especially his white face and his straggly black hair. If he had made the slightest move the crowd would have seen it; but he didn't. So after he had lain perfectly still for ten minutes many said that they were comfortably sure that he was really asleep. A young physician who watched him awhile said they couldn't wake him with a club— it was one of the peculiar symptoms of what ailed him— and suggested that now was the golden opportunity for those whose business it was, to gather him in without the slightest danger to themselves. There was a long and unanimous silence, during which the theory of subterfuge on the part of the Man gained ground. Finally the doctor said he would be one of two men to go in after him; a freight brakeman said he would be the other. They went to the rear of the station and opened a catch in a window where a piece of coal had broken out a light, raised the sash, and crawled in. The crowd kept watch of the Man, prepared to yell if he stirred. But he didn't stir. The two men crawled up behind the barricade, around in front where the headlight streamed in and jumped. Then the crowd came through the front windows, and the Man was gathered in.

Now this is the plain and unvarnished tale of how the Man at Solitaria ran the Great Western Road. There is no probability that he will resume the management. Nevertheless he inaugurated one improvement for which the traveling public should be grateful. The new Man at Solitaria has an assistant.

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7: Clarimonde

Theophile Gautier

1811-1872

Chronique de Paris, June 23 & 26, 1836 (French)

Weird Tales, Feb 1928

Translated by Lafcadio Hearn, 1850-1904; French title *le Morte Amoureuse*

BROTHER, you ask me if I have ever loved. Yes. My story is a strange and terrible one; and though I am sixty-six years of age, I scarcely dare even now to disturb the ashes of that memory. To you I can refuse nothing; but I should not relate such a tale to any less experienced mind. So strange were the circumstances of my story that I can scarcely believe myself to have ever actually been a party to them. For more than three years I remained the victim of a most singular and diabolical illusion. Poor country priest though I was, I led every night in a dream— would to God it had been all a dream!— a most worldly life, a damning life, a life of Sardanapalus. One single look too freely cast upon a woman well-nigh caused me to lose my soul; but finally by the grace of God and the assistance of my patron saint I succeeded in casting out the evil spirit that possessed me. My daily life was long interwoven with a nocturnal life of a totally different character. By day I was a priest of the Lord, occupied with prayer and sacred things; by night, from the instant that I closed my eyes I became a young nobleman, a fine connoisseur in women, dogs and horses; gambling, drinking, and blaspheming; and when I awoke at early daybreak it seemed to me, on the other hand, that I had been sleeping, and had only dreamed that I was a priest. Of this somnambulistic life there now remains to me only the recollection of certain scenes and words which I can not banish from my memory; but although I never actually left the walls of my presbytery, one would think to hear me speak that I were a man who, weary of all worldly pleasures, had become a religious, seeking to end a tempestuous life in the service of God, rather than a humble seminarist who has grown old in this obscure curacy, situated in the depths of the woods and even isolated from the life of the century.

Yes, I have loved as none in the world ever loved— with an insensate and furious passion— so violent that I am astonished it did not cause my heart to burst asunder. Ah, what nights— what nights!

FROM my earliest childhood I had felt a vocation to the priesthood, so that all my studies were directed with that idea in view. Up to the age of twenty-four my life had been only a prolonged novitiate. Having completed my course of theology I successively received all the minor orders, and my superiors judged

me worthy, despite my youth, to pass the last awful degree. My ordination was fixed for Easter week.

I had never gone into the world. My world was confined by the walls of the college and the seminary. I knew in a vague sort of a way that there was something called Woman, but I never permitted my thoughts to dwell on such a subject, and I lived in a state of perfect innocence. Twice a year only I saw my infirm and aged mother, and in those visits were comprised my sole relations with the outer world.

I regretted nothing; I felt not the least hesitation at taking the last irrevocable step; I was filled with joy and impatience. Never did a betrothed lover count the slow hours with more feverish ardor; I slept only to dream that I was saying mass; I believed there could be nothing in the world more delightful than to be a priest; I would have refused to be a king or a poet in preference. My ambition could conceive of no loftier aim.

I tell you this in order to show you that what happened to me could not have happened in the natural order of things, and to enable you to understand that I was the victim of an inexplicable fascination.

At last the great day came. I walked to the church with a step so light that I fancied myself sustained in air, or that I had wings upon my shoulders. I believed myself an angel, and wondered at the somber and thoughtful faces of my companions, for there were several of us. I had passed all the night in prayer, and was in a condition well nigh bordering on ecstasy. The bishop, a venerable old man, seemed to me God the Father leaning over His eternity, and I beheld heaven through the vault of the temple.

You well know the details of that ceremony—the benediction, the communion under both forms, the anointing of the palms of the hands with the Oil of Catechumens, and then the holy sacrifice offered in concert with the bishop.

Ah, truly spake Job when he declared that the imprudent man is one who hath not made a covenant with his eyes! I accidentally lifted my head, which until then I had kept down, and beheld before me, so close that it seemed I could have touched her— although she was actually a considerable distance from me and on the farther side of the sanctuary railing— a young woman of extraordinary beauty and attired with royal magnificence. It seemed as though scales had suddenly fallen from my eyes. I felt like a blind man who unexpectedly recovers his sight. The bishop, so radiantly glorious but an instant before, suddenly vanished away, the tapers paled upon their golden candlesticks like stars in the dawn, and a vast darkness seemed to fill the whole church. The charming creature appeared in bright relief against the background of that darkness, like some angelic revelation. She seemed herself radiant, and radiating light rather than receiving it.

I lowered my eyelids, firmly resolved not to open them again, that I might not be influenced by external objects, for distraction had gradually taken possession of me until I hardly knew what I was doing.

In another minute, nevertheless, I reopened my eyes, for through my eyelashes I still beheld her all sparkling with prismatic colors, and surrounded with such a penumbra as one beholds in gazing at the sun.

OH, how beautiful she was! The greatest painters, who followed ideal beauty into heaven itself, and thence brought back to earth the true portrait of the Madonna, never in their delineations even approached that wildly beautiful reality which I saw before me. Neither the verses of the poet nor the palette of the artist could convey any conception of her. She was rather tall, with a form and bearing of a goddess. Her hair, of a soft blond hue, was parted in the midst and flowed back over her temples in two rivers of rippling gold; she seemed a diademed queen. Her forehead, bluish-white in its transparency, extended its calm breadth above the arches of her eyebrows, which by a strange singularity were almost black, and admirably relieved the effect of sea-green eyes of unsustainable vivacity and brilliancy. What eyes! With a single flash they could have decided a man's destiny. They had a life, a limpidity, an ardor, a humid light which I have never seen in human eyes; they shot forth rays like arrows, which I could distinctly see enter my heart. I know not if the fire which illumined them came from heaven or from hell, but assuredly it came from one or the other. That woman was either an angel or demon, perhaps both. Assuredly she never sprang from the flank of Eve, our common mother. Teeth of the most lustrous pearl gleamed in her ruddy smile, and at every inflection of her lips little dimples appeared in the satiny rose of her adorable cheeks. There was a delicacy and pride in the regal outline of her nostrils bespeaking noble blood. Agate gleams played over the smooth, lustrous skin of her half-bare shoulders, and strings of great blond pearls— almost equal to her neck in beauty of color— descended upon her bosom. Prom time to time she elevated her head with the undulating grace of a startled serpent or peacock, thereby imparting a quivering motion to the high lace ruff which surrounded it like a silver trelliswork.

She wore a robe of orange-red velvet, and from her wide ermine-lined sleeves there peeped forth patrician hands of infinite delicacy, and so ideally transparent that, like the fingers of Aurora, they permitted the light to shine through them.

All these details I can recollect at this moment as plainly as though they were of yesterday, for notwithstanding I was greatly troubled at the time, nothing escaped me; the faintest touch of shading, the little dark speck at the point of the chin, the imperceptible down at the comers of the lips, the velvety

floss upon the brow, the quivering shadows of the eyelashes upon the cheeks—I could notice everything with astonishing lucidity of perception.

And gazing I felt opening within me gates that had until then remained closed; vents long obstructed became all clear, permitting glimpses of unfamiliar perspectives within; life suddenly made itself visible to me under a totally novel aspect. I felt as though I had just been born into a new world and a new order of things. A frightful anguish commenced to torture my heart as with red-hot pincers. Every successive minute seemed to me at once but a second and yet a century. Meanwhile the ceremony was proceeding, and I shortly found myself transported far from that world of which my newly born desires were furiously besieging the entrance. Nevertheless I answered "Yes" when I wished to say "No," though all within me protested against the violence done to my sold by my tongue. Some occult power seemed to force the words from my throat against my will. Thus it is, perhaps, that so many young girls walk to the altar firmly resolved to refuse in a startling manner the husband imposed upon them, and that yet not one ever fulfils her intention. Thus it is, doubtless, that so many poor novices take the veil, though they have resolved to tear it into shreds at the moment when called upon to utter the vows. One dares not thus cause so great a scandal to all present, nor deceive the expectation of so many people. All those eyes, all those wills seem to weigh down upon you like a cope of lead, and, moreover, measures have been so well taken, everything has been so thoroughly arranged beforehand and after a fashion so evidently irrevocable, that the will yields to the weight of circumstances and utterly breaks down.

As the ceremony proceeded the features of the fair unknown changed their expression. Her look had at first been one of caressing tenderness; it changed to an air of disdain and of mortification, as though at not having been able to make itself understood.

With an effort of will sufficient to have uprooted a mountain, I strove to cry out that I would not be a priest, but I could not speak; my tongue seemed nailed to my palate, and I found it impossible to express my will by the least syllable of negation. Though fully awake, I felt like one under the influence of a nightmare, who vainly strives to shriek out the one word upon which life depends.

She seemed conscious of the martyrdom I was undergoing, and, as though to encourage me, she gave me a look replete with divinest promise.

Her eyes were a poem; their every glance was a song.

She said to me:

"If thou wilt be mine, I shall make thee happier than God Himself in His paradise. The angels themselves will be jealous of thee. Tear off that funeral shroud in which thou art about to wrap thyself. I am Beauty, I am Youth, I am

Life. Come to me! Together we shall be Love. Can Jehovah offer thee aught in exchange? Our lives will flow on like a dream, in one eternal kiss.

"Fling forth the wine of that chalice, and thou art free. I will conduct thee to the Unknown Isles. Thou shalt sleep in my bosom upon a bed of massy gold under a silver pavilion, for I love thee and would take thee away from thy God, before Whom so many noble hearts pour forth floods of love which never reach even the steps of His throne!"

These words seemed to float to my ears in a rhythm of infinite sweetness, for her look was actually sonorous, and the utterances of her eyes were re-echoed in the depths of my heart as though living lips had breathed them into my life. I felt myself willing to renounce God, and yet my tongue mechanically fulfilled all the formalities of the ceremony. The fair one gave me another look, so beseeching, so despairing that keen blades seemed to pierce my heart, and I felt my bosom transfixed by more swords than those of Our Lady of Sorrows.

All was consummated; I had become a priest.

Never was deeper anguish painted on human face than upon hers. The maiden who beholds her affianced lover suddenly fall dead at her side, the mother bending over the empty cradle of her child, Eve seated at the threshold of the gate of Paradise, the miser who finds a stone substituted for his stolen treasure, the poet who accidentally permits the only manuscript of his finest work to fall into he fire, could not wear a look so despairing, so inconsolable. AIL the blood had abandoned her charming face, leaving it whiter than marble; her beautiful arms hung lifelessly on either side of her body as though their muscles had suddenly relaxed, and she sought the support of a pillar, for her yielding limbs almost betrayed her. As for myself, I staggered toward the door of the church, livid as death, my forehead bathed with a sweat bloodier than that of Calvary; I felt as though I were being strangled; the vault seemed to have flattened down upon my shoulders, and it seemed to me that my head alone sustained the whole weight of the dome.

As I was about to cross the threshold a hand suddenly caught mine— a woman's hand! I had never till then touched the hand of any woman. It was cold as a serpent's skin, and yet its impress remained upon my wrist, burnt there as though branded by a glowing iron. It was she. "Unhappy man! Unhappy man! What hast thou done?" she exclaimed in a low voice, and immediately, disappeared in the crowd.

The aged bishop passed by. He cast a severe and scrutinizing look upon me. My face presented the wildest aspect imaginable: I blushed and turned pale alternately; dazzling lights flashed before my eyes. A companion took pity on me. He seized my arm and led me out. I could not possibly have found my way back to the seminary unassisted. At the comer of a street, while the young priest's attention was momentarily turned in another direction, a negro page,

fantastically garbed, approached me, and without pausing on his way slipped into my hand a little pocket-book with gold-embroidered comers, at the same time giving me a sign to hide it. I concealed it in my sleeve, and there kept it until I found myself alone in my cell. Then I opened the clasp. There were only two leaves within, bearing the words, "Clarimonde. At the Concini Palace." So little acquainted was I at that time with the things of this world that I had never heard of Clarimonde, celebrated as she was, and I had no idea as to where the Concini Palace was situated. I hazarded a thousand conjectures, each more extravagant than the last; but, in truth, I cared little whether she were a great lady or a courtesan, so that I could but see her once more.

MY LOVE, although the growth of a single hour, had taken imperishable root. I did not even dream of attempting to tear it up, so fully was I convinced such a thing would be impossible. That woman had completely taken possession of me. One look from her had sufficed to change my very nature. She had breathed her will into my life, and I no longer lived in myself, but in her and for her. I gave myself up to a thousand extravagancies. I kissed the place upon my hand which she had touched, and I repeated her name over and over again for hours in succession. I only needed to close my eyes in order to see her distinctly as though she were actually present; and I reiterated to myself the words she had uttered in my ear at the church porch: "Unhappy man! Unhappy man! What hast thou done?" I comprehended at last the full horror of my situation, and the funereal and awful restraints of the state into which I had just entered became clearly revealed to me. To be a priest!— that is, to be chaste, to never love, to observe no distinction of sex or age, to turn from the sight of all beauty, to put out one's own eyes, to hide for ever crouching in the chill shadows of some church or cloister, to visit none but the dying, to watch by unknown corpses, and ever bear about with one the black *soutane* as a garb of mourning for oneself, so that your very dress might serve as a pall for your coffin.

And I felt life rising within me like a subterranean lake, expanding and overflowing; my blood leaped fiercely through my arteries; my long-restrained youth suddenly burst into active being, like the aloe which blooms but once in a hundred years, and then bursts into blossom with a clap of thunder.

What could I do in order to see Clarimonde once more? I had no pretext to offer for desiring to leave the seminary, not knowing any person in the city. I would not even be able to remain there but a short time, and was only waiting my assignment to the curacy which I must thereafter occupy. I tried to remove the bars of the window; but it was at a fearful height from the ground, and I found that as I had no ladder it would be useless to think of escaping thus. And, furthermore, I could descend thence only by night in any event, and afterward

how should I be able to find my way through the inextricable labyrinth of streets? All these difficulties, which to many would have appeared altogether insignificant, were gigantic to me, a poor seminarist who had fallen in love only the day before for the first time, without experience, without money, without attire.

"Ah!" cried I to myself in my blindness, "were I not a priest I could have seen her every day; I might have been her lover, her spouse. Instead of being wrapped in this dismal shroud of mine I would have had garments of silk and velvet, golden chains, a sword, and fair plumes like other handsome young cavaliers. My hair, instead of being dishonored by the tonsure, would flow down upon my neck in waving curls; I would have a fine waxed mustache; I would be a gallant." But one hour passed before an altar, a few hastily articulated words, had for ever cut me off from the number of the living, and I had myself sealed down the stone of my own tomb; I had with my own hand bolted the gate of my prison!

I went to the window. The sky was beautifully blue; the trees had donned their spring robes; nature seemed to be making parade of an ironical joy. The Place was filled with people, some going, others coming; young beaux and young beauties were sauntering in couples toward the groves and gardens; merry youths passed by, cheerily trolling refrains of drinking-songs— it was all a picture of vivacity, life, animation, gayety, which formed a bitter contrast with my mourning and my solitude. On the steps of the gate sat a young mother playing with her child. She kissed its rosy mouth still impearled with drops of milk, and performed, in order to amuse it, a thousand divine little puerilities such as only mothers know how to invent. The father standing at a little distance smiled gently upon the charming group, and with folded arms seemed to hug his joy to his heart. I could not endure that spectacle. I closed the window with violence, and flung myself on my bed, my heart filled with frightful hate and jealousy, and gnawed my fingers and my bedcovers like a tiger that had passed ten days without food.

I know not how long I remained in this condition, but at last, while writhing on the bed in a fit of spasmodic fury, I suddenly perceived the Abbé Sérapion, who was standing erect in the center of the room, watching me attentively. Pilled with shame of myself, I let my head fall upon my breast and covered my face with my hands.

"Romuald, my friend, something very extraordinary is transpiring within you," observed Sérapion, after a few moments' silence; "your conduct is altogether inexplicable. You— always so quiet, so pious, so gentle— you to rage in your cell like a wild beast! Take heed, brother— do not listen to the suggestion of the devil. The Evil Spirit, furious that you have consecrated yourself for ever to the Lord, is prowling around you like a ravening wolf and

making a last effort to obtain possession of you. Instead of allowing yourself to be conquered, my dear Romuald, make to yourself a cuirass of prayers, a buckler of mortifications, and combat the enemy like a valiant man; you will then assuredly overcome him. Virtue must be proved by temptation, and gold comes forth purer from the hands of the assayer. Pear not. Never allow yourself to become discouraged. The most watchful and steadfast souls are at moments liable to such temptation. Pray, fast, meditate, and the Evil Spirit will depart from you."

The words of the Abbé Sérapion restored me to myself, and I became a little more calm. "I came," he continued, "to tell you that you have been appointed to the curacy of C——. The priest who had charge of it has just died, and Monseigneur the Bishop has ordered me to have you installed there at once. Be ready, therefore, to start tomorrow." I responded with an inclination of the head, and the Abbé retired. I opened my missal and commenced reading some prayers, but the letters became confused and blurred under my eyes, the thread of the ideas entangled itself hopelessly in my brain, and the volume at last fell from my hands without my being aware of it

To leave tomorrow without having been able to see her again, to add yet another barrier to the many already interposed between us, to lose for ever all hope of being able to meet her, except, indeed, through a miracle! Even to write to her, alas! would be impossible, for by whom could I dispatch my letter? With my sacred character of priest, to whom could I dare unbosom myself, in whom could I confide? I became a prey to the bitterest anxiety.

Then suddenly recurred to me the words of the Abbé Sérapion regarding the artifices of the devil; and the strange character of the adventure, the supernatural beauty of Clarimonde, the phosphoric light of her eyes, the burning imprint of her hand, the agony into which she had thrown me, the sudden change wrought within me when all my piety vanished in a single instant—these and other things clearly testified to the work of the Evil One and perhaps that satiny hand was but the glove which concealed his claws. Pilled with terror at these fancies, I again picked up the missal which had slipped from my knees and fallen upon the floor, and once more gave myself up to prayer.

Next morning Sérapion came to take me away. Two mules freighted with our miserable valises awaited us at the gate. He mounted one, and I the other as well as I knew how.

AS WE PASSED along the streets of the city, I gazed attentively at all the windows and balconies in the hope of seeing Clarimonde, but it was yet early in the morning, and the city had hardly opened its eyes. Mine sought to penetrate the blinds and window-curtains of all the palaces before which we were passing. Sérapion doubtless attributed this curiosity to my admiration of the

architecture, for he slackened the pace of his animal in order to give me time to look around me. At last we passed the city gates mid commenced to mount the hill beyond. When we arrived at its summit I turned to take a last look at the place where Clarimonde dwelt. The shadow of a great cloud hung over all the city; the contrasting colors of its blue and red roofs were lost in the uniform half-tint, through which here and there floated upward, like white flakes of foam, the smoke of freshly kindled fires. By a singular optical effect one edifice, which surpassed in height all the neighboring buildings that were still dimly veiled by the vapors, towered up, fair and lustrous with the gilding of a solitary beam of sunlight— although actually more than a league away it seemed quite near. The smallest details of its architecture were clearly distinguishable— the turrets, the platforms, the window-casements, and even the swallow-tailed weathervanes.

"What is that palace I see over there all lighted up by the sun?" I asked Sérapion, He shaded his eyes with his hand, and having looked in the direction indicated, replied: "It is the ancient palace which the Prince Concini has given to the courtesan Clarimonde. Awful things are done here."

At that instant— I know not yet whether it was a reality or an illusion— I fancied I saw gliding along the terrace a shapely white figure, which gleamed for a moment in passing and as quickly vanished. It was Clarimonde.

Oh, did she know that at that very hour, all feverish and restless— from the height of the rugged road which separated me from her, and which, alas! I could never more descend— I was directing my eyes upon the palace where she dwelt and which a mocking beam of sunlight seemed to bring nigh to me, as though inviting me to enter therein as its lord? Undoubtedly she must have known it, for her soul was too sympathetically united with mine not to have felt its least emotional thrill, and that subtle sympathy it must have been which prompted her to climb— although clad only in her nightdress— to the summit of the terrace, amid the icy dews of the morning.

The shadow gained the palace, and the scene became to the eye only a motionless ocean of roofs and gables, amid which one mountainous undulation was distinctly visible. Sérapion urged his mule forward, my own at once followed at the same gait, and a sharp angle in the road at last hid the city of S—— for ever from my eyes, as I was destined never to return thither. At the close of a weary three days' journey through dismal country fields, we caught sight of the cock upon the steeple of the church which I was to take charge of, peeping above the trees, and after having followed some winding roads fringed with thatched cottages and little gardens, we found ourselves in front of the façade, which certainly possessed few features of magnificence. A porch ornamented With some moldings, and two or three pillars rudely hewn from sandstone; a tiled roof with counterforts of the same sandstone as the pillars— that was all.

To the left lay the cemetery, overgrown with high weeds, and having a great iron cross rising up in its center; to the right stood the presbytery under the shadow of the church. It was a house of the most extreme simplicity and frigid cleanliness. We entered the enclosure. A few chickens were picking up some oats scattered upon the ground; accustomed, seemingly, to the black habit of ecclesiastics, they showed no fear of our presence and scarcely troubled themselves to get out of our way. A hoarse, wheezy barking fell upon our ears, and we saw an aged dog running toward us.

It was my predecessor's dog. He had dull bleared eyes, grizzled hair, and every mark of the greatest age to which a dog can possibly attain. I patted him gently, and he proceeded at once to march along beside me with an air of satisfaction unspeakable. A very old woman, who had been the housekeeper of the former curé, also came to meet us, and after having invited me into a little back parlor, asked whether I intended to retain her. I replied that I would take care of her, and the dog, and the chickens, and all the furniture her master had bequeathed her at his death. At this she became fairly transported with joy, and the Abbé Sérapion at once paid her the price which she asked for her little property.

As soon as my installation was over, the Abbé Sérapion returned to the seminary. I was, therefore, left alone, with no one but myself to look to for aid or counsel. The thought of Clarimonde again began to haunt me, and in spite of all my endeavors to banish it, I always found it present in my meditations. One evening, while promenading in my little garden along the walks bordered with box-plants, I fancied that I saw through the elm-trees the figure of a woman, who followed my every movement, and that I beheld two sea-green eyes gleaming through the foliage; but it was only an illusion, and on going round to the other side of the garden, I could find nothing except a footprint on the sanded walk— a footprint so small that it seemed to have been made by the foot of a child. The garden was enclosed by very high walls. I searched every nook and corner of it, but could discover no one there. I have never succeeded in fully accounting for this circumstance, which, after all, was nothing compared with the strange things which happened to me afterward.

FOR A WHOLE YEAR I lived thus, filling all the duties of my calling with the most scrupulous exactitude, praying and fasting, exhorting and lending spiritual aid to the sick, and bestowing alms even to the extent of frequently depriving myself of the very necessaries of life. But I felt a great aridness within me, and the sources of grace seemed closed against me. I never found that happiness which should spring from the fulfilment of a holy mission; my thoughts were far away, and the words of Clarimonde were ever upon my lips like an involuntary refrain. Oh, brother, meditate well on this! Through having but once lifted my

eyes to look upon a woman, through one fault apparently so venial, I have for years remained a victim to the most miserable agonies, and the happiness of my life has been destroyed for ever.

I will not longer dwell upon those defeats, or on those inward victories invariably followed by yet more terrible falls, but will at once proceed to the facts of my story. One night my door-bell was long and violently rung. The aged housekeeper arose and opened to the stranger, and the figure of a man, whose complexion was deeply bronzed, and who was richly clad in a foreign costume, with a poniard at his girdle, appeared under the rays of Barbara's lantern. Her first impulse was one of terror, but the stranger reassured her, and stated that he desired to see me at once on matters relating to my holy calling. Barbara invited him upstairs, where I was on the point of retiring. The stranger told me that his mistress, a very noble lady, was lying at the point of death, and desired to see a priest. I replied that I was prepared to follow him, took with me the sacred articles necessary for extreme unction, and descended in all haste. Two horses black as the night itself stood without the gate, pawing the ground with impatience, and veiling their chests with long streams of smoky vapor exhaled from their nostrils. He held the stirrup and aided me to mount upon one; then, merely laying his hand upon the pommel of the saddle, he vaulted on the other, pressed the animal's sides with his knees, and loosened rein.

The horse bounded forward with the velocity of an arrow. Mine, of which the stranger held the bridle, also started off at a swift gallop, keeping up with his companion. We devoured the road. The ground flowed backward beneath us in a long streaked line of pale gray, and the black silhouettes of the trees seemed fleeing by us on either side like an army in rout. We passed through a forest so profoundly gloomy that I felt my flesh creep in the chill darkness with superstitious fear. The showers of bright sparks which flew from the stony road under the ironshod feet of our horses remained glowing in our wake like a fiery trail; and had anyone at that hour of the night beheld us both— my guide and myself— he must have taken us for two specters riding upon nightmares. Witch-fires ever and anon flitted across the road before us, and the night-birds shrieked fearsomely in the depth of the woods beyond, where we beheld at intervals glow the phosphorescent eyes of wildcats. The manes of the horses became more and more disheveled, the sweat streamed over their flanks, and their breath came through their nostrils hard and fast. But when he found them slacking pace, the guide reanimated them by uttering a strange, guttural, unearthly cry, and the gallop recommenced with fury.

At last the whirlwind race ceased; a huge black mass pierced through with many bright points of light suddenly rose before us, the hoofs of our horses echoed louder upon a strong wooden drawbridge, and we rode under a great vaulted archway which darkly yawned between two enormous towers. Some

great excitement evidently reigned in the castle. Servants with torches were crossing the courtyard in every direction, and above lights were ascending and descending from landing to landing. I obtained a confused glimpse of vast masses of architecture— columns, arcades, flights of steps, stairways— a royal voluptuousness and elfin magnificence of construction worthy of fairyland. A negro page— the same who had before brought me the tablet from Clarimonde, and whom I instantly recognized— approached to aid me in dismounting, and the major-domo, attired in black velvet with a gold chain about his neck, advanced to meet me, supporting himself upon an ivory cane. Large tears were falling from his eyes and streaming over his cheeks and white beard. "Too late!"' he cried, sorrowfully shaking his venerable head. "Too late, sir priest! But if you have not been able to save the soul, come at least to watch by the poor body."

He took my arm and conducted me to the death-chamber. I wept not less bitterly than he, for I had learned that the dead one was none other than that Clarimonde whom I had so deeply and so wildly loved. A *prie-dieu* stood at the foot of the bed; a bluish flame flickering in a bronze *patera* filled all the room with a wan, deceptive light, here and there bringing out in the darkness at intervals some projection of furniture or cornice. In a chiseled urn upon the table there was a faded white rose, whose leaves— excepting one that still held— had all fallen, like odorous tears, to the foot of the vase. A broken black mask, a fan, and disguises of every variety, which were lying on the armchairs, bore witness that death had entered suddenly and unannounced into that sumptuous dwelling. Without daring to cast my eyes upon the bed, I knelt down and commenced to repeat the Psalms for the Dead, with exceeding fervor, thanking God that He had placed the tomb between me and the memory of this woman, so that I might thereafter be able to utter her name in my prayers as a name for ever sanctified by death. But my fervor gradually weakened, and I fell insensibly into a reverie. That chamber bore no semblance to a chamber of death. In lieu of the fetid and cadaverous odors which I had been accustomed to breathe during such funereal vigils, a languorous vapor of Oriental perfume— I know not what amorous odor of woman— softly floated through the tepid air. That pale light seemed rather a twilight gloom contrived for voluptuous pleasure, than a substitute for the yellow-flickering watch-tapers which shine by the side of corpses. I thought upon the strange destiny which enabled me to meet Clarimonde again at the very moment when she was lost to me for ever, and a sigh of regretful anguish escaped from my breast. Then it seemed to me that someone behind me had also sighed, and I turned round to look. It was only an echo. But in that moment my eyes fell upon the bed of death which they had till then avoided. The red damask curtains, decorated with large flowers worked in embroidery and looped up with gold bullion, permitted me to behold the fair dead, lying at full length, with hands joined upon her bosom. She was covered

with a linen wrapping of dazzling whiteness, which formed a strong contrast with the gloomy purple of the hangings, and was of so fine a texture that it concealed nothing of her body's charming form, and allowed the eye to follow those beautiful outlines— undulating like the neck of a swan— which even death had not robbed of their supple grace. She seemed an alabaster statue executed by some skilful sculptor to place upon the tomb of a queen, or rather, perhaps, like a slumbering maiden over whom the silent snow had woven a spotless veil.

I could no longer maintain my constrained attitude of prayer. The air of the alcove intoxicated me, that febrile perfume of half-faded roses penetrated my very brain, and I commenced to pace restlessly up and down the chamber, pausing at each turn before the bier to contemplate the graceful corpse lying beneath the transparency of its shroud. Wild fancies came thronging to my brain. I thought to myself that she might not, perhaps, be really dead; that she might only have feigned death for the purpose of bringing me to her castle, and then declaring her love.

At one time I even thought I saw her foot move under the whiteness of the coverings, and slightly disarrange the long straight folds of the winding-sheet.

And then I asked myself: "Is this indeed Clarimonde? What proof have I that it is she? Might not that black page have passed into the service of some other lady? Surely, I must be going mad to torture and afflict myself thus!" But my heart answered with a fierce throbbing: "It is she; it is she indeed!" I approached the bed again, and fixed my eyes with redoubled attention upon the object of my incertitude. Ah, must I confess it? That exquisite perfection of bodily form, although purified and made sacred by the shadow of death, affected me more voluptuously than it should have done; and that repose so closely resembled slumber that one might well have mistaken it for such. I forgot that I had come there to perform a funeral ceremony; I fancied myself a young bridegroom entering the chamber of the bride, who all modestly hides her fair face, and through coyness seeks to keep herself wholly veiled.

Heartbroken with grief, yet wild with hope, shuddering at once with fear and pleasure, I bent over her and grasped the comer of the sheet. I lifted it back, holding my breath all the while through fear of waking her. My arteries throbbed with such violence that I felt them hiss through my temples, and the sweat poured from my forehead in streams, as though I had lifted a mighty slab of marble. There, indeed, lay Clarimonde, even as I had seen her at the church on the day of my ordination. She was not less charming than then. With her, death seemed but a last coquetry. The pallor of her cheeks, the less brilliant carnation of her lips, her long eyelashes lowered and relieving their dark fringe against that white skin lent her an unspeakably seductive aspect of melancholy

chastity and mental suffering; her long loose hair, still intertwined with some little blue flowers, made a shining pillow for her head, and veiled the nudity of her shoulders with its thick ringlets; her beautiful hands, purer, more diaphanous, than the Host, were crossed on her bosom in an attitude of pious rest and silent prayer, which served to counteract all that might have proved otherwise too alluring— even after death— in the exquisite roundness and ivory polish of her bare arms from which the pearl bracelets had not yet been removed.

I remained long in mute contemplation, and the more I gazed, the less could I persuade myself that life had really abandoned that beautiful body for ever. I do not know whether it was an illusion or a reflection of the lamplight, but it seemed to me that the blood was again commencing to circulate under that lifeless pallor, although she remained all motionless. I laid my hand lightly on her arm; it was cold, but not colder than her hand on the day when if touched mine at the portals of the church. I resumed my position, bending my face above her, and bathing her cheek with the warm dew of my tears. Ah, what bitter feelings of despair and helplessness, what agonies unutterable did I endure in that long watch! Vainly did I wish that I could have gathered all my life into one mass that I might give it all to her, and breathe into her chill remains the flame which devoured me. The night advanced, and feeling the moment of eternal separation approach, I could not deny myself the last sad sweet pleasure of imprinting a kiss upon the dead lips of her who had been my only love.... Oh, miracle! A faint breath mingled itself with my breath, and the mouth of Clarimonde responded to the passionate pressure of mine. Her eyes unclosed, and lighted up with something of their former brilliancy; she uttered a long sigh, and uncrossing her arms, passed them around my neck with a look of ineffable delight.

"Ah, it is thou, Romuald!" she murmured in a voice languishingly sweet as the last vibrations of a harp. "What ailed thee, dearest? I waited so long for thee that I am dead; but we are now betrothed: I can see thee and visit thee. *Adieu*, Romuald, *adieu*! I love thee. That is all I wished to tell thee, and I give thee back the life which thy kiss for a moment recalled. We shall soon meet again."

Her head fell back, but her arms yet encircled me, as though to retain me still. A furious whirlwind suddenly burst in the window, and entered the chamber. The last remaining leaf of the white rose for a moment palpitated at the extremity of the stalk like a butterfly's wing, then it detached itself and flew forth through the open casement, bearing with it the soul of Clarimonde. The lamp was extinguished, and I fell insensible upon the bosom of the beautiful dead.

WHEN I came to myself again I was lying on the bed in my little room at the presbytery, and the old dog of the former curl was licking my hand, which had been hanging down outside of the covers. Barbara, all trembling with age and anxiety, was busying herself about the room, opening and shutting drawers, and emptying powders into glasses. On seeing me open my eyes, the old woman uttered a cry of joy, the dog yelped and wagged his tail, but I was still so weak that I could not speak a single word or make the slightest motion. Afterward I learned that I had lain thus for three days, giving no evidence of life beyond the faintest respiration. Those three days do not reckon in my life, nor could I ever imagine whither my spirit had departed during those three days; I have no recollection of aught relating to them. Barbara told me that the same coppery-complexioned man who came to seek me on the night of my departure from the presbytery had brought me back the next morning in a close litter, and departed immediately afterward.

When I became able to collect my scattered thoughts, I reviewed within my mind all the circumstances of that fateful night. At first I thought I had been the victim of some magical illusion, but ere long the recollection of other circumstances, real and palpable in themselves, came to forbid that supposition. I could not believe that I had been dreaming, since Barbara as well as myself had seen the strange man with his two black horses, and described with exactness every detail of his figure and apparel. Nevertheless it appeared that none knew of any castle in the neighborhood answering to the description of that in which I had again found Clarimonde.

One morning I found the Abbé Sérapion in my room. Barbara had advised him that I was ill, and he had come with all speed to see me. Although this haste on his part testified to an affectionate interest in me, yet his visit did not cause me the pleasure which it should have done. The Abbé Sérapion had something penetrating and inquisitorial in his gaze which made me feel very ill at ease. His presence filled me with embarrassment and a sense of guilt. At the first glance he divined my interior trouble, and I hated him for his clairvoyance.

While he inquired after my health in hypocritically honeyed accents, he constantly kept his two great yellow lion-eyes fixed upon me, and plunged his look into my soul like a sounding lead. Then he asked me how I directed my parish, if I was happy in it, how I passed the leisure hours allowed me in the intervals of pastoral duty, whether I had become acquainted with many of the inhabitants of the place, what was my favorite reading, and a thousand other such questions. I answered these inquiries as briefly as possible, and he, without ever waiting for my answers, passed rapidly from one subject of query to another. That conversation had evidently no connection with what he actually wished to say. At last, without any premonition, but as though repeating a piece of news which he had recalled on the instant, and feared might otherwise be

forgotten subsequently, he suddenly said, in a clear vibrant voice, which rang in my ears like the trumpets of the Last Judgment:

"The great courtesan Clarimonde died a few days ago, at the close of an orgy which lasted eight days and eight nights. It was something infernally splendid. The abominations of the banquets of Belshazzar and Cleopatra were re-enacted there. Good God, what age are we living in? The guests were served by swarthy slaves who spoke an unknown tongue, and who seemed to me to be veritable demons. The livery of the very least among them would have served for the gala-dress of an emperor. There have always been very strange stories told of this Clarimonde, and all her lovers came to a violent or miserable end. They used to say that she was a ghoul, a female vampire; but I believe she was none other than Beelzebub himself."

He ceased to speak, and commenced to regard me more attentively than ever, as though to observe the effect of his words on me. I could not refrain from starting when I heard him utter the name of Clarimonde, and this news of her death, in addition to the pain it caused me by reason of its coincidence with the nocturnal scenes I had witnessed, filled me with an agony and terror which my face betrayed, despite my utmost endeavors to appear composed. Sérapion fixed an anxious and severe look upon me, and then observed: "My son, I must warn you that you are standing with foot raised upon the brink of an abyss; take heed lest you fall therein. Satan's claws are long, and tombs are not always true to their trust. The tombstone of Clarimonde should be sealed down with a triple seal, for, if reports be true, it is not the first time she has died. May God watch over you, Romuald!"

And with these words the Abbé walked slowly to the door. I did not see him again at that time, for he left for S—— almost immediately.

I became completely restored to health and resumed my accustomed duties. The memory of Clarimonde and the words of the old Abbé were constantly in my mind; nevertheless no extraordinary event had occurred to verify the funereal predictions of Sérapion, and I had commenced to believe that his fears and my own terrors were over-exaggerated, when one night I had a strange dream. I had hardly fallen asleep when I heard my bed-curtains drawn apart, as their rings slid back upon the curtain-rod with a sharp sound. I rose up quickly upon my elbow, and beheld the shadow of a woman standing erect before me. I recognized Clarimonde immediately. She bore in her hand a little lamp, shaped like those which are placed in tombs, and its light lent her fingers a rosy transparency, which extended itself by lessening degrees even to the opaque and milky whiteness of her bare arm. Her only garment was the linen winding-sheet which had shrouded her when lying upon the bed of death. She sought to gather its folds over her bosom as though ashamed of being so scantily clad, but her little hand was not equal to the task. She was so white that the color of the

drapery blended with that of her flesh under the pallid rays of the lamp. Enveloped with this subtle tissue which betrayed all the contour of her body, she seemed rather the marble statue of some fair antique bather than a woman endowed with life. But dead or living, statue or woman, shadow or body, her beauty was still the same, only that the green light of her eyes was less brilliant, and her mouth, once so warmly crimson, was only tinted with a faint tender rosiness, like that of her cheeks. The little blue flowers which I had noticed entwined in her hair were withered and dry, and had lost nearly all their leaves, but this did not prevent her from being charming— so charming that, notwithstanding the strange character of the adventure, and the unexplainable manner in which she had entered my room, I felt not even for a moment the least fear.

She placed the lamp on the table and seated herself at the foot of my bed; then bending toward me, she said, in that voice at once silvery clear and yet velvety in its sweet softness, such as I never heard from any lips save hers:

"I have kept thee long in waiting, dear Romuald, and it must have seemed to thee that I had forgotten thee. But I come from afar off, very far off, and from a land whence no other has ever yet returned. There is neither sun nor moon in that land whence I come: all is but space and shadow; there is neither road nor pathway: no earth for the foot, no air for the wing; and nevertheless behold me here, for Love is stronger that Death and must conquer him in the end. Oh what sad faces and fearful things I have seen on my way hither! What difficulty my soul, returned to earth through the power of will alone, has had in finding its body and reinstating itself therein! What terrible efforts I had to make ere I could lift the ponderous slab with which they had covered me! See, the palms of my poor hands are all bruised! Kiss them, sweet love, that they may be healed!" She laid the cold palms of her hands upon my mouth, one after the other. I kissed them, indeed, many times, and she the while watched me with a smile of ineffable affection.

I confess, to my shame, that I had entirely forgotten the advice of the Abbé Sérapion and the sacred office wherewith I had been invested. I had fallen without resistance, and at the first assault. I had not even made the least effort to repel the tempter. The fresh coolness of Clarimonde's skin penetrated my own, and I felt voluptuous tremors pass over my whole body. Poor child! in spite of all I saw afterward, I can hardly yet believe she was a demon; at least she had no appearance of being such, and never did Satan so skilfully conceal his claws and horns. She had drawn her feet up beneath her, and squatted down on the edge of the couch in an attitude full of negligent coquetry. Prom time to time she passed her little hand through my hair and twisted it into curls, as though trying how a new style of wearing it would become my face. I abandoned myself to her hands with the most guilty pleasure, while she accompanied her gentle

play with the prettiest prattle. The most remarkable fact was that I felt no astonishment whatever at so extraordinary an adventure, and as in dreams one finds no difficulty in accepting the most fantastic events as simple facts, so all these circumstances seemed to me perfectly natural in themselves.

"I loved thee long ere I saw thee, dear Romuald, and sought thee everywhere. Thou wast my dream, and I first saw thee in the church at the fatal moment. I said at once, 'It is he!' I gave thee a look into which I threw all the love I ever had, all the love I now have, all the love I shall ever have for thee— a look that would have damned a cardinal or brought a king to his knees at my feet in view of all his court Thou remainedst unmoved, preferring thy God to me!

"Ah, how jealous I am of that God whom thou didst love and still lovest more than me!

"Woe is me, unhappy one that I am! I can never have thy heart all to myself, I whom thou didst recall to life with a kiss— dead Clarimonde, who for thy sake bursts asunder the gates of the tomb, and comes to consecrate to thee a life which she has resumed only to make thee happy!"

All her words were accompanied with the most impassioned caresses, which bewildered my sense and my reason to such an extent that I did not fear to utter a frightful blasphemy for the sake of consoling her, and to declare that I loved her as much as God.

Her eyes rekindled and shone like chrysoprases. "In truth?— in very truth?— as much as God!" she cried, flinging her beautiful arms around me. "Since it is so, thou wilt come with me; thou wilt follow me whithersoever I desire. Thou wilt cast away thy ugly black habit. Thou shalt be the proudest and most envied of cavaliers; thou shalt be my lover! To be the acknowledged lover of Clarimonde, who has refused even a pope! That will be something to feel proud of. Ah, the fair, unspeakably happy existence, the beautiful golden life we shall live together! And when shall we depart, my fair sir?"

"Tomorrow! Tomorrow!" I cried in my delirium.

"Tomorrow, then, so let it be!" she answered. "In the meanwhile I shall have opportunity to change my toilet, for this is a little too light and in nowise suited for a voyage. I must also forthwith notify all my friends who believe me dead, and mourn for me as deeply as they are capable of doing. The money, the dresses, the carriage— all will be ready. I shall call for thee at this same hour. *Adieu*, dear heart!" And she lightly touched my forehead with her lips. The lamp went out, the curtains closed again, and all became dark; a leaden, dreamless sleep fell on me and held me unconscious until the morning following.

I AWOKE later than usual, and the recollection of this singular adventure troubled me during the whole day. I finally persuaded myself that it was a mere

vapor of my heated imagination. Nevertheless its sensations had been so vivid that it was difficult to persuade myself that they were not real, and it was not without some presentiment of what was going to happen that I got into bed at last, after having prayed God to drive far from me all thoughts of evil, and to protect the chastity of my slumber.

I soon fell into a deep sleep, and my dream was continued. The curtains again parted, and I beheld Clarimonde, not as on the former occasion, pale in her pale winding-sheet, with the violets of death upon her cheeks, but gay, sprightly, jaunty, in a superb traveling-dress of green velvet, trimmed with gold lace, and looped up on either side to allow a glimpse of satin petticoat. Her blond hair escaped in thick ringlets from beneath a broad black felt hat, decorated with white feathers whimsically twisted into various shapes. In one hand she held a little riding whip terminated by a golden whistle. She tapped me lightly with it, and exclaimed: "Well, my fine sleeper, is this the way you make your preparations? I thought I would find you up and dressed. Arise quickly, we have no time to lose."

I leaped out of bed at once.

"Come, dress yourself, and let us go," she continued, pointing to a little package she had brought with her. "The horses are becoming impatient of delay and champing their bits at the door. We ought to have been by this time at least ten leagues distant from here."

I dressed myself hurriedly, and she handed me the articles of apparel herself one by one, bursting into laughter from time to time at my awkwardness, as she explained to me the use of a garment when I had made a mistake. She hurriedly arranged my hair, and this done, held up before me a little pocket-mirror of Venetian crystal, rimmed with silver filigree-work, and playfully asked: "How dost find thyself now? Wilt engage me for thy valet?"

I was no longer the same person, and I could not even recognize myself. I resembled my former self no more than a finished statue resembles a block of stone. My old face seemed but a coarse daub of the one reflected in the mirror. I was handsome, and my vanity was sensibly tickled by the metamorphosis. That elegant apparel, that richly embroidered vest had made of me a totally different personage, and I marveled at the power of transformation owned by a few yards of cloth cut after a certain pattern. The spirit of my costume penetrated my very skin and within ten minutes more I had become something of a coxcomb.

In order to feel more at ease in my new attire, I took several turns up and down the room. Clarimonde watched me with an air of maternal pleasure, and appeared well satisfied with her work. "Come, enough of this child's play! Let us start, Romuald, dear. We have far to go, and we may not get there in time." She took my hand and led me forth. All the doors opened before her at a touch, and we passed by the dog without awaking him.

At the gate we found Margheritone waiting, the same swarthy groom who had once before been my escort. He held the bridles of three horses, all black like those which bore us to the castle— one for me, one for him, one for Clarimonde. These horses must have been Spanish genets born of mares fecundated by a zephyr, for they were fleet as the wind itself, and the moon, which had just risen at our departure to light us on the way, rolled over the sky like a wheel detached from her own chariot. We beheld her on the right leaping from tree to tree, and putting herself out of breath in the effort to keep up with us. Soon we came upon a level plain where, hard by a clump of trees, a carriage with four vigorous horses awaited us. We entered it, and the postillions urged their animals into a mad gallop. I had one arm around Clarimonde's waist, and one of her hands clasped in mine; her head leaned upon my shoulder, and I felt her bosom, half bare, lightly pressing against my arm. I had never known such intense happiness. In that hour I had forgotten everything, and I no more remembered having ever been a priest, so great was the fascination which the evil spirit exerted upon me.

Prom that night my nature seemed in some sort to have become halved, and there were two men within me, neither of whom knew the other. At one moment I believed myself a priest who dreamed nightly that he was a gentleman, at another that I was a gentleman who dreamed he was a priest. I could no longer distinguish the dream from the reality, nor could I discover where the reality began or where ended the dream. The exquisite young lord and libertine railed at the priest, the priest loathed the dissolute habits of the young lord. Two spirals entangled and confounded the one with the other, yet never touching, would afford a fair representation of this bicephalic life which I lived. Despite the strange character of my condition, I do not believe that I ever inclined, even for a moment, to madness. I always retained with extreme vividness all the perceptions of my two lives. Only there was one absurd fact which I could not explain to myself— namely, that the consciousness of the same individuality existed in two men so opposite in character. It was an anomaly for which I could not account— whether I believed myself to be the curé of the little village of C——, or *Il Signor Romualdo*, the titled lover of Clarimonde.

Be that as it may, I lived, at least I believed that I lived, in Venice. I have never been able to discover rightly how much of illusion and how much of reality there was in this fantastic adventure. We dwelt in a great palace on the Canaleio, filled with frescoes and statues, and containing two Titians in the noblest style of the great master, which were hung in Clarimonde's chamber. It was a palace well worthy of a king. We had each our gondola, our *barcarolli* in family livery, our music hall, and our special poet. Clarimonde always lived upon a magnificent scale; there was something of Cleopatra in her nature. As for me, I

had the retinue of a prince's son, and I was regarded with as much reverential respect as though I had been of the family of one of the twelve Apostles or the four Evangelists of the Most Serene Republic. I would not have turned aside to allow even the Doge to pass, and I do not believe that since Satan fell from heaven, any creature was ever prouder or more insolent than I. I went to the Ridotto, and played with a luck which seemed absolutely infernal. I received the best of all society— the sons of ruined families, women of the theater, shrewd knaves, parasites, hectoring swashbucklers. But notwithstanding the dissipation of such a life, I always remained faithful to Clarimonde. I loved her wildly. She would have excited satiety itself, and chained inconstancy. To have Clarimonde was to have twenty mistresses; ay, to possess all women: so mobile, so varied of aspect, so fresh in new charms was she all in herself— a very chameleon of a woman, in sooth. She donned to perfection the character, the attraction, the style of beauty of any woman who appeared to please you. She returned my love a hundred-fold, and it was in vain that the young patricians and even the Ancients of the Council of Ten made her the most magnificent proposals. A Foscari even went so far as to offer to espouse her. She rejected all his overtures. Of gold she had enough. She wished no longer for anything but love— a love youthful, pure, evoked by herself, and which should be a first and last passion. I would have been perfectly happy but for a cursed nightmare which recurred every night, and in which I believed myself to be a poor village cure, practising mortification and penance for my excesses during the day. Reassured by my constant association with her, I never thought further of the strange manner in which I had become acquainted with Clarimonde. But the words of the Abbé Sérapion concerning her recurred often to my memory, and never ceased to cause me uneasiness

FOR SOME TIME the health of Clarimonde had not been so good as usual; her complexion grew paler day by day. The physicians who were summoned could not comprehend the nature of her malady and knew not how to treat it. They all prescribed some insignificant remedies, and never called a second time. Her paleness, nevertheless, visibly increased, and she became colder and colder, until she seemed almost as white and dead as upon that memorable night in the unknown castle. I grieved with anguish unspeakable to behold her thus slowly perishing; and she, touched by my agony, smiled upon me sweetly and sadly with the fateful smile of those who feel that they must die.

One morning I was seated at her bedside, and breakfasting from a little table placed close at hand, so that I might not be obliged to leave her for a single instant. In the act of cutting some fruit I accidentally inflicted rather a deep gash on my finger. The blood immediately gushed forth in a little purple jet, and a few drops spurted upon Clarimonde. Her eyes flashed, her face suddenly

assumed an expression of savage and ferocious joy such as I had never before observed in her. She leaped out of her bed with animal agility— the agility, as it were, of an ape or a cat— and sprang upon my wound, which she commenced to suck with an air of unutterable pleasure. She swallowed the blood in little mouthfuls, slowly and carefully, like a connoisseur tasting a wine from Xeres or Syracuse. Gradually her eyelids half closed, and the pupils of her green eyes became oblong instead of round. From time to time she paused in order to kiss my hand, then she would recommence to press her lips to the lips of the wound in order to coax forth a few more ruddy drops. When she found that the blood would no longer come, she arose with eyes liquid and brilliant, rosier than a May dawn; her face full and fresh, her hand warm and moist— in fine, more beautiful than ever, and in the most perfect health.

"I shall not die! I shall not die!" she cried, clinging to my neck, half mad with joy. "I can love thee yet for a long time. My life is thine, and all that is of me comes from thee. A few drops of thy rich and noble blood, more precious and more potent than all the elixirs of the earth, have given me back life."

This scene long haunted my memory, and inspired me with strange doubts in regard to Clarimonde; and the same evening, when slumber had transported me to my presbytery, I beheld the Abbé Sérapion, graver and more anxious of aspect than ever. He gazed attentively at me, and sorrowfully exclaimed: "Not content with losing your soul, you now desire also to lose your body. Wretched young man, into how terrible a plight have you fallen!" The tone in which he uttered these words powerfully affected me, but in spite of its vividness even that impression was soon dissipated, and a thousand other cares erased it from my mind.

At last one evening, while looking into a mirror whose traitorous position she had not taken into account, I saw Clarimonde in the act of emptying a powder into the cup of spiced wine which she had long been in the habit of preparing after our repasts. I took the cup, feigned to carry it to my lips, and then placed it on the nearest article of furniture as though intending to finish it at my leisure. Taking advantage of a moment when the fair one's back was turned, I threw the contents under the table, after which I retired to my chamber and went to bed, fully resolved not to sleep, but to watch and discover what should come of all this mystery. I did not have to wait long. Clarimonde entered in her nightdress, and having removed her apparel, crept into bed and lay down beside me. When she felt assured that I was asleep, she bared my arm, and drawing a gold pin from her hair, commenced to murmur in a low voice:

"One drop, only one drop! One ruby at the end of my needle.... Since thou lovest me yet, I must not die!... Ah, poor love! His beautiful blood, so brightly purple, I must drink it. Sleep, my only treasure! Sleep, my god, my child! I will do thee no harm; I will only take of thy life what I must to keep my own from being

for ever extinguished. But that I love thee so much, I could well resolve to have other lovers whose veins I could drain; but since I have known thee all other men have become hateful to me.... Ah, the beautiful arm! How round it is! How white it is! How shall I ever dare to prick this pretty blue vein!" And while thus murmuring to herself she wept, and I felt her tears raining on my arm as she clasped it with her hands. At last she took the resolve, slightly punctured me with her pin, and commenced to suck up the blood which oozed from the place. Although she swallowed only a few drops, the fear of weakening me soon seized her, and she carefully tied a little band around my arm, afterward rubbing the wound with an unguent which immediately cicatrized it.

Further doubts were impossible. The Abbé Sérapion was right. Notwithstanding this positive knowledge, however, I could not cease to love Clarimonde, and I would gladly of my own accord have given her all the blood she required to sustain her factitious life. Moreover, I felt but little fear of her. The woman seemed to plead with me for the vampire, and what I had already heard and seen sufficed to reassure me completely. In those days I had plenteous veins, which would not have been so easily exhausted as at present; and I would not have thought of bargaining for my blood, drop by drop. I would rather have opened myself the veins of my arm and said to her; "Drink, and may my love infiltrate itself throughout thy body together with my blood!" I carefully avoided ever making the least reference to the narcotic drink she had prepared for me, or to the incident of the pin, and we lived in the most perfect harmony.

Yet my priestly scruples commenced to torment me more than ever, and I was at a loss to imagine what new penance I could invent to mortify and subdue my flesh. Although these visions were involuntary, and though I did not actually participate in anything relating to them, I could not dare to touch the body of Christ with hands so impure and a mind defiled by such debauches whether real or imaginary. In the effort to avoid falling under the influence of these wearisome hallucinations, I strove to prevent myself from being overcome by sleep. I held my eyelids open with my fingers, and stood for hours together leaning upright against the wall, fighting sleep with all my might; but the dust of drowsiness invariably gathered upon my eyes at last, and finding all resistance useless, I would have to let my arms fall in the extremity of despairing weariness, and the current of slumber would again bear me away to the perfidious shores.

Sérapion addressed me with the most vehement exhortations, severely reproaching me for my softness and want of fervor. Finally, one day when I was more wretched than usual, he said to me: "There is but one way by which you can obtain relief from this continual torment, and though it is an extreme measure it must be made use of; violent diseases require violent remedies. I know where Clarimonde is buried. It is necessary that we shall disinter her

remains, and that you shall behold in how pitiable a state the object of your love is. Then you will no longer be tempted to lose your soul for the sake of an unclean corpse devoured by worms, and ready to crumble into dust. That will assuredly restore you to yourself." For my part, I was so tired of this double life that I at once consented, desiring to ascertain beyond a doubt whether a priest or a gentleman had been the victim of delusion. I had become fully resolved either to kill one of the two men within me for the benefit of the other, or else to kill both, for so terrible an existence could not last long and be endured.

THE Abbé Sérapion provided himself with a mattock, a lever, and a lantern, and at midnight we wended our way to the cemetery of ——, the location and place of which were perfectly familiar to him. After having directed the rays of the dark lantern upon the inscriptions of several tombs, we came at last upon a great slab, half concealed by huge weeds and devoured by mosses and parasitic plants, whereupon we deciphered the opening lines of the epitaph:

Ici git Clarimonde
Qui fut de son vivant
La plus belle du monde.

[Here lies Clarimonde
Who was famed in her lifetime
As the fairest of women.]

"It is here without doubt," muttered Sérapion, and placing his lantern on the ground, he forced the point of the lever under the edge of the stone and commenced to raise it. The stone yielded, and he proceeded to work with the mattock. Darker and more silent than the night itself, I stood by and watched him do it, while he, bending over his dismal toil, streamed with sweat, panted, and his hard-coming breath seemed to have the harsh tone of a death rattle. It was a weird scene, and had any persons from without beheld us, they would assuredly have taken us rather for profane wretches and shroud-stealers than for priests of God. There was something grim and fierce in Sérapion's zeal which lent him the air of a demon rather than of an apostle or an angel, and his great aquiline face, with all its stem features brought out in strong relief by the lantern-light, had something fearsome in it which enhanced the unpleasant fancy. I felt an icy sweat come out upon my forehead in huge beads, and my hair stood up with a hideous fear. Within the depths of my own heart I felt that the act of the austere Sérapion was an abominable sacrilege; and I could have prayed that a triangle of fire would issue from the entrails of the dark clouds, heavily rolling above us, to reduce him to cinders. The owls which had been nestling in the cypress-trees, startled by the gleam of the lantern, flew against it

from time to time, striking their dusky wings against its panes, and uttering plaintive cries of lamentation; wild foxes yelped in the far darkness, and a thousand sinister noises detached themselves from the silence.

At last Sérapion's mattock struck the coffin itself, making its planks re-echo with a deep sonorous sound, with that terrible sound nothingness utters when stricken. He wrenched apart and tore up the lid, and I beheld Clarimonde, pallid as a figure of marble, with hands joined; her white winding-sheet made but one fold from her head to her feet. A little crimson drop sparkled like a speck of dew at one comer of her colorless mouth. Sérapion, at this spectacle, burst into fury: "Ah, thou art here, demon! Impure courtesan! Drinker of blood and gold!" And he flung holy water upon the corpse and the coffin, over which he traced the sign of the cross with his sprinkler. Poor Clarimonde had no sooner been touched by the blessed spray than her beautiful body crumbled into dust, and became only a shapeless and frightful mass of cinders and half-calcined bones.

"Behold your mistress, my Lord Romuald!" cried the inexorable priest, as he pointed to these sad remains. "Will you be easily tempted after this to promenade on the Lido or at Pusina with your beauty?"

I covered my face with my hands; a vast ruin had taken place within me. I returned to my presbytery, and the noble Lord Romuald, the lover of Clarimonde, separated himself from the poor priest with whom he had kept such strange company so long. But once only, the following night, I saw Clarimonde. She said to me, as she had said the first time at the portals of the church: "Unhappy man! Unhappy man! What hast thou done? Wherefore have harkened to that imbecile priest? Wert thou not happy? And what harm had I ever done thee that thou shouldst violate my poor tomb, and lay bare the miseries of my nothingness? All communication between our souls and our bodies is henceforth for ever broken. *Adieu*! Thou wilt yet regret me!"

She vanished in air as smoke, and I never saw her more.

Alas! she spoke truly indeed. I have regretted her more than once, and I regret her still. My soul's peace has been very dearly bought. The love of God was not too much to replace such a love as hers. And this, brother, is the story of my youth. Never gaze upon a woman, and walk abroad only with eyes ever fixed upon the ground; for however chaste and watchful one may be, the error of a single moment is enough to make one lose eternity.

8: The Shuttered House

A. E. W. Mason

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IF EVER A MAN'S PLEASURES jumped with his duties mine did in the year 1744, when, as a clerk in the service of the Royal African Company of Adventurers, I was despatched to the remote islands of Scilly in search of certain information which, it was believed, Mr. Robert Lovyes alone could impart. For even a clerk that sits all day conning his ledgers may now and again chance upon a record or name which will tickle his dull fancies with the suggestion of a story. Such a suggestion I had derived from the circumstances of Mr. Lovyes. He had passed an adventurous youth, during which he had for eight years been held to slavery by a negro tribe on the Gambia river; he had afterwards amassed a considerable fortune, and embarked it in the ventures of the Company; he had thereupon withdrawn himself to Tresco, where he had lived for twenty years: so much any man might know without provocation to his curiosity. The strange feature of Mr. Lovyes' conduct was revealed to me by the ledgers. For during all those years he had drawn neither upon his capital nor his interest, so that his stake in the Company grew larger and larger, with no profit to himself that any one could discover. It seemed to me, in fact, clean against nature that a man so rich should so disregard his wealth; and I busied myself upon the journey with discovering strange reasons for his seclusion, of which none, I may say, came near the mark, by so much did the truth exceed them all.

I landed at the harbour of New Grimsey, on Tresco, in the grey twilight of a September evening; and asking for Mr. Lovyes, was directed across a little ridge of heather to Dolphin Town, which lies on the eastward side of Tresco, and looks across Old Grimsey Sound to the island of St. Helen's. Dolphin Town, you should know, for all its grand name, boasts but a poor half-score of houses dotted about the ferns and bracken, with no semblance of order. One of the houses, however, attracted my notice— first, because it was built in two storeys, and was, therefore, by a storey taller than the rest; and, secondly, because all its windows were closely shuttered, and it wore in that falling light a drooping, melancholy aspect, like a derelict ship upon the seas. It stood in the middle of this scanty village, and had a little unkempt garden about it inclosed within a wooden paling. There was a wicket-gate in the paling, and a rough path from the gate to the house door, and a few steps to the right of this path a well was sunk and rigged with a winch and bucket. I was both tired and thirsty, so I turned into the garden and drew up some water in the bucket. A narrow track was beaten in the grass between the well and the house, and I saw with surprise that the stones about the mouth of the well were splashed and still wet. The house,

then, had an inmate. I looked at it again, but the shutters kept their secret: there was no glimmer of light visible through any chink. I approached the house, and from that nearer vantage discovered that the shutters were common planks fitted into the windows and nailed fast to the woodwork from without. Growing yet more curious, I marched to the door and knocked, with an inquiry upon my tongue as to where Mr. Lovyes lived. But the excuse was not needed; the sound of my blows echoed through the house in a desolate, solitary fashion, and no step answered them. I knocked again, and louder. Then I leaned my ear to the panel, and I distinctly heard the rustling of a woman's dress. I held my breath to hear the more surely. The sound was repeated, but more faintly, and it was followed by a noise like the closing of a door. I drew back from the house, keeping an eye upon the upper storey, for I thought it possible the woman might reconnoitre me thence. But the windows stared at me blind, unresponsive. To the right and left lights twinkled in the scattered dwellings, and I found something very ghostly in the thought of this woman entombed as it were in the midst of them and moving alone in the shuttered gloom. The twilight deepened, and suddenly the gate behind me whined on its hinges. At once I dropped to my full length on the grass— the gloom was now so thick there was little fear I should be discovered— and a man went past me to the house. He walked, so far as I could judge, with a heavy stoop, but was yet uncommon tall, and he carried a basket upon his arm. He laid the basket upon the doorstep, and, to my utter disappointment, turned at once, and so down the path and out at the gate. I heard the gate rattle once, twice, and then a click as its latch caught. I was sufficiently curious to desire a nearer view of the basket, and discovered that it contained food. Then, remembering me that all this while my own business waited, I continued on my way to Mr. Lovyes' house. It was a long building of a brownish granite, under Merchant's Point, at the northern extremity of Old Grimsey Harbour. Mr. Lovyes was sitting over his walnuts in the cheerless solitude of his dining-room— a frail old gentleman, older than his years, which I took to be sixty or thereabouts, and with the air of a man in a decline. I unfolded my business forthwith, but I had not got far before he interrupted me.

"There is a mistake," he said. "It is doubtless my brother Robert you are in search of. I am John Lovyes, and was, it is true, captured with my brother in Africa, but I escaped six years before he did, and traded no more in those parts. We fled together from the negroes, but we were pursued. My brother was pierced by an arrow, and I left him, believing him to be dead."

I had, indeed, heard something of a brother, though I little expected to find him in Tresco too. He pressed upon me the hospitality of his house, but my business was with Mr. Robert, and I asked him to direct me on my path, which he did with some hesitation and reluctance. I had once more to pass through

Dolphin Town, and an impulse prompted me to take another look at the shuttered house. I found that the basket of food had been removed, and an empty bucket stood in its place. But there was still no light visible, and I went on to the dwelling of Mr. Robert Lovyes. When I came to it, I comprehended his brother's hesitation. It was a rough, mean little cottage standing on the edge of the bracken close to the sea— a dwelling fit for the poorest fisherman, but for no one above that station, and a large open boat was drawn up on the hard beside it as though the tenant fished for his bread. I knocked at the door, and a man with a candle in his hand opened it.

"Mr. Robert Lovyes?" I asked.

"Yes, I am he." And he led the way into a kitchen, poor and mean as the outside warranted, but scrupulously clean and bright with a fire. He led the way, as I say, and I was still more mystified to observe from his gait, his height, and the stoop of his shoulders that he was the man whom I had seen carrying the basket through the garden. I had now an opportunity of noticing his face, wherein I could detect no resemblance to his brother's. For it was broader and more vigorous, with a great, white beard valancing it; and whereas Mr. John's hair was neatly powdered and tied with a ribbon, as a gentleman's should be, Mr. Robert's, which was of a black colour with a little sprinkling of grey, hung about his head in a tangled mane. There was but a two-years difference between the ages of the brothers, but there might have been a decade. I explained my business, and we sat down to a supper of fish, freshly caught, which he served himself. And during supper he gave me the information I was come after. But I lent only an inattentive ear to his talk. For my knowledge of his wealth, the picture of him as he sat in his great sea-boots and coarse seaman's vest, as though it was the most natural garb in the world, and his easy discourse about those far African rivers, made a veritable jumble of my mind. To add to it all, there was the mystery of the shuttered house. More than once I was inclined to question him upon this last account, but his manner did not promise confidences, and I said nothing. At last he perceived my inattention.

"I will repeat all this to-morrow," he said grimly. "You are, no doubt, tired. I cannot, I am afraid, house you, for, as you see, I have no room; but I have a young friend who happens by good luck to stay this night on Tresco, and no doubt he will oblige me." Thereupon he led me to a cottage on the outskirts of Dolphin Town, and of all in that village nearest to the sea.

"My friend," said he, "is named Ginver Wyeth, and, though he comes from these parts, he does not live here, being a school-master on the mainland. His mother has died lately, and he is come on that account."

Mr. Wyeth received me hospitably, but with a certain pedantry of speech which somewhat surprised me, seeing that his parents were common fisherfolk. He readily explained the matter, however, over a pipe, when Mr. Lovyes had left

us. "I owe everything to Mrs. Lovyes," he said. "She took me when a boy, taught me something herself, and sent me thereafter, at her own charges, to a school in Falmouth."

"Mrs. Lovyes!" I exclaimed.

"Yes," he continued, and, bending forward, lowered his voice. "You went up to Merchant's Point, you say? Then you passed Crudge's Folly— a house of two storeys with a well in the garden."

"Yes, yes!" I said.

"She lives there," said he.

"Behind those shutters!" I cried.

"For twenty years she has lived in the midst of us, and no one has seen her during all that time. Not even Robert Lovyes. Aye, she has lived behind the shutters."

There he stopped. I waited, thinking that in a little he would take up his tale, but he did not, and I had to break the silence.

"I had not heard that Mr. Robert was ever married," I said as carelessly as I might.

"Nor was he," replied Mr. Wyeth. "Mrs. Lovyes is the wife of John. The house at Merchant's Point is hers, and there twenty years ago she lived."

His words caught my breath away, so little did I expect them.

"The wife of John Lovyes!" I stammered, "but—" And I told him how I had seen Robert Lovyes carry his basket up the path.

"Yes," said Wyeth. "Twice a day Robert draws water for her at the well, and once a day he brings her food. It is in his house, too, that she lives— Crudge's Folly, that was his name for it, and the name clings. But, none the less, she is the wife of John;" and with little more persuasion Mr. Wyeth told me the story.

"It is the story of a sacrifice," he began, "mad or great, as you please; but, mark you, it achieved its end. As a boy, I witnessed it from its beginnings. For it was at this very door that Robert Lovyes rapped when he first landed on Tresco on the night of the seventh of May twenty-two years ago, and I was here on my holidays at the time. I had been out that day in my father's lugger to the Poul, which is the best fishing-ground anywhere near Scilly, and the fog took us, I remember, at three of the afternoon. So what with that and the wind failing, it was late when we cast anchor in Grimsey Sound. The night had fallen in a brown mirk, and so still that the sound of our feet brushing through the ferns was loud, like the sweep of scythes. We sat down to supper in this kitchen about nine, my mother, my father, two men from the boat, and myself, and after supper we gathered about the fire here and talked. The talk in these parts, however it may begin, slides insensibly to that one element of which the noise is ever in our ears; and so in a little here were we chattering of wrecks and wrecks and wrecks and the bodies of dead men drowned. And then, in the thick of the talk, came

the knock on the door— a light rapping of the knuckles, such as one hears twenty times a day; but our minds were so primed with old wives' tales that it fairly shook us all. No one stirred, and the knocking was repeated.

"Then the latch was lifted, and Robert Lovyes stepped in. His beard was black then— coal black, like his hair— and his face looked out from it pale as a ghost and shining wet from the sea. The water dripped from his clothes and made a puddle about his feet.

" 'How often did I knock?' he asked pleasantly. 'Twice, I think. Yes, twice.'

"Then he sat down on the settle, very deliberately pulled off his great sea-boots, and emptied the water out of them.

" 'What island is this?' he asked.

" 'Tresco.'

" 'Tresco!' he exclaimed, in a quick, agitated whisper, as though he dreaded yet expected to hear the name. 'We were wrecked, then, on the Golden Ball.'

" 'Wrecked?' cried my father; but the man went on pursuing his own thoughts.

" 'I swam to an islet.'

" 'It would be Norwithel,' said my father.

" 'Yes,' said he, 'it would be Norwithel.' And my mother asked curiously—

" 'You know these islands?' For his speech was leisurely and delicate, such as we heard neither from Scillonians nor from the sailors who visit St. Mary's.

" 'Yes,' he answered, his face breaking into a smile of unexpected softness, 'I know these islands. From Rosevean to Ganilly, from Peninnis Head to Maiden Bower: I know them well.'"

AT THIS POINT Mr. Wyeth broke off his story, and crossing to the window, opened it. "Listen!" he said. I heard as it were the sound of innumerable voices chattering and murmuring and whispering in some mysterious language, and at times the voices blended and the murmurs became a single moan.

"It is the tide making on the Golden Ball," said Mr. Wyeth. "The reef stretches seawards from St. Helen's island and half way across the Sound. You may see it at low tide, a ledge level as a paved causeway, and God help the ship that strikes on it!"

Even while he spoke, from these undertones of sound there swelled suddenly a great booming like a battery of cannon.

"It is the ledge cracking," said Mr. Wyeth, "and it cracks in the calmest weather." With that, he closed the window, and, lighting his pipe, resumed his story.

"IT WAS on that reef that Mr. Robert Lovyes was wrecked. The ship, he told us, was the schooner *Waking Dawn*, bound from Cardiff to Africa, and she had

run into the fog about half-past three, when they were a mile short of the Seven Stones. She bumped twice on the reef, and sank immediately, with, so far as he knew, all her crew.

" 'So now,' Robert continued, tapping his belt, 'since I have the means to pay, I will make bold to ask for a lodging, and for this night I will hang up here my dripping garments to Neptune.'

" 'Me tabula sacer
Votiva paries—'

"I began in the pride of my schooling, for I had learned that verse of Horace but a week before.

"'This, no doubt, is the Cornish tongue,' he interrupted gravely, 'and will you please to carry my boots outside?'

"What followed seemed to me then the strangest part of all this business, though, indeed, our sea-fogs come and go as often as not with a like abruptness. But the time of this fog's dispersion shocked the mind as something pitiless and arbitrary. For had the air cleared an hour before, the Waking Dawn would not have struck. I opened the door, and it was as though a panel of brilliant white was of a sudden painted on the floor. Robert Lovyes sprang up from the settle, ran past me into the open, and stood on the bracken in his stockinged feet. A little patch of fog still smoked on the shining beach of Tean; a scarf of it was twisted about the granite bosses of St. Helen's; and for the rest the moonlight sparkled upon the headlands and was spilled across miles of placid sea. There was a froth of water upon the Golden Ball, but no sign of the schooner sunk among its weeds.

"My father, however, and the two boatmen hurried down to the shore, while I was despatched with the news to Merchant's Point. My mother asked Mr. Lovyes his name, that I might carry it with me. But he spoke in a dreamy voice, as though he had not heard her.

" 'There were eight of the crew. Four were below, and I doubt if the four on deck could swim.'

"I ran off on my errand, and, coming back a little later with a bottle of cordial waters, found Mr. Lovyes still standing in the moonlight. He seemed not to have moved a finger. I gave him the bottle, with a message that any who were rescued should be carried to Merchant's Point forthwith, and that he himself should go down there in the morning.

" 'Who taught you Latin?' he asked suddenly.

" 'Mrs. Lovyes taught me the rudiments,' I began; and with that he led me on to talk of her, but with some cunning. For now he would divert me to another topic and again bring me back to her, so that it all seemed the vagrancies of a boy's inconsequent chatter.

"Mrs. Lovyes, who was remotely akin to the Lord Proprietor, had come to Tresco three years before, immediately after her marriage, and, it was understood, at her husband's wish. I talked of her readily, for, apart from what I owed to her bounty, she was a woman most sure to engage the affections of any boy. For one thing she was past her youth, being thirty years of age, tall, with eyes of the kindliest grey, and she bore herself in everything with a tender toleration, like a woman that has suffered much.

"Of the other topics of this conversation there was one which later I had good reason to remember. We had caught a shark twelve feet long at the Poul that day, and the shark fairly divided my thoughts with Mrs. Lovyes.

" 'You bleed a fish first into the sea,' I explained. 'Then you bait with a chad's head, and let your line down a couple of fathoms. You can see your bait quite clearly, and you wait.'

" 'No doubt,' said Robert; 'you wait.'

" 'In a while,' said I, 'a dim lilac shadow floats through the clear water, and after a little you catch a glimpse of a forked tail and waving fins and an evil devil's head. The fish smells at the bait and sinks again to a lilac shadow— perhaps out of sight; and again it rises. The shadow becomes a fish, the fish goes circling round your boat, and it may be a long while before he turns on his back and rushes at the bait.'

" 'And as like as not, he carries the bait and line away."

" 'That depends upon how quick you are with the gaff,' said I.' Here comes my father.'

"My father returned empty-handed. Not one of the crew had been saved.

" 'You asked my name,' said Robert Lovyes, turning to my mother. 'It is Crudge— Jarvis Crudge.' With that he went to his bed, but all night long I heard him pacing his room.

"The next morning he complained of his long immersion in the sea, and certainly when he told his story to Mr. and Mrs. Lovyes as they sat over their breakfast in the parlour at Merchant's Point, he spoke with such huskiness as I never heard the like of. Mr. Lovyes took little heed to us, but went on eating his breakfast with only a sour comment here and there. I noticed, however, that Mrs. Lovyes, who sat over against us, bent her head forward and once or twice shook it as though she would unseat some ridiculous conviction. And after the story was told, she sat with no word of kindness for Mr. Crudge, and, what was yet more unlike her, no word of pity for the sailors who were lost. Then she rose and stood, steadying herself with the tips of her fingers upon the table. Finally she came swiftly across the room and peered into Mr. Crudge's face.

" 'If you need help,' she said, 'I will gladly furnish it. No doubt you will be anxious to go from Tresco at the earliest. No doubt, no doubt you will,' she repeated anxiously.

" 'Madame,' he said, 'I need no help, being by God's leave a man'— and he laid some stress upon the 'man,' but not boastfully— rather as though all women did, or might need help, by the mere circumstance of their sex— 'and as for going hence, why yesterday I was bound for Africa. I sailed unexpectedly into a fog off Scilly. I was wrecked in a calm sea on the Golden Ball—I was thrown up on Tresco— no one on that ship escaped but myself. No sooner was I safe than the fog lifted—'

" 'You will stay?' Mrs. Lovyes interrupted. 'No?'

" 'Yes,' said he, 'Jarvis Grudge will stay.'

"And she turned thoughtfully away. But I caught a glimpse of her face as we went out, and it wore the saddest smile a man could see.

"Mr. Grudge and I walked for a while in silence.

" 'And what sort of a name has Mr. John Lovyes in these parts?' he asked.

" 'An honest sort,' said I emphatically— 'the name of a man who loves his wife.'

" 'Or her money,' he sneered. 'Bah! a surly ill-conditioned dog, I'll warrant, the curmudgeon!"

"'You are marvellously recovered of your cold,' said I.

"He stopped, and looked across the Sound. Then he said in a soft, musing voice: 'I once knew just such another clever boy. He was so clever that men beat him with sticks and put on great sea-boots to kick him with, so that he lived a miserable life, and was subsequently hanged in great agony at Tyburn.'

"Mr. Grudge, as he styled himself, stayed with us for a week, during which time he sailed much with me about these islands; and I made a discovery. Though he knew these islands so well, he had never visited them before, and his knowledge was all hearsay. I did not mention my discovery to him, lest I should meet with another rebuff. But I was none the less sure of its truth, for he mistook Hanjague for Nornor, and Priglis Bay for Beady Pool, and made a number of suchlike mistakes. After a week he hired the cottage in which he now lives, bought his boat, leased from the steward the patch of ground in Dolphin Town, and set about building his house. He undertook the work, I am sure, for pure employment and distraction. He picked up the granite stones, fitted them together, panelled them, made the floors from the deck of a brigantine which came ashore on Annet, pegged down the thatch roof— in a word, he built the house from first to last with his own hands and he took fifteen months over the business, during which time he did not exchange a single word with Mrs. Lovyes, nor anything more than a short 'Good-day' with Mr. John. He worked, however, with no great regularity. For while now he laboured in a feverish haste, now he would sit a whole day idle on the headlands; or, again, he would of a sudden throw down his tools as though the work overtaxed him, and, leaping into his

boat, set all sail and run with the wind. All that night you might see him sailing in the moonlight, and he would come home in the flush of the dawn.

"After he had built the house, he furnished it, crossing for that purpose backwards and forwards between Tresco and St. Mary's. I remember that one day he brought back with him a large chest, and I offered to lend him a hand in carrying it. But he hoisted it on his back and took it no farther than the cottage in which he lived, where it remained locked with a padlock.

"Towards Christmas-time, then, the house was ready, but to our surprise he did not move into it. He seemed, indeed, of a sudden, to have lost all liking for it, and whether it was that he had no longer any work upon his hands, he took to following Mrs. Lovyes about, but in a way that was unnoticeable unless you had other reasons to suspect that his thoughts were following her.

"His conduct in this respect was particularly brought home to me on Christmas Day. The afternoon was warm and sunny, and I walked over the hill at Merchant's Point, meaning to bathe in the little sequestered bay beyond. From the top of the hill I saw Mrs. Lovyes walking along the strip of beach alone, and as I descended the hill-side, which is very deep in fern and heather, I came plump upon Jarvis Grudge, stretched full-length on the ground. He was watching Mrs. Lovyes with so greedy a concentration of his senses that he did not remark my approach. I asked him when he meant to enter his new house.

" 'I do not know that I ever shall,' he replied.

" 'Then why did you build it?' I asked.

" 'Because I was a fool!' and then he burst out in a passionate whisper. 'But a fool I was to stay here, and a fool's trick it was to build that house!' He shook his fist in its direction. 'Call it Grudge's Folly, and there's the name for it!' and with that he turned him again to spying upon Mrs. Lovyes.

"After a while he spoke again, but slowly and with his eyes fixed upon the figure moving upon the beach.

" 'Do you remember the night I came ashore? You had caught a shark that day, and you told me of it. The great lilac shadow which rises from the depths and circles about the bait, and sinks again and rises again and takes— how long?— two years maybe before he snaps it.'

" 'But he does not carry it away,' said I, taking his meaning.

" 'Sometimes—sometimes," he snarled.

" 'That depends on how quick we are with the gaff."

" 'You!' he laughed, and taking me by the elbows, he shook me till I was giddy.

" 'I owe Mrs. Lovyes everything,' I said. At that he let me go. The ferocity of his manner, however, confirmed me in my fears, and, with a boy's extravagance, I carried from that day a big knife in my belt.

" 'The gaff, I suppose,' said Mr. Grudge with a polite smile when first he remarked it. During the next week, however, he showed more contentment with his lot, and once I caught him rubbing his hands and chuckling, like a man well pleased; so that by New Year's Eve I was wellnigh relieved of my anxiety on Mrs. Lovyes' account.

"On that night, however, I went down to Grudge's cottage, and peeping through the window on my way to the door, I saw a strange man in the room. His face was clean-shaven, his hair tied back and powdered; he was in his shirt-sleeves, with a satin waistcoat, a sword at his side, and shining buckles to his shoes. Then I saw that the big chest stood open. I opened the door and entered.

" 'Come in!' said the man, and from his voice I knew him to be Mr. Crudge. He took a candle in his hand and held it above his head.

" 'Tell me my name,' he said. His face, shaved of its beard and no longer hidden by his hair, stood out distinct, unmistakable.

" 'Lovyes,' I answered.

" 'Good boy,' said he. 'Robert Lovyes, brother to John.'

" 'Yet he did not know you,' said I, though, indeed, I could not wonder.

" 'But she did,' he cried, with a savage exultation. 'At the first glance, at the first word, she knew me.' Then, quietly, 'My coat is on the chair beside you.'

"I took it up. 'What do you mean to do?' I asked.

" 'It is New Year's Eve,' he said grimly. 'The season of good wishes. It is only meet that I should wish my brother, who stole my wife, much happiness for the next twelve months.'

"He took the coat from my hands.

" 'You admire the coat? Ah! true, the colour is lilac.' He held it out at arm's length. Doubtless I had been staring at the coat, but I had not even given it a thought. 'The lilac shadow!' he went on, with a sneer. 'Believe me, it is the purest coincidence.' And as he prepared to slip his arm into the sleeve I flashed the knife out of my belt. He was too quick for me, however. He flung the coat over my head. I felt the knife twisted out of my hand; he stumbled over the chair; we both fell to the ground, and the next thing I know I was running over the bracken towards Merchant's Point with Robert Lovyes hot upon my heels. He was of a heavy build, and forty years of age. I had the double advantage, and I ran till my chest cracked and the stars danced above me. I clanged at the bell and stumbled into the hall.

" 'Mrs. Lovyes!' I choked the name out as she stepped from the parlour.

" 'Well?' she asked. 'What is it?'

" 'He is following— Robert Lovyes!'

"She sprang rigid, as though I had whipped her across the face. Then, 'I knew it would come to this at the last,' she said; and even as she spoke Robert Lovyes crossed the threshold.

" 'Molly,' he said, and looked at her curiously. She stood singularly passive, twisting her fingers. 'I hardly know you,' he continued. 'In the old days you were the wilfullest girl I ever clapped eyes on.'

" 'That was thirteen years ago,' she said, with a queer little laugh at the recollection.

"He took her by the hand and led her into the parlour. I followed. Neither Mrs. Lovyes nor Robert remarked my presence, and as for John Lovyes, he rose from his chair as the pair approached him, stretched out a trembling hand, drew it in, stretched it out again, all without a word, and his face purple and ridged with the veins.

" 'Brother,' said Robert, taking between his fingers half a gold coin, which was threaded on a chain about Mrs. Lovyes' wrist, 'where is the fellow to this? I gave it to you on the Gambia river, bidding you carry it to Molly as a sign that I would return.'

"I saw John's face harden and set at the sound of his brother's voice. He looked at his wife, and, since she now knew the truth, he took the bold course.

" 'I gave it to her,' said he, 'as a token of your death; and, by God! she was worth the lie!'

"The two men faced one another— Robert smoothing his chin, John with his arms folded, and each as white and ugly with passion as the other. Robert turned to Mrs. Lovyes, who stood like a stone.

" 'You promised to wait,' he said in a constrained voice. 'I escaped six years after my noble brother.'

" 'Six years?' she asked. 'Had you come back then you would have found me waiting.'

" 'I could not,' he said. 'A fortune equal to your own— that was what I promised to myself before I returned to marry you.'

" 'And much good it has done you,' said John, and I think that he meant by the provocation to bring the matter to an immediate issue. 'Pride, pride!' and he wagged his head. 'Sinful pride!'

"Robert sprang forward with an oath, and then, as though the movement had awakened her, Mrs. Lovyes stepped in between the two men, with an arm outstretched on either side to keep them apart.

" 'Wait!' she said. 'For what is it that you fight? Not, indeed, for me. To you, my husband, I will no more belong; to you, my lover, I cannot. My woman's pride, my woman's honour—those two things are mine to keep.'

"So she stood casting about for an issue, while the brothers glowered at one another across her. It was evident that if she left them alone they would fight, and fight to the death. She turned to Robert.

" 'You meant to live on Tresco here at my gates, unknown to me; but you could not.'

" 'I could not,' he answered. 'In the old days you had spoken so much of Scilly— every island reminded me— and I saw you every day.'

"I could read the thought passing through her mind. It would not serve for her to live beside them, visible to them each day. Sooner or later they would come to grips. And then her face flushed as the notion of her great sacrifice came to her.

" 'I see but the one way,' she said. 'I will go into the house that you, Robert, have built. Neither you nor John shall see me, but none the less, I shall live between you, holding you apart, as my hands do now. I give my life to you so truly that from this night no one shall see my face. You, John, shall live on here at Merchant's Point. Robert, you at your cottage, and every day you will bring me food and water and leave it at my door.'

"The two men fell back shamefaced. They protested they would part and put the world between them; but she would not trust them. I think, too, the notion of her sacrifice grew on her as she thought of it. For women are tenacious of sacrifice even as men are of revenge. And in the end she had her way. That night Robert Lovyes nailed the boards across the windows, and brought the door-key back to her; and that night, twenty years ago, she crossed the threshold. No man has seen her since. But, none the less, for twenty years she has lived between the brothers, keeping them apart."

This was the story which Mr. Wyeth told me as we sat over our pipes, and the next day I set off on my journey back to London. The conclusion of the affair I witnessed myself. For a year later we received a letter from Mr. Robert, asking that a large sum of money should be forwarded to him. Being curious to learn the reason for his demand, I carried the sum to Tresco myself. Mr. John Lovyes had died a month before, and I reached the island on Mr. Robert's wedding-day. I was present at the ceremony. He was now dressed in a manner which befitted his station— an old man bent and bowed, but still handsome, and he bore upon his arm a tall woman, grey-haired and very pale, yet with the traces of great beauty. As the parson laid her hand in her husband's, I heard her whisper to him, "Dust to Dust."

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9: The Popkin Dismissal Agency

L. H. Robbins

Leonard Harman Robbins, 1877-1947

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THE ELEVATOR let me off at the twelfth floor, and I walked half a block along the corridor, looking for the offices of Lubbux and Blaxton, divorce specialists. The farther I went the more slowly I walked. Four times that week I had come up in that elevator and started down that corridor, only to lose heart and turn back.

Bridegrooms whose feet grow cold at the church door, and brides who want to run home at sight of the parson, can sympathise with the person who is going to get divorced.

To-day I progressed further down the hall towards Messrs. Lubbux and Blaxton than before, past offices of construction companies, typewriter concerns, and newspaper syndicates, whose names on the doors I had read many times; past the barber's shop that had marked the farthest north of my last visit, and so into an unexplored region where the painted words on the glass were unfamiliar. My mind was made up— I would go through to the Pole this time or perish!

I could see the end of the hall now, and knew that my matrimonial jumping-off place was near at hand. Suddenly I halted, staring at a gold-leaf legend that read:

THE POPKIN DISMISSAL AGENCY
John Popkin

What if this should be the John Popkin whose prisoner I had been the year before in his private gaol in New Jersey? Glad of any excuse to delay my call upon Lubbux and Blaxton, I opened the door and entered.

Three women and two men were seated in the outer office, wearing such gloomy looks as people wear in the waiting rooms of surgeons and dentists. A stenographer smiled to mc from the other side of a railing. I said I had come to inquire if the John Popkin of the firm was my friend John Popkin of Chesterbridge.

"He is," said the girl. "Shall I take in your card?"

Two minutes later, the eccentric millionaire and I were shaking hands in his inner office.

"What has become of your private gaol ?" I asked.

"Closed for a while," said be. "I have another scheme, just now, for regenerating society. Even reformers need variety, you know. Next year I may reopen the place at Chesterbridge; but this year I'm establishing this dismissal agency. Heard any talk about it yet?"

"No."

"You will. It fills the longest-felt want in the history of the world."

"What do you dismiss?"

"Anybody." He handed me a folder. Sit here and read this while I attend to my clients outside. Then we'll go to lunch."

While he was gone I read his prospectus

THIS POPKIN DISMISSAL AGENCY undertakes to remove objectionable persons of any sort from any conceivable situation in which they interfere with the peace and happiness of others. Secrecy guaranteed. Scandals absolutely avoided. All operations conducted with intelligence and despatch.

I thought of my mother-in-law, holding the fort in my home and pouring gallons of poison daily into our cup of happiness—my cup and Annie's I was still brooding over my domestic woes when Popkin came back.

"Now for a steak," said he.

"I'm not hungry; but I'll go along and watch you eat."

"Not hungry ?" he laughed. "What is the matter—disappointed in love?"

"That's about , it," I answered, drearily. "That was why I was driving my car so furiously the day last summer when you took me prisoner for speeding."

"Locking you up served you right, Brandon. You might have killed somebody."

"I might have killed myself, and that would have suited me first rate, Popkin."

He sat down and patted my knee with a fatherly hand. "Tell me all about it."

I told him how happy Annie and I had been; how her mother had come creeping into our Eden; how love's young dream had become a nightmare; how I had determined upon a separation as the only escape from an impossible situation.

"At my mother's suggestion," I said, "I am now on my way to see a lawyer."

"Don't do that," said Popkin. "Providence has placed me here in your way to save you all that. By mistake you have come to the right shop, and you'll thank your stars for it the rest of your days."

"Tell me about this queer agency of yours," said I, to change the subject.

"There's not much more to tell than the name implies. For years I have been impressed with the tremendous amount of unhappiness that exists in the world as the result of the unwillingness of employers and others to deal frankly and

sensibly with servants and other persons whose presence around them has become harmful or disagreeable. A case will illustrate:

"The tall gentleman you saw in the waiting room as you entered owns an ice cream factory. His name is Cone. He has a manager who thinks the business couldn't be run without him.

For years this manager has lorded it over Mr. Cone, and browbeaten him, and talked like a Dutch uncle to him, and treated him like dirt. The fellow's honesty and industry are not in question; he has simply assumed all the authority in the shop and set himself above the owner, who has borne with the tyranny until he has lost the nerve to open his head to the man whose wages he pays.

"There's where we come in. For a modest fee we bounce the manager. We take all the risk of the fellow's displeasure. We are not hard-hearted and brutal, neither are we tender-hearted and cowardly. We are simply a machine, an impersonal agent in the case. Nothing that he may say can stop us. We intervene, as they say in Washington; we restore the power to the hands in which it belongs, and then we withdraw our forces and look for another job.

"Early this morning the manager came in offering to mediate. Mediation is right in our line. Cone is disposed to arbitrate. He had named his demands; his manager likewise. To-morrow we may be able to bring the two together beneath the olive branch, and the dove of peace will coo in that ice-cream factory for a long, long time."

"Fine idea!" I exclaimed. "What about the women I saw outside?"

"Servant girl cases, all three. The stout woman is Mrs. Roger Typesett. Her case is typical. She has been owned by a maid for eight years. She can't give a dinner party without the maid's consent, and the maid has withheld her consent so often lately that the woman is threatened with the loss of her position in society. She would rather bow down to the girl the rest of her life than walk into the kitchen and discharge her. But her husband won't allow her to surrender her social prestige without firing a shot; he has invested a lot of money in it. So he has sent her to me, and this afternoon we shall go up to the house, beard the lioness in her den, and send, her packing. No doubt there will be mediation in that case, too." Popkin smiled genially.

"Mr. Typesett is one of our most valued customers. He owns 'The Morning Bulletin,' and has hired us to run off six sacred cows for him since January, which we have done successfully; so he has a high regard for our work. Sacred cows are hard to dismiss, as you know it you happen to be familiar with the newspaper business."

"I'm not. What is a sacred cow?"

"A sacred cow is a journalist whose occupation has come to consist largely in 'throwing the bull to his employers,' and drawing a fat pail of bran therefor.

Sacred cows are tenacious. Their going value is small in two ways of looking at it. They drag many a newspaper into bankruptcy. Our Job for Mr. Typesett was the hardest we have ever tackled. We have since raised our rates on that class of work."

Popkin pulled out the drawer of a card catalogue, talking on in his eager way. The Elimination of Indispensables was his hobby this year, and be rode it as hard as he rode any of the others.

"I can tell you a hundred tales to show how we have made the world happier. Here is the case of a church that was going downhill because the same people had held the offices in the church societies for a generation, and wouldn't see that they were acting as a drag. We handled that situation so delicately that only three families left the congregation. The minister came in last week to tell me that his membership had doubled.

"Here is the case of two superintendents in a sugar mill. Each employed us to dismiss the other. They met one Saturday in our outer office. Maybe, you noticed the broken spindle in the railing. We lost money on that case. Here is a chauffeur who worked for two maiden ladies, when he wasn't drunk. He was a tough proposition. Here is a town official in Connecticut, where they don't believe in the Recall.

"And so on," concluded Popkin. "You will see, I think, that our agency is a boon to humanity.' We are as necessary, as the employment agencies; people have to be fired as well as hired—a fact that American enterprise has overlooked up to this time."

"Aren't you cutting in on the preserves of the courts and the police?"

"We are, and proud of it. Suppose you call the police— that means , a scandal, doesn't it? Suppose you go to law—think of the time and the litigation, not to mention the, funny stories about you in the newspapers. We save you notoriety and expense. Of course, we meet a heap of opposition. The divorce lawyers in particular are bitter toward us. and that brings me, Brandon, to your case. Tell me your story more in detail."

With a faint ray of hope illuminating my gloom, I told him all— how Annie and I had lived without a quarrel until the year when her mother and mine had come to visit us; how the two old ladies had locked horns at the very start over Annie's housekeeping ; how Annie's mother had left in anger, only to return to defend Annie from my mother and me; how my dear, devoted mother had gone away in a huff, to come back next day to help me stand up for my rights; how Annie had been coached by her mother to annoy my mother; how my mother had encouraged me to resent the encroachment upon my authority as head of the house; how the gulf between Annie and myself had grown so wide that not even the biggest cannon at Fort Wadsworth could throw a shell across it; how there was nothing left for me but Reno or the river.

"You still love your wife?"

"Dearly."

"More than you love anyone else?"

"Yes, I think I do."

"And she ?"

"Of course, I can't tell—we haven't spoken civilly to each other for six months— but I am willing to bet every cent I own that she will never love another man, whatever she may think of me."

"Either of the old ladles dependent upon you for support?"

"No; they have homes and means of their own."

Popkin beamed with enthusiasm.

"Brandon," said he, "put yourself in my hands. I'll give this case my personal attention. Go and stay at your club for a couple of days."

I wrung his hand gratefully. He opened the door to show me to the elevator.

Coming out of the door immediately across the hall was my mother-in-law! The sign on that door was Lubbux & Blaxton!

Though I did not relish the idea of leaving my mother alone in the house with Annie and her mother, I took Popkin's advice and avoided my home for two long nights. On the morning of the third day I telephoned the agency.

"Come on down," said Popkin, and eagerly I went.

"Well," said I, when we were closeted in his private office, "what's the verdict?"

Popkin's face was serious. "This case," said he, "is in many respects, the most difficult I have ever undertaken. A force hitherto irresistible has met an apparently immovable body, and the result so far is chaos."

"Have you been up at the house?"

"Three times. It is a beautiful home you have, Brandon."

"It isn't a home any more; it's a purgatory. Did you see Annie's mother?"

"Yes, and yours, also a man sitting on the steps who looked to me like a process server. I suspect he was waiting to serve papers on you in divorce proceedings. If I were you I'd stay away from there."

I ground my teeth. "That's the doings of Annie's mother. Honestly, Popkin, Annie hasn't a complaint against me in all the world. We're as fond of each other as two turtle doves. We never had even the ghost of a row until this visitation descended upon our nest."

"I'm sure of that, Brandon. In my interview with your wife she didn't breathe an unkind word about you. What she's after is a divorce from your mother. And what you are after when you came up here the other day was a divorce from her mother, eh ?"

"That's the truth of the matter, I guess."

"I saw your mother first," said Mr Popkin. "I explained to her the effect that her presence was having on your happiness. I asked her to absent herself for your sake. She refused to go. She was positive. She accused me of being in league with Annie and her mother. She declared that she would sooner let them, walk over her dead body than leave you at the mercy of such an obstinate woman as your mother-in-law."

"That's mother all over," said I. "When I was a small boy in North Orange she fought an entire school board for three years because a teacher had slapped my face for throwing chalk. She got the teacher fired, too. We had to move away an a result of the rumpus, and my education was hopelessly arrested ; but she won her point."

"A boy's best friend is his mother, Brandon," said Popkin.

"You needn't be sententious," I told him. "When a woman has gone through as much fire and brimstone for her son as my mother has for me in the last year, she deserves respectful mention."

"The fact remains, Brandon, that your mother is a fly in the ointment at present. You admit it, don't you?"

"I suppose I do; but I resent your figure of speech. A man won't hear his mother called a fly."

"Then we will swat the fly metaphor and apply it to your wife's mother instead."

"The simile is a weak one," said I. "Annie's mother is a hornet."

"I judge so. It was a hornet's nest that I got into when I asked her to clear out. She charged me with being in collusion with you and your dear mother in an effort to humiliate her daughter. She said we would tear the house down over her head before she would desert her darling Annie in the hour of persecution. A fine, brave spirit your wife's mother has. She would make a splendid militant."

"She has carved holes in my picture of happiness all right; but militant is not the name for her. She's a Mexican brigand in skirts. She'd make Zapatista look like a Salvation Army corporal."

"It was a stormy interview she gave me," said Popkin. "I am convinced that nothing but the fire department can drag her away from your premises. I have used my utmost powers of persuasion on both of your mothers, and I have to acknowledge that I'm completely baffled for the first time in my career of righting human wrongs."

He paced the floor, scratching his head and thinking hard.

"I hate, to give up and confess myself beaten," he said; "but I would drop this case in a minute if I didn't take a personal interest in it. The situation at your house is what the French call an impasse. It's a deadlock, and there's no thoroughfare for the peace parade."

"You spoke of a third visit," I hinted.

"That was the time I saw your wife. I asked her to send her mother away. She wouldn't listen to it. She said her mother should stay till hockey matches began to be played in Hades, or words to that effect. She gave me a rather poor account of your mother, Brandon."

"What did she say about me?"

"Nothing worth repeating, except that you had allowed your mother to think for you so long that you had lost all your manliness."

"Damn!" I shouted.

''Hush!" said Popkin. "What would your mother think to hear her son say anything so assertive as that? I might add that your wife put the blame on your mother, and seemed only sorry for you. In fact, she cried a good deal when you were discussed. I think she still loves you."

"Yet she's getting a divorce from me!"

"Well, haven't you considered starting something in that line yourself?"

I bowed my head. Surely no man before my time had found himself in so wretched a position.

"Cheer up, old man," said Popkin. "I'm genuinely sorry for you, and I believe there may still be a way to help you. This is—let's see— Thursday, What are your wife's engagements for Saturday?"

"Saturday mornings she plays Lady Bountiful in the Fourth Street Day Nursery in Hoboken. Saturday afternoons she used to go motoring with me; but we aren't doing any of that this spring."

"Good!" cried Popkin, beaming in his old way. "Now I want you to follow my instructions and get out of town before that process server finds you. You know my country place up at Chesterbridge. Hop in your car and run up there this afternoon. My old caretaker and his wife will expecting you. Make yourself at home, and wait until you hear from me. It will be a bit lonesome; but maybe we can remedy that."

I gave him a melancholy handshake and went directly to the garage. In an hour I was across the ferry and speeding over the Kearney turnpike.

There is no lovelier land on earth than Central Jersey in May. This was my thoughts on the following Saturday afternoon as I came up the hill from whipping Popkin's private trout brook. In the spell of that occupation I had almost forgotten my sorrows, grievous though they were. Old Izaak Walton knew what he was talking about when he recommended fishing as a cure for human woes. Intent upon spreading trouble among the trout in their shaded pools, I had for a moment lost sight of my own, and I sent a thought wave of gratitude to the owner of the stately mansion looming before me.

I looked across the wide lawns and the woods and orchards to the church spires of Chesterbridge in the distance, and wondered that so beautiful a world

should contain domestic wars. "With so much peace going to waste out here," thought I, "why should it be so scarce a commodity in the city?"

I had turned the corner of the house now. A dusty taxicab was disappearing down the driveway. At the top of the verandah steps stood my wife, looking twice as lovely as any angel in any painter's dream of Paradise, although she was a trifle pale.

My rod and reel fell clanging from my hand. "Annie!" I cried, and ran toward her, stumbling on the lowest step in my rubber shoes and lighting on all fours at her feet, while my creel of fish went flying over my head.

"Are you hurt?" she asked, hastening down to me.

"I hope I have broken every bone in my worthless body!" said I.

"Any man deserves a tumble who goes fishing when he has lady callers," she said. "Mercy! how red your neck is! Why didn't you wear a handkerchief around it? You know how easily you tan."

We sat down side by side on the top step and looked into each other's eyes for three thousand years. Her eyes were wet— I could see that through my tears.

I took her hand and kissed it. She laid her head on my shoulder. Suddenly a fear shot through me.

"You spoke of lady callers," said I. "Is your— are you accompanied by— by anybody ?"

"I am not," she replied. "Is your— is anyone here with you?"

"No one but the best woman in the world."

She sprang to her feet. "I was told that you were here alone!" she said, icily. "I have been tricked! If I had dreamed that your— that she was here, do you suppose I should have come?"

"If you mean my mother, she isn't within fifty miles of here."

"But you said the best woman in the world—"

"Well, isn't that you? Aren't you here?"

"Oh!" she sighed, and nestled again. "But I thought you considered her the best. I've always thought you thought so."

"Forget it," said I.

"But I'm not the best, Brandy, dear—truly I'm not. I'm the meanest and cruellest and most unhappy. And when that Mr. Popkin came to me yesterday with your message I was so hateful and malicious that I felt glad you were suffering so, glad that you had had to give in first. I'm wicked and proud. Forgive me, dear Brandy!"

"My message?" said I. "What mess—" But I checked my words in time. "Oh, yes, yes, to be sure. And what did he tell you?"

"Just what you told him to tell me, I suppose. I think it was perfectly noble of you, Brandy, to send for me after all I had done to hurt you." And she pulled my head down to hers.

The old caretaker came out of the house.

"There's a call for you on the long-distance, sir," said he.

It was that benefactor of his race, John Popkin.

"Was the abduction successful?" he asked.

"Yes, you rascal," I answered. "Bless you for that message, old man."

"It wasn't quite right," said he, "but I guess it was justifiable. Failing to remove your maternal relatives from your unhappy home, I removed your wife. It was the only thing left to do. Everything all correct now?"

"Yes."

"That's good, that's first-rate. Now you two young people settle down there in my gaol and enjoy yourselves the rest of the summer, will you?"

"But what about my mother— and hers? They'll be worrying. They've probably notified the police by this time."

"No, they haven't. I have told them that you and your wife have eloped; object matrimony; and that you are safe and comfortable. You can 'phone them from there to the same effect if you like, though I don't advise it. Better let well enough be."

"What do you propose to do with them— leave them there in the house together to eliminate each other like the Kilkenny cats?"

"Nothing like that will happen," said Popkin. "When I left them an hour ago they were weeping in each other's arms to think they had such undutiful children. They're going to have a good long visit now and got acquainted."

"Popkin," said I, "you're a friend of man. You're a social live wire. You're a regular Atlantic cable."

Then Annie, standing at my side, pushed my face away from the receiver, put hers in front, and said:

"Good evening, Mr. Popkin. This is Mrs. Brandon. C. Y. K,"

"I don't quite get that, Mrs. Brandon."

"C. Y. K," said Annie. "Consider yourself kissed."

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10: The Evening Rice

Achmed Abdullah

1881-1945

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UP THERE IN THE GRAY NORTH a great triple tomb thrusts its frowning parapet obliquely into space. On its outer walls, to left and right of the entrance, are bas-reliefs in sea-green majolica, representing five-claw, imperial dragons.

It is the Fu-Ling, the Happy and August Tomb, where lies the T'ai Tzu, the Nurhachi, the Iron-capped Prince, the founder of the Manchu dynasty, who centuries ago swept out of the barren Central Asian wastes at the head of his host of red-skinned, flat-nosed horsemen, and turned placid China into a crimson shambles.

Last year the hereditary keeper of the sacred tomb, a Ch'i-jen, a Manchu bannerman, sold it to a moon-faced Chinese farmer for a lean sack of clipped silver taels. Next year it will house the farmer's squealing, red-bristled pigs.

And still the Manchu has his sword and the strength of his sword-arm; still the moon-faced coolie is a coward who shrinks at the swish and crackle of naked steel.

Yet, next year, the pigs will dirty the tomb's yellow imperial tiles. And the pigs, too, are symbolic— and necessary. For what is the evening rice without a few slivers of fried pork?

THE LAST TIME Ng Ch'u had seen him had been nearly forty years earlier in the squat little Manchu-Chinese border town of Ninguta, in the hushed shelter of an enameled pagoda-roof that mirrored the sun-rays a thousandfold, like countless intersecting rainbows— endless zigzag flashings of electric blue and deep rose and keen, arrogant, glaucous-green, like the shooting of dragon-flies and purple-winged tropical moths. There had been murder in the other's, the Manchu's, eyes; murder in the hairy, brown fist that curled about broad, glistening steel.

But on that day he, the despised Chinese coolie, had had the whip-hand.

"A Manchu you are!" he had said; and his eyes had glistened triumphantly through meager almond slits. "A Manchu indeed! A Pao-i bannerman, an aristocrat— sloughing your will and your passions as snakes cast their skin, brooking no master but yourself and the black desert thunder! And I am only a mud-turtle from the land of Han." He had sucked in his breath. "But— " he had continued; had slurred and stopped.

"But?"

"But— there is one thing, perhaps two, which the Huang T'ai Hou, the Empress, the Old Buddha, does not forgive— not even in a Manchu, an iron-

capped prince!"— and a few more words, sibilant, staccato, and at once Yang Shen-hsiu had sheathed his dagger with a little dry, metallic click and had walked away, while Ng Ch'u had returned to his home.

There he had kowtowed deeply before an elderly peasant woman with bound feet, gnarled hands, and shriveled, berry-brown features.

"Mother," he had said, "I am going away today. I am going away now. I— and the Moon-beam!"— pointing into the inner room at a lissome, blue-clad form that was bending over the cooking-pots.

"Why, son?"

"There is Yang Shen-hsiu, the Manchu!"

"But— I thought—"

"Yes. I know. But a Manchu never forgets. And someday— perhaps tomorrow— his passion and his hatred, since he is a fool, will vanquish his fear. On that day— by Buddha and by Buddha— I shall not be here. Nor shall the Moon-beam!"

Nearly forty years earlier— and now he saw him again.

For just the fraction of a second, the unexpected sight of those glittering, hooded eyes— for he was conscious of Yang Shen-hsiu's eyes even before he saw the rest of the face: the thin nose beaking away bold and aquiline, the high cheekbones that seemed to give beneath the pressure of the leathery, ruddy-gold skin, the compressed, sardonic lips brushed by a drooping Mandarin mustache, and the flagging, combative chin— for just the fraction of a second, the unexpected sight of those sinister eyes, rising quickly like some evil dream from the human maelstrom that streaked down Forty-second Street, threw Ng Ch'u off his guard. It conquered in him the long habit of outward self-control which he had acquired in a lifetime of tight bargaining, of matching his algebraic Mongol cunning against the equal cunning of his countrymen.

He stopped still. His round, butter-yellow face was marked by a look of almost ludicrous alarm. His tiny, pinkish button of a nose crinkled and sniffled like that of a frightened rabbit. His pudgy, comfortable little hands opened and shut convulsively. His jaw felt swollen, out of joint. His tongue seemed heavy, clogging, like something which did not belong to him and which he must try to spit out. Little blue and crimson wheels gyrated madly in front of his bulging eyes.

Ng Ch'u was a coward. He knew it. Nor was he ashamed of it. To him— a prosy, four-square, sublimely practical Chinese— reckless, unthinking courage seemed incomprehensible, and he was too honest a man to find fascination or worth in anything he could not understand.

Still it was one thing to be afraid, by which one lost no face to speak of, and another to appear afraid, by which one often lost a great deal of face and of

profit, and so he collected himself with an effort and greeted the Manchu with his usual, faintly ironic ease of manner.

"Ten thousand years, ten thousand years!"

"And yet another year!" came the courtly reply; and, after a short pause, "Ah— friend Ng Ch'u!" Showing that recognition had been mutual.

They looked at each other, smiling, tranquil, touching palm to palm. They were carefully, even meticulously, dressed: the Chinese in neat pin-stripe worsted, bowler hat, glossy cordovan brogues that showed an inch of brown-silk hose, and a sober shepherd's-plaid necktie in which twinkled a diamond horseshoe pin; the Manchu in pontifical Prince Albert and shining high hat with the correct eight reflections. Both, at least sartorially, were a very epitome of the influence of West over East.

IN THAT MOTLEY New York crowd, nobody could have guessed that here, in neat pin-stripe worsted and pontifical Prince Albert, stood tragedy incarnate: tragedy that had started, four decades earlier, in a Manchu-Chinese border town, with a girl's soft song flung from a painted balcony; that had threatened to congeal into darkening blood, and that had faded out in a whispered, sardonic word about the Huang T'ai Hou, the Empress, the Old Buddha, and a coolie's stupendous Odyssey from a mud-chinked Ninguta hut to a gleaming Fifth Avenue shop; tragedy that, by the same token, had started four centuries earlier when red-faced, flat-nosed Tatars, led by iron-capped Manchu chiefs, had poured out of Central Asia, to be met by submissiveness— the baffling submissiveness of placid, yellow China— the submissiveness of a rubber ball that jumps back into place the moment you remove the pressure of your hand— the submissiveness of a race that, being old and wise, prefers the evening meal of rice and fried pork to epic, clanking heroics.

For a moment Ng Ch'u wondered— and shivered slightly at the thought— if Yang Shen-hsiu's perfectly tailored coat might hold the glimmer of steel. Then he reconsidered. This was New York, and the noon hour, and Forty-second Street, youthful, shrill, but filled with tame, warm conveniences, and safe— sublimely safe.

"I hope I see you well, honorable Manchu?" he asked casually, lighting an expensive, gold-tipped cigarette with fingers that were quite steady.

"Thank you," replied Yang Shen-hsiu. "I am in excellent health. And yourself?"

"Nothing to complain of."

"And—" purred the Manchu; and, beneath the gentle, gliding accents, the other could sense the hard, unfaltering resolve of hatred emerging from the dim, wiped-over crepuscule of forty years into new, brazen, arrogant freedom— "the— Moon-beam?"

"Is the Moon-beam no longer."

"Her spirit has leaped the dragon gate— has rejoined the spirits of her worthy ancestors?"

"No, no." Ng Ch'u gave a little, lopsided laugh. "But the Moon-beam— alas!— has become Madame Full Moon. She has grown exceedingly fat. As fat as a peasant's round measure of butter. Ahee! ahoo! Age fattens all— age softens all— and everything—" His voice trembled a little, and he repeated, "All and everything!" Then, rather anxiously, his head to one side, with a patient and inquiring glance in his eyes, "Does it not, Yang Shen-hsiu?"

The latter scratched his cheek delicately with a long, highly polished fingernail.

"Yes," he said unhurriedly. "Age softens all and everything— except belike— "

"So there are exceptions?" came the meek query.

"Yes, Ng Ch'u. Three." A light eddied up in the glittering, hooded eyes. "A sword, a stone, and— ah— a Manchu."

Ng Ch'u dropped his cigarette. He put his fingers together, nervously, tip against tip.

"You have recently arrived in America?" he asked after a short silence.

He spoke with a sort of bored, indifferent politeness, merely as if to make conversation. But the other looked up sharply. The ghost of a smile curled his thin lips.

"My friend," he replied, "I, too, am familiar with the inexplicable laws of these foreign barbarians which put the yellow man even beneath the black in human worth and civic respect. I, too, know that we of the black-haired race are not permitted to enter this free land— unless we be students or great merchants or dignitaries of China or came here years ago— like you. I realize, furthermore, that babbling, leaky tongues can whisper cunning words to the immigration authorities— can spill the tea for many a worthy coolie who makes his living here on the strength of a forged passport. But— " smoothly, calmly, as Ng Ch'u tried to interrupt, "it so happened that the Old Buddha looked upon me with favor before she resigned her earthly dignities and ascended the dragon. I, the very undeserving one, have been showered with exquisite honors. Very recently I was sent to America in an official capacity. Thus— as to the Chinese exclusion law, also as to babbling, leaky tongues that whisper here and there— do not trouble, Ng Ch'u. Your tongue might catch cold— and would not that cause your honorable teeth to shrivel?"

He paused, stared at the other, then— and a tremor ran over his hawkish features, as a ripple is seen upon a stagnant pool even before the wind of storm strikes it— went on in a voice that was low and passionless, yet pregnant with stony, enormous resolve,

"Coolie! I have never forgotten the Moon-beam. I have never forgotten that once the thought of her played charming cadences on the lute of my youthful soul. I have never forgotten that once her image was the painted pleasure-boat that floated gently on the waters of my dream-ruffled sleep. I— ah— I have never forgotten that once the Moon-beam was a yellow, silken rose, and that a coolie brushed the bloom from her petals with his objectionable lips. No— I have never forgotten."

"And—" asked Ng Ch'u, a little diffident, but quite matter-of-fact, like a bazaar trader who is not yet sure of the size of his customer's purse and must therefore bargain circumspectly— "is there no way to— make you forget?"

"Assuredly there is a way," the Manchu laughed.

"Oh—?"

"What sayeth the Li-Ki—? 'Do not try to fathom what has not yet arrived! Do not climb the tree if you wish to catch fish!' "

And Yang Shen-hsiu went on his way, while Ng Ch'u looked after him with a rather comical expression of devout concentration on his round face, clasping and unclasping his short, pudgy fingers, pursing his lips, and emitting a sort of melancholy whistle.

He was a coward, and very much afraid. He was only a coolie, though the receiving teller of the Hudson National Bank purred civilly over his deposit-slips.

And the other? A Manchu. An aristocrat. A sharp hatchet of a man who cleaved his way through life. Why, even Yang Shen-hsiu's back, beneath the prim and decorous folds of the Prince Albert, gave an impression of steely, ruthless efficiency— the efficiency of a hawk's claw and a snake's fang.

"Assuredly," Ng Ch'u said to himself, as he turned east down Forty-second Street, "if I were a fool, I would now write to China and complete my funeral arrangements. I would order longevity boards of seasoned wood and cause the priests to pick out a charming retreat for my earthly remains. Too, if I were a fool, I might quote the Book of Ceremonies and Outer Observances to the tiger about to gore me. Ah— but I am not a fool— I am only a coward— I beg your pardon!" as his head sunk on his chest, he bumped into an indignant dowager who came from a department store, her plump arms crowded with bargains. "I beg your pardon— "

"Goodness! Can't you see where you're going—?"

A bundle dropped. Ng Ch'u bent to pick it up. So did the woman. Ng Ch'u straightened up again and, in the process, butted her chin with a round face that was still earnestly apologetic.

Another bundle dropped. People stopped, snickered, nudged each other. The woman suppressed unwomanly words. Ng Ch'u then decided to go away from there.

"Haya! haya!" he continued in his thoughts as he went on his way. "Blessed be the Excellent Lord Gautama who made me a coward! For— is there a keener foresight, a better protection, than fear?"

And, head erect, he walked along, toward his uptown shop that faced Fifth Avenue, beneath an enormous sign bearing his name in braggart, baroque, gilt letters, with a profusion of China's and Japan's choicest wares— dim, precious things— bronzes mellowed with the patina of the swinging centuries and embroideries and white and green and amber jade; kakemonos in sepia and gold and pigeon-gray, on which the brush of an artist long since dead had retraced the marvels of some capital of the Ashikaga dynasty; ancient koto harps with plectrums of carved ivory; satsuma bowls enameled with ho-ho birds; but mostly the porcelains of China— porcelains of all periods— Wen-tchang statuettes in aubergine and lambent yellow Kang-he ginger-jars painted with blue and white hawthorn sprays, Keen-lung egg-shell plates with backs of glowing ruby, Yung-ching peach-blow whose ruddy-brown shimmered with flecks of silver and green and pink like the first touch of Spring that is coaxing the colors from the shy sepal of the peach-blossom.

He loved porcelains. They represented to him more than money, more than success. He had attached himself to their study as an old Florentine attached himself to the study of theology, caring nothing for religion, but with a sort of icy-cold, impersonal, scientific passion. Somehow— for there was his fabulous Odyssey, from a mud-chinked Ninguta hut to a gleaming Fifth Avenue shop— these porcelains were to him the apex of his life, the full, richly flavored sweetness of his achievement; and he often gently teased the Moon-beam, who had become Madame Full Moon, because, in their neat Pell Street flat, she preferred to eat her evening rice from heavy, white American stoneware with a border of improbable forget-me-nots.

"Good morning," he smiled as he crossed the threshold of his shop.

"Good morning, sir," came the answering chorus from the half dozen Chinese clerks, while his chief salesman, Wen Pao, stepped forward and told him that, an hour earlier, his good customer, Mrs. Peter Van Dissel, had come in and bargained about that pale-blue Suen-tih Ming bowl with the red fish molded as handles.

"Seven thousand I asked," said Wen Pao. "Five thousand she offered— then five thousand five hundred— then six thousand. She will return tomorrow. Then she and I will talk business." He smiled. "The eye of desire fattens the price," he added.

"Ah— excellent!" replied Ng Ch'u. "Trade indeed revolves like a wheel. She can have the bowl for six thousand five hundred dollars. It is a noble piece, worthy of a coral-button Mandarin's collection."

He turned to look at the sheaf of letters that awaited his perusal on a teak-wood table at the back of the store.

Then, suddenly, he again addressed the clerk.

"Wen Pao," he said. "I have reconsidered. The bowl is not for sale."

"Oh—?" the other looked astonished.

"No," repeated Ng Ch'u. "It is not for sale. Put it in the small safe in my private office. One of these days, when a certain necessary thing shall have been pleasantly accomplished, I shall use the bowl myself, to eat therefrom my evening rice. There is no porcelain in the world," he went on rather academically, "like ancient Ming marked on the reverse side with the honorific seal of peace, longevity, and harmonious prosperity. It rings sweetly— like a lute made of glass— under the chop-sticks' delicate touch."

"Ho!" whispered Nag En Hin, the American-born son of Nag Hop Fat, the Pell Street soothsayer, who had recently graduated from high school. "In the estimation of some people the strings of their cotton drawers are equivalent to a Manchu's silken breeches of state,"

Ng Ch'u had overheard.

"They are equivalent, little, little paper tiger without teeth," he purred— "in durability— "

He turned and bowed low before a customer who had entered the shop; and, for the next three hours, there was in his coward's heart hardly a thought of his old enemy. Only dimly the figure of Yang Shen-hsiu jutted into the outer rim of his consciousness, like a trifling annoyance, which, presently, when the time was ripe, he would cause to pass out of his consciousness altogether.

NOR, except indirectly, did he speak of him to the Moon-beam that night, after he had returned to his Pell Street flat that, close to the corner of Mott, faced the gaudy, crimson-bedaubed joss temple— he rather liked its proximity. Not that he believed much in the ancient divinities— the Tsaou Kwo-klu who sits on a log, the Han Seang-tse who rides upon a fan, the Chang-Ho-laou who stands on a frog, the Ho Seen-koo astride a willow-branch, or any of the other many idols, Buddhist or Taoist. For he was a Chinese, thus frankly, sneeringly irreligious. But he had rare, thaumaturgical moments when his bland-philosophical soul craved a few ounces of hygienic stimulant in the form of incense-powder sending up curling, aromatic smoke, a dully booming gong, a priest's muttered incantations before the gilt shrine, or a meaningless prayer or two written on scarlet paper and then chewed and swallowed.

It was so tonight.

"Moon-beam," he said to his little fat wife, who smiled at his entry as she had smiled at him every day these forty years, ever since she had married him, the earthbound coolie, in preference to a Manchu who had courted her

riotously, swaggeringly, extravagantly, willing to leap all barriers of caste, "I think that after the evening rice I shall go to the temple and burn a couple of Hunshuh incense-sticks before the three gods of happiness— the Fo, the Lo, and the Cho." He smiled amusedly at the thought. "Perhaps the gods are powerless to help me," he added with patronizing tolerance, "perhaps they are not. Still— " again he smiled and waved a pudgy hand.

The Moon-beam continued setting the table for dinner.

"You are in trouble, Great One?" she asked, quite casually, over her shoulder.

"Oh— the jackal howls in the distance," he answered metaphorically, easing his plump body into a comfortable American rocking-chair. "Yes— " He lit a cigarette. "The jackal howls. Loudly and arrogantly. And yet— will my old buffalo die therefore?"

SHE DID NOT reply. Nor was she worried.

For she knew Ng Ch'u. For forty years she had lived in intimate daily alliance with him, physically and psychically. She knew that he was a one-idea man who always surrendered completely to the eventual aim and object of his slow, patient, persistent, slightly nagging decision; who never took the second step before he was sure of the first; who possessed, at the core of his meek, submissive soul, a tremendous, almost pagan capacity to resolve his mind in his desire, and his desire in the actual, practical deed. Yes— she knew him. And never since that day in the little Manchu-Chinese border town when she had become his bride, according to the sacred rites, with all the traditional ceremonies complete from *kueichu* to *laoh-shin-fang*, had she doubted either his kindliness or his wisdom; never, though often she walked abroad, in Pell Street, to swap the shifting, mazed gossip of Chinatown, had she envied the other women— whites and half-castes and American-born Chinese— their shrill, scolding, flaunting, naked freedom; always had she been satisfied to regulate her life according to the excellent Confucius' three rules of wifely behaviour: not to have her marital relations known beyond the threshold of her apartment, either for good or for evil; to refrain from talkativeness and, outside of household matters where she reigned supreme, to take no step and to arrive at no conclusion on her own initiative.

Ng Ch'u was in trouble. He was the Great One. Presently he would conquer the trouble.

What, then, was there to worry about?

And so, dinner over, she busied her fat, clever little hands with strips of blue-and-blue embroidery, while he prepared for himself the first pipe of the evening— "the pipe of august beginning," as he called it.

"AH!" HE SIGHed contentedly, as he kneaded the opium cube with agile fingers, stuck the needle into the lamp, the flame of which, veiled by butterflies and moths of green enamel, sparkled like an emerald, dropped the red-hot little pellet into a plain bamboo pipe without tassels or ornaments, and, both shoulders well back, inhaled the soothing fumes at one long whiff— "this black bamboo pipe was white once— white as my youth— and the kindly drug has colored it black with a thousand and ten thousand smokes. It is the best pipe in the world. No pipe of precious wood or ivory or tortoise-shell or jade or carved silver can ever come near that bamboo."

He stopped; prepared a second pipe. The fizzing of the amber opium drops as they evaporated over the lamp accentuated the silence.

Presently he spoke again.

"Moon-beam!"

"Yes, Great One?"

She leaned forward, across the table. Her wrinkled, honey-colored old face, framed by great, smooth wings of jet-black hair, loomed up in the ring of light from the swinging kerosene lamp.

"An ancient pipe," he repeated, "blackened with a thousand and ten thousand smokes. Ahee—" he slurred; then went on, "such as—"

Again he halted. Then he continued, just a little diffidently, a little self-consciously, as, Mongol to the core, he considered the voicing of intimate sentiments between husband and wife slightly indelicate— "such as our love, Moon-beam— burned deep and strong and black by a thousand and ten thousand days of mutual knowledge—"

She looked at him. She rose. She put her arms about him.

They were rather ludicrous, those two. Yellow, fat, crinkled, old, decidedly ugly. Standing there, holding each other close, in the center of the plain little room. With the garish lights of Pell Street winking through the well-washed window-curtains, the symphony of Pell Street skirling in with a belching, tawdry chorus; a street organ trailing a brassy, syncopated jazz; the hectic splutter and hiss of a popcorn-man's cart; some thick, passionate words flung up from a shadow-blotched postern, then dropping into the gutter: "Gee, kid, I'm sure nuts about you!"

"G'wan, yer big slob, tell it t'the marines—"

Yes. Ludicrous, that scene.

And ludicrous, perhaps, the Moon-beam's words, in guttural, staccato Chinese,

"Great One! Truly, truly, all the real world is enclosed for me in your heart!"

He looked at her from beneath heavy, opium-reddened eyelids.

"Moon-beam," he said, "once you could have been a Manchu's bride."

She gave a quaint, giggling, girlish, high-pitched little laugh.

"Once," she replied, "the ass went seeking for horns— and lost its ears." She patted his cheeks. "I am a coolie's fat old woman. Great One! An old coolie's fat, useless old woman— "

"Little Moon-beam," he whispered, "little, little Moon-beam—"

It was the voice of forty years ago, stammering, passionate, tender. He held her very close.

Then, unhurriedly, he released her. Unhurriedly, he left the room, walked down the stairs and over to the joss temple.

There— his tongue in his cheek, his mind smiling at his soul— he went through a certain intricate ritual, with shreds of scarlet paper, and incense sticks, and pieces of peach-wood especially dreaded by ghosts.

Yu Ch'ang, the priest, watched him, and— since even holy men must eat and drink— suggested that, perhaps, the other might like sacerdotal intercession with the Shang Ti, the Supreme Ruler of Heaven.

Ng Ch'u laughed.

"I have always avoided middlemen," he said. "That's how I made my fortune. Shall I then offend the deity by talking through a priest's greedy lips?"

And he left the joss temple and walked out into the street.

It was late. Rain, that had started in fluttering, flickering rags, had driven both dwellers and sightseers to shelter. Black, silent, the night looked down. Across the road from his flat, the lights sprang out warm and snug and friendly. But he remembered that there was some urgent business matter he had to talk over with Ching Shan, the retired merchant who was his silent partner, and that at this hour he would be most likely to find him sipping a cup of hot wine in the back room of Nag Hong Fah's restaurant, which, for yellow men exclusively, was known euphoniously as the Honorable Pavilion of Tranquil Longevity.

So he turned toward Mott Street. But he kept to the middle of the street, and he stepped slowly, warily, heels well down, arms carefully balanced, head jerked slightly forward, his whole body poised for instant shift or flight, all his senses primed to give quick warning of anything unusual or minatory.

For again, now that he was alone, fear of Yang Shen-hsiu had rushed upon him full-armed; and here— with the sodden, pitchy blanket of night painting the shadows with deeper shadows, and the rain-whipped streets deserted by everybody— was the very place where murder might happen, had happened in the past, in Tong war and private feud— the corner saloons with their lurking side entrances, where a man might slip in and out like a rabbit through the tunnels of its warren; the inky, prurient, slimy halls and areaways; the sudden, mysterious alleys cutting edge-wise into mazes of buildings; the steep cellars that yawned like saturnine, toothless maws; the squat, moldy, turgid tenements, with the reckless invitations of their fire escapes.

Ng Ch'u shivered. Should he turn back, make a run for his home?

And— what then?

Tomorrow was another day. Tomorrow the sun would shine golden and clear. True. But tomorrow the Manchu would still be the Manchu; and Ng Ch'u was sure of two things: that Yang Shen-hsiu would plot his speedy death, and that, even supposing he broke the unwritten law of Pell Street, it would be quite useless to go to the police of the red-haired devils and ask them for protection.

For could he, the merchant, accuse the other, the great Chinese dignitary sent to America on a diplomatic mission? And of what? What could he say?

Could he make these foreigners believe in this tale of China, of forty years ago? Could he tell them that he and the other had been in love with the same girl, that she had preferred the coolie to the aristocrat, and that the latter had sworn revenge? Could he tell them that those had been the days directly after China's war of eighteen hundred and sixty against France and England, when the imperial court had been compelled to leave Peking and flee to Jehol, when the Summer Palace had been taken and sacked by the barbarians, when a shameful treaty had been forced on the Middle Kingdom, and when the Kuang T'ai Hou, the Empress, the Old Buddha, had issued an edict that, until a "more propitious time" the lives of foreigners should be sacred in the land of Han? Could he tell them how he had found out that the Manchu, in a fit of rage, had murdered, and quietly buried, a British missionary; how thus, by threatening exposure to the Peking authorities, he had held the whip-hand; how, discretion being the better part of valor, he and the Moon-beam had emigrated to America; and how now, today, forty years later, he had met the Manchu here, in New York— still the same Manchu— hawkish, steely, ruthless—?

Ng Ch'u shook his head.

He could imagine what Bill Devoy, detective of Second Branch and Pell Street specialist, would say,

"Cut it out! Ye've been hittin' the old pipe too hard. What? Manchu? Dowager Empress? Moon-beam? Missionary? Revenge? Say— ye've blown in too many dimes on them— now— seven-reelers! Keep away from the movies, Chinkie— see?"

NG CH'U shivered. He jumped sidewise rapidly as he heard a rustling noise. Then he smiled apologetically— it had just been a dim stir of torn bits of paper whirled about by a vagabond wind— and turned, at a sudden right angle, toward Nag Hong Fah's Great Chop Suey Restaurant where it slashed the purple, trailing night with a square of yellow light.

A minute later, his heart beating like a trip-hammer, he was up the stairs. Two minutes later, outwardly composed, he bowed, his hands clasped over his chest, to the company of merchants who were gathered in the Honorable

Pavilion of Tranquil Longevity, some quietly smoking or sipping tea, others gossiping, still others playing at hsiang ch'i chess and ta ma.

The soft, gliding hum of voices, the sizzling of the opium lamps, the sucking of boiling-hot tea drunk by compressed lips, the clicks of the copper and ivory counters— it was all tremendously peaceful and reassuring; and Ng Ch'u sighed contentedly as he dropped into a chair by the side of Ching Shan, his silent partner, and began talking to him in an undertone about a shipment of Sheba pottery which could be picked up at a bargain in San Francisco.

Presently, business over, he asked a question.

"Brother very old and very wise," he said, "what are the protections of the day and the night against an evil man?"

Ching Shan was known throughout Pell Street for his stout wisdom— a reputation which he upheld by quoting esoterically and didactically from some hoary tome of learning, whenever asked a question, and then reinforcing his opinion by a yet lengthier quotation from another book.

"Ng Ch'u," he replied, "it has been reported in the Shu King that the sage Wu once spoke as follows: 'I have heard that the good man, doing good, finds the day insufficient, and the night, and that the evil man, doing evil, also finds the day insufficient, and the night.'" He paused, looked around him, made sure that not only Ng Ch'u but also the rest of the company were listening to him attentively, and continued: "Yet, as to the evil man, and the good, has it not furthermore been said that the correct doctrine of the good man is to be true to the principles of his nature and the benevolent exercise of these principles when dealing with others?"

"Even when dealing with evil men?" asked Ng Ch'u.

"Decidedly, little brother."

"Ah—" smiled Ng Ch'u, "and the principle of my nature has always been to see that I have pork with my evening rice— to bargain close and tight— to know the worth of money—"

"Money," said Nag Hong Fah, the restaurant proprietor, "which is the greatest truth in the world—"

"Money," chimed in Yung Long, the wealthy wholesale grocer, "which is mastery and power and sway and shining achievement—"

"Money," said Ching Shan rather severely, since he had retired from active business affairs and was not worried by financial troubles, "which is good only when used by a purified desire and a righteous aim— "

"What aim more righteous," rejoined Ng Ch'u, "than peace and happiness and the evening rice—"

And then, quite suddenly, a hush fell over the Honorable Pavilion of Tranquil Longevity. Tea cups were held tremblingly in mid-air. Pipes dropped. Voices were stilled.

For there, framed in the doorway, stood three figures, lean, tall, threatening; faces masked by black neckerchiefs; pistols held steadily in yellow hands.

"Oh— Buddha!" screamed Nag Hong Fah. "The hatchetmen— the hatchetmen—"

"Silence, obese grandfather of a skillet!" said the tallest of the three. "Silence— or— " His voice was terse and metallic; his pistol described a significant half-circle and drew a bead on the restaurant proprietor's stout chest. He took a step nearer into the room, while his two colleagues kept the company covered. "My friends," he said, "I have not come here to harm anybody— except—"

His eyes searched the smoke-laden room, and, as if drawn by a magnet, Ng Ch'u rose and waddled up to him.

"Except to kill me?" he suggested meekly.

"Rightly guessed, older brother," smiled the other. "I regret— but what is life— eh:— and what is death? A slashing of throats! A cutting of necks! A jolly ripping of jugular veins!" He laughed behind his mask and drew Ng Ch'u toward him with a strong, clawlike hand.

The latter trembled like a leaf.

"Honorable killer," he asked, "there is, I take it, no personal rancor against me in your heart?"

"Not a breath— not an atom— not a sliver! It is a mere matter of business!"

"You have been sent by somebody else to kill me— perhaps by—?"

"Let us name no names. I have indeed been sent by— somebody."

Ng Ch'u looked over his shoulder at Ching Shan who sat there, very quiet, very disinterested.

"Ching Shan," he said, "did you not say that the correct doctrine of the good man is to be true to his principles and the benevolent exercise of these principles?"

"Indeed!" wonderingly.

"Ah— " gently breathed Ng Ch'u, and again he addressed the hatchetman. "Honorable killer," he said, "the nameless party— who sent you here— how much did he promise you for causing my spirit to join the spirits of my ancestors?"

"But— "

"Tell me. How much?"

"Five hundred dollars!"

Ng Ch'u smiled.

"Five hundred dollars— eh?— for killing me?" he repeated.

"Yes, yes!" exclaimed the astonished hatchetman.

"Five hundred dollars— eh?— for killing me?" he rebroke into gurgling laughter. "Correct doctrine to be true to one's own principles! Principles of

barter and trade— my principles— the coolie's principles— Ahee!— ahoo!— ahai! Here, hatchetman!" His voice was now quite steady. Steady was the hand with which he drew a thick roll of bills from his pocket. "Here are five hundred dollars— and yet another hundred! Go! Go and kill him— him who sent you!"

AND, late that night, back in his neat little flat, Ng Ch'u turned casually to his wife.

"Moon-beam," he said, "the little trouble has been satisfactorily settled." He paused, smiled. "Tomorrow," he added, "I shall eat my evening rice from a pale-blue Suen-tih Ming bowl with red fish molded as handles."

"Yes, Great One," came the Moon-beam's calm, incurious reply.

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11: The Fascinating Mrs. Whitehead

C. J. Cutcliffe Hyne

1865-1944

In: *Atoms of Empire*, 1904

THE WORST OF A STEAMER flirtation is that you are more or less bound to see it through. Gilchrist went to Las Palmas in Grand Canary by a British African boat because they start from Liver pool, near which port he resided. Mrs. Whitehead went by the same steamer because she thought there was less likelihood of meeting people who knew her there than there would be on one of the bigger and faster Cape boats which go from the South of England. And to further this coy desire she decapitated her name, and appeared on the purser's list as Mrs. White. Gilchrist fore gathered with her before they had brought Holyhead over the quarter, because he and she were the only two passengers who had not seen the necessity of going below to lie down.

"Will you let me lash your deck chair?" he said by way of introduction. "The sea'll get worse as soon as we open up the Channel more, and you may get a nasty spill."

He very naturally got leave to do that, and (quite as naturally) wedged himself in a corner beside her, and began to talk. That was the beginning of it all. By the time they had got abreast of Land's End he had discovered that her Christian name was Elsie, and by the time they had crossed the Bay, and were carrying the brown hills of Portugal along on their port beam, he had dropped into the habit of letting slip the name of Elsie with the most skilled unconsciousness whenever there was no one else within ear-shot.

He was not exactly new to this sort of game, and no more was she. They owned up to the fact cheerfully. "I do hate callow youths," said Mrs. White; and, "When I find myself paired off with schoolgirls under two-and-twenty," said Gilchrist, "I bolt as soon as I conveniently can, and have a comfortable swear. Let me drag you a chair behind the lifeboat there, and then you can smoke a cigarette."

"One more cushion, please, just under my head," said Mrs. White, and now tuck the rug in round my feet. There, thanks, that's nice. Now some men would be shocked at my sitting here and smoking, when half Portugal might be looking on at us through race-glasses, for any thing we know. Others would be greedy and keep all their cigarettes to themselves. You are neither one nor the other, and therefore I like you."

"Therefore I am an infinitely lucky man," said Gilchrist.

"I think you are pretty lucky all the way round. Nothing to do except amuse yourself. You certainly aren't going to Grand Canary for the good of your health,

because you're the picture of that already; and I can't say you've got quite the cut of a man who's going there on business."

"Oh, I'm going to kick up my heels, and walk about, and climb the mountains, and eat oranges and avocado pears. At intervals I shall play a little golf."

"Delightful programme. Nothing to do but amuse yourself. But don't you get rather tired of it sometimes?"

"It hasn't bored me so far. When a man's had enough of one thing he can try another."

"That depends on the man's income. It's an expensive game ringing the changes too often."

"Well, I suppose it is, come to think of it," said Gilchrist. " I started the yachting mania last summer. That came in rather heavy for a first outfit of materials."

"Evidently," said Mrs. White, with a sigh, "you are a young man having many possessions. What a blessed comfort it must be to get away from the region of narrow means."

Gilchrist thought the matter over at greater length that night when the lights had been switched off in the smoke-room and the other passengers had turned in; and he came to sev eral conclusions. Above all things he was satisfied that it was entirely without drawbacks to be well off. He also gave a good deal of his time to thinking over Mrs. White. He didn't quite know whether he was in love with her or not; he couldn't quite define what being in love meant; but he was completely satisfied she was the nicest woman on that particular steamer, and possibly on many steamers. Moreover, he reminded himself that he was thirty-two, and was under instructions from various relatives who took an interest in him, to get married without any further dawdling over it.

To think over a matter of this kind, solus, at sea, and under the suggestive stars, is a very different affair from doing the same prosaically at home. Mrs. White did not turn up all the next morning; and not caring for anybody else on board, he was bored with his own society. In the afternoon she was also absent, and he grew more bored. And in the evening, when she showed up again, he proposed in the first ten minutes, out of sheer relief at seeing her again.

"Oh, and now I am happy," said Mrs. White.

He kissed her a great many times she had an excellent method of kissing and they ar ranged to get married in three months' time in London, and spend the honeymoon at his shooting place in Scotland. " But we won't let the cat out of the bag yet, dear," said Gilchrist, "and then we can have our fun in Las Palmas without being pointed out and giving a free comic entertainment to all the other people."

"No, darling," said Mrs. White. "We'll keep the engagement as our own dear sweet secret till we get back to England."

But from what source no one seemed exactly to know the little episode was being passed about the ship in strictly confidential whispers during the very next morning; and by midday everybody was chuckling over it and ostentatiously avoiding stares; and at dinner the captain stood champagne all down the tables, and the health of the pair of them was drunk with enthusiasm and music. Gilchrist smiled as he returned thanks, and tried not to feel savage; and the hard-up men who were going down to serve on the West Coast of Africa got drunk that night, or mournfully sentimental, according to their natures. But they one and all during the course of the evening came and hit Gilchrist on the back several times, and told him what a lucky chap he was; and each time Gilchrist thanked them most cordially, and assured him self with unnecessary emphasis that they were undeniably right.

When the steamer was coming into Las Palmas harbour, Mrs. White was examining with a glass the semi-detached island which carries the light house.

"They've taken it down," said she.

Gilchrist asked what.

"That staring white notice on the hillside there. 'Grand Canary Engineering Company,' it used to be."

"Oh, you've been here before, have you? I didn't know. You never told me."

"Ye-es didn't I tell you? at the Metropole. But I shall stay at the Hotel Catalina now."

"That was before you were left a widow?"

"Oh, of course, my husband was there. Do run down, there's a dear boy, and make them bring up my boxes. I tipped that wretched steward, and he hasn't done it yet."

Gilchrist went away below, and as he had his own packing to finish, he did not see an English gentleman come off in the doctor's boat, greet Mrs. White very warmly, exchange a few words with her, and then return hurriedly to shore consumed with abundant laughter. But he was up in time to see the letters brought into the saloon by the shore agent, and to watch Mrs. White take up a telegram most legibly addressed to Whitehead."

"Ah," said Mrs. White, with a sigh of vast relief, "then it is all right."

Gilchrist experienced a peculiar little thrill. The name of Whitehead carried recent memories for him. It would have done the same for any one who had been lately in England. So he inquired, "What's all right?"

"My news," said Mrs. White, cheerfully.

"Mayn't I share them?"

"Sure you want to, dear?"

"Of course," said Gilchrist, and hoped that he was speaking in his natural voice.

"It's all right, dear," said his fiancée. "I can marry you. I wasn't quite sure before, because law is so risky, although this was nearly a certain thing. But they've wired me to say that we've got the decree *nisi*, so as soon as the time's run out "

"What!" cried Gilchrist, " you're the Mrs. Whitehead the papers have been crammed with? Oh Lord!" And his mind galloped through a ream of unrefreshing details.

"I'm the lady," said she.

"But I knew nothing of this."

"You never asked me."

"Well, our little farce can't go on."

"Which, pray?"

"Well, if you want it in plainer words, my engagement to you."

"Oh, that's your small game, is it?" said she, smiling sweetly. "Then I'd better see the captain and two or three of the other gentlemen here at once, and get their evidence put down in writing."

Gilchrist whistled.

"You'll look after my things, won't you, till I come back? There's the purser. I'll go and catch him before he's off ashore."

"Wait a minute," said Gilchrist. "What are you after?"

"Isn't it obvious? Am I going to have my feelings tossed about in this way?"

"That means 'breach of promise.' But you won't get it, you know."

"I shall have a very good try," said madame, dryly. "You will look after those things, won't you, till I go and see the purser?"

"No, wait another minute, please. Law's expensive, and I should think you've had enough airing in the papers lately."

"On the contrary, so much, that a little more will make no difference. In fact, it will turn the laugh my side. But as for you, my dear boy, you're different. It will come as a refreshing novelty."

"As I say, law's uncertain, and it's ten to one you'd lose your case. But look here, I've got a couple of hundred pounds in notes. Will you take that and call it quits?"

"My excellent sir, the 'feelings' are going to cost you a cool thousand if you pay for them now."

"Don't you wish you may get it?"

"I don't very much mind, because I shall ask for ten thousand if we fight, and I should very much prefer to finger ten."

Gilchrist didn't swear, first because it is rude to swear before a lady, and secondly because he didn't know words enough to do justice to the occasion.

Instead he went into the saloon and wrote out a cheque, for which he received a very satisfactory document in return. Afterwards he went ashore.

He met Mrs. White-Whitehead frequently during the ensuing month in Las Palmas, and they always bowed to one another most cordially, but they never spoke. She was always with another man, and once, when he went into the hotel where they were staying, he found out the other man's name. Then he whistled again, most thoughtfully. The name was not new to him. He had read it several times before, in the very same newspaper paragraphs where he had read so much about Mrs. Whitehead.

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12: Shut Out

F. Anstey

Thomas Anstey Guthrie 1856-1934

Longman's Magazine June 1884

IT IS TOWARDS the end of an afternoon in December, and Wilfred Rolleston is walking along a crowded London street with his face turned westward. A few moments ago and he was scarcely conscious of where he was or where he meant to go: he was walking on mechanically in a heavy stupor, through which there stole a haunting sense of degradation and despair that tortured him dully. And suddenly, as if by magic, this has vanished: he seems to himself to have waked from a miserable day dream to the buoyant consciousness of youth and hope. Temperaments which are subject to fits of heavy and causeless depression have their compensations sometimes in the reaction which follows; the infesting cares, as in Longfellow's poem, 'fold their tents, like the Arabs, and as silently steal away,' and with their retreat comes an exquisite exhilaration which more equable dispositions can never experience.

Is this so with Rolleston now? He only knows that the cloud has lifted from his brain, and that in the clear sunshine which bursts upon him now he can look his sorrows in the face and know that there is nothing so terrible in them after all.

It is true that he is not happy at the big City day school which he has just left. How should he be? He is dull and crabbed and uncouth, and knows too well that he is an object of general dislike; no one there cares to associate with him, and he makes no attempt to overcome their prejudices, being perfectly aware that they are different from him, and hating them for it, but hating himself, perhaps, the most.

And though all his evenings are spent at home there is little rest for him even there, for the work for the next day must be prepared; and he sits over it till late, sometimes with desperate efforts to master the difficulties, but more often staring at the page before him with eyes that are almost wilfully vacant.

All this has been and is enough in itself to account for the gloomy state into which he had sunk. But— and how could he have forgotten it?— it is over for the present.

To-night he will not have to sit up struggling with the tasks which will only cover him with fresh disgrace on the morrow; for a whole month he need not think of them, nor of the classes in which the hand of everyone is against him. For the holidays have begun; to-day has been the last of the term. Is there no reason for joy and thankfulness in that? What a fool he has been to let those black thoughts gain such a hold over him!

Slowly, more as if it had all happened a long time ago instead of quite recently, the incidents of the morning come back to him, vivid and clear once more— morning chapel and the Doctor's sermon, and afterwards the pretence of work and relaxed discipline in the class rooms, when the results of the examinations had been read out, with the names of the boys who had gained prizes and their remove to the form above. He had come out last of course, but no one expected anything else from him; a laugh had gone round the desks when his humble total closed the list, and he had joined in it to show them he didn't care. And then the class had been dismissed, and there had been friendly good-byes, arrangements for walking home in company or for meeting during the holidays— for all but him; he had gone out alone— and the dull blankness had come over him from which he has only just recovered.

But, for the present at all events, he has got rid of it completely; he is going home, where at least he is not despised, where he will find a sanctuary from gibes and jostlings and impositions; and the longer he thinks of this the higher his spirits rise, and he steps briskly, with a kind of exultation, until the people he passes in the streets turn and look at him, struck by his expression. 'They can see how jolly I'm feeling,' he thinks with a smile.

The dusk is falling, and the shops he passes are brilliant with lights and decorations, but he does not stop to look at any of them; his mind is busy with settling how he shall employ himself on this the first evening of his liberty, the first for so long on which he could feel his own master.

At first he decides to read. Is there not some book he had begun and meant to finish, so many days ago now that he has even forgotten what it was all about, and only remembers that it was exciting?

And yet, he thinks, he won't read to-night— not on the very first night of the holidays. Quite lately— yesterday or the day before— his mother had spoken to him, gently but very seriously, about what she called the morose and savage fits which would bring misery upon him if he did not set himself earnestly to overcome them.

And there were times, he knew, when it seemed as if a demon possessed him and drove him to wound even those who loved him and whom he loved— times when their affection only roused in him some hideous spirit of sullen contradiction.

He feels softened now somehow, and has a new longing for the love he has so often harshly repulsed. He *will* overcome this sulkiness of his; he will begin this very evening; as soon as he gets home he will tell his mother that he is sorry, that he does love her really, only that when these fits come on him he hardly knows what he says or does.

And she will forgive him, only too gladly; and his mind will be quite at ease again. No, not quite; there is still something he must do before that: he has a

vague recollection of a long-standing coolness between himself and his younger brother, Lionel. They never have got on very well together; Lionel is so different— much cleverer even already, for one thing; better looking too, and better tempered. Whatever they quarrelled about Wilfred is very sure that he was the offender; Lionel never begins that kind of thing. But he will put himself in the right at once, and ask Lionel to make friends again; he will consent readily enough— he always does.

And then he has a bright idea: he will take his brother some little present to prove that he really wishes to behave decently for the future. What shall he buy?

He finds himself near a large toy shop at the time, and in the window are displayed several regiments of brightly coloured tin warriors—the very thing! Lionel is still young enough to delight in them.

Feeling in his pockets, Rolleston discovers more loose silver than he had thought he possessed, and so he goes into the shop and asks for one of the boxes of soldiers. He is served by one of two neatly dressed female assistants, who stare and giggle at one another at his first words, finding it odd, perhaps, that a fellow of his age should buy toys— as if, he thinks indignantly, they couldn't see that it was not for *himself* he wanted the things.

But he goes on, feeling happier after his purchase. They will see now that he is not so bad after all. It is long since he has felt such a craving to be thought well of by somebody.

A little farther on he comes to a row of people, mostly women and tradesmen's boys, standing on the curb stone opposite a man who is seated in a little wooden box on wheels drawn up close to the pavement. He is paralytic and blind, with a pinched white face framed in an old-fashioned fur cap with big ear lappets; he seems to be preaching or reading, and Rolleston stops idly enough to listen for a few moments, the women making room for him with alacrity, and the boys staring curiously round at the new arrival with a grin.

He hardly pays much attention to this; he is listening to the poem which the man in the box is reciting with a nasal and metallic snuffle in his voice:

There's a harp *and* a crown,
For you and *for* me,
Hanging on the boughs
Of that Christmas tree!

He hears, and then hurries on again, repeating the stanza mechanically to himself, without seeing anything particularly ludicrous about it. The words have reminded him of that Christmas party at the Gordons', next door. Did not Ethel Gordon ask him particularly to come, and did he not refuse her sullenly? What a

brute he was to treat her like that! If she were to ask him again, he thinks he would not say no, though he does hate parties.

Ethel is a dear girl, and never seems to think him good-for-nothing, as most people do. Perhaps it is sham though— no, he can't think that when he remembers how patiently and kindly she has borne with his senseless fits of temper and tried to laugh away his gloom.

Not every girl as pretty as Ethel is would care to notice him, and persist in it in spite of everything; yet he has sulked with her of late. Was it because she had favoured Lionel? He is ashamed to think that this may have been the reason.

Never mind, that is all over now; he will start clear with everybody. He will ask Ethel, too, to forgive him. Is there nothing he can do to please her? Yes some time ago she had asked him to draw something for her. (He detests drawing lessons, but he has rather a taste for drawing things out of his own head.) He had told her, not too civilly, that he had work enough without doing drawings for girls. He will paint her something to-night as a surprise; he will begin as soon as tea is cleared away; it will be more sociable than reading a book.

And then already he sees a vision of the warm little panelled room, and himself getting out his colour-box and sitting down to paint by lamp-light— for any light does for his kind of colouring— while his mother sits opposite and Lionel watches the picture growing under his hand.

What shall he draw? He gets quite absorbed in thinking over this; his own tastes run in a gory direction, but perhaps Ethel, being a girl, may not care for battles or desperate duels. A compromise strikes him; he will draw a pirate ship: that will be first rate, with the black flag flying on the mainmast, and the pirate captain on the poop scouring the ocean with a big glass in search of merchantmen; all about the deck and rigging he can put the crew, with red caps, and belts stuck full of pistols and daggers.

And on the right there shall be a bit of the pirate island, with a mast and another black flag— he knows he will enjoy picking out the skull and cross-bones in thick Chinese white— and then, if there is room, he will add a cannon, and perhaps a palm tree. A pirate island always has palm trees.

He is so full of this projected picture of his that he is quite surprised to find that he is very near the square where he lives; but here, just in front of him, at the end of the narrow lane, is the public-house with the coach and four engraved on the ground glass of the lower part of the window, and above it the bottles full of coloured water.

And here is the greengrocer's. How long is it since it was a barber's?— surely a very little time. And there is the bootmaker's, with its outside display of dangling shoes, and the row of naked gas jets blown to pale blue specks and whistling red tongues by turns as a gust sweeps across them.

This is his home, this little dingy, old-fashioned red-brick house at an angle of the square, with a small paved space railed in before it. He pushes open the old gate with the iron arch above, where an oil-lamp used to hang, and hurries up to the door with the heavy shell-shaped porch, impatient to get to the warmth and light which await him within.

The bell has got out of order, for only a faint jangle comes from below as he rings; he waits a little and then pulls the handle again, more sharply this time, and still no one comes.

When Betty does think proper to come up and open the door he will tell her that it is too bad keeping a fellow standing out here, in the fog and cold, all this time.... She is coming at last— no, it was fancy; it seems as if Betty had slipped out for something, and perhaps the cook is upstairs, and his mother may be dozing by the fire, as she has begun to do of late.

Losing all patience, he gropes for the knocker, and, groping in vain, begins to hammer with bare fists on the door, louder and louder, until he is interrupted by a rough voice from the railings behind him.

'Now then, what are you up to there, eh?' says the voice, which belongs to a burly policeman who has stopped suspiciously on the pavement.

'Why,' says Rolleston, 'I want to get in, and I can't make them hear me. I wish you'd try what you can do, will you?'

The policeman comes slowly in to the gate. 'I dessay,' he says jocularly. 'Is there anythink else? Come, suppose you move on.'

A curious kind of dread of he knows not what begins to creep over Wilfred at this.

'Move on?' he cries, '*why* should I move on? This is my house; don't you see? I live here.'

'Now look 'ere, my joker, I don't want a job over this,' says the constable, stolidly. 'You'll bring a crowd round in another minute if you keep on that 'ammering.'

'Mind your own business,' says the other with growing excitement.

'That's what you'll make me do if you don't look out,' is the retort. 'Will you move on before I make you?'

'But, I say,' protests Rolleston, 'I'm not joking; I give you my word I'm not. I do live here. Why, I've just come back from school, and I can't get in.'

'Pretty school *you* come from!' growls the policeman; ' 'andles on to *your* lesson books, if *I* knows anything. 'Ere, out you go!'

Rolleston's fear increases. 'I won't! I won't!' he cries frantically, and rushing back to the door beats upon it wildly. On the other side of it are love and shelter, and it will not open to him. He is cold and hungry and tired after his walk; why do they keep him out like this?

'Mother!' he calls hoarsely. 'Can't you hear me, mother? It's Wilfred; let me in!'

The other takes him, not roughly, by the shoulder. 'Now you take my advice,' he says. 'You ain't quite yourself; you're making a mistake. I don't want to get you in trouble if you don't force me to it. Drop this 'ere tomfool game and go home quiet to wherever it is you *do* live.'

'I tell you I live here, you fool!' shrieks Wilfred, in deadly terror lest he should be forced away before the door is opened.

'And I tell you you don't do nothing of the sort,' says the policeman, beginning to lose his temper. 'No one don't live 'ere, nor ain't done not since I've bin on the beat. Use your eyes if you're not too far gone.'

For the first time Rolleston seems to see things plainly as they are; he glances round the square— that is just as it always is on foggy winter evenings, with its central enclosure a shadowy black patch against a reddish glimmer, beyond which the lighted windows of the houses make yellow bars of varying length and tint.

But this house, his own— why, it is all shuttered and dark; some of the window panes are broken; there is a pale grey patch in one that looks like a dingy bill; the knocker has been unscrewed from the door, and on its scraped panels someone has scribbled words and rough caricatures that were surely not there when he left that morning.

Can anything— any frightful disaster— have come in that short time? No, he will not think of it; he will not let himself be terrified, all for nothing.

'Now, are you goin'?' says the policeman after a pause.

Rolleston puts his back against the door and clings to the sides. 'No!' he shouts. 'I don't care what you say; I don't believe you: they are all in there— they are, I tell you, they are— they *are*!'

In a second he is in the constable's strong grasp and being dragged, struggling violently, to the gate, when a soft voice, a woman's, intercedes for him.

'What is the matter? Oh, don't— don't be so rough with him, poor creature!' it cries pitifully.

'I'm only exercisin' my duty, mum,' says the officer; 'he wants to create a disturbance 'ere.'

'No,' cries Wilfred, 'he lies! I only want to get into my own house, and no one seems to hear me. *You* don't think anything is the matter, do you?'

It is a lady who has been pleading for him; as he wrests himself from his captor and comes forward she sees his face, and her own grows white and startled.

'Wilfred!' she exclaims.

'Why, you know my name!' he says. 'Then you can tell him it's all right. Do I know you? You speak like— is it— *Ethel*?'

'Yes,' she says, and her voice is low and trembling, 'I am Ethel.'

He is silent for an instant; then he says slowly, 'You are not the same— nothing is the same: it is all changed— changed— and oh, my God, what am *I*?'

Slowly the truth is borne in upon his brain, muddled and disordered by long excess, and the last shred of the illusion which had possessed him drifts away.

He knows now that his boyhood, with such possibilities of happiness as it had ever held, has gone for ever. He has been knocking at a door which will open for him never again, and the mother by whose side his evening was to have been passed died long long years ago.

The past, blotted out completely for an hour by some freak of the memory, comes back to him, and he sees his sullen, morbid boyhood changing into something worse still, until by slow degrees he became what he is now— dissipated, degraded, lost.

At first the shock, the awful loneliness he awakes to, and the shame of being found thus by the woman for whom he had felt the only pure love he had known, overwhelm him utterly, and he leans his head upon his arms as he clutches the railings, and sobs with a grief that is terrible in its utter abandonment.

The very policeman is silent and awed by what he feels to be a scene from the human tragedy, though he may not be able to describe it to himself by any more suitable phrase than 'a rum start.'

'You can go now, policeman,' says the lady, putting money in his hand. 'You see I know this— this gentleman. Leave him to me; he will give you no trouble now.'

And the constable goes, taking care, however, to keep an eye occasionally on the corner where this has taken place. He has not gone long before Rolleston raises his head with a husky laugh: his manner has changed now; he is no longer the boy in thought and expression that he was a short time before, and speaks as might be expected from his appearance.

'I remember it all now,' he says. 'You are Ethel Gordon, of course you are, and you wouldn't have anything to do with me— and quite right too— and then you married my brother Lionel. You see I'm as clear as a bell again now. So you came up and found me battering at the old door, eh? Do you know, I got the fancy I was a boy again and coming home to— bah, what does all that matter? Odd sort of fancy though, wasn't it? Drink is always playing me some cursed trick now. A pretty fool I must have made of myself!'

She says nothing, and he thrusts his hands deep in his ragged pockets. 'Hallo! what's this I've got?' he says, as he feels something at the bottom of one

of them, and, bringing out the box of soldiers he had bought half an hour before, he holds it up with a harsh laugh which has the ring of despair in it.

'Do you see this?' he says to her. 'You'll laugh when I tell you it's a toy I bought just now for— guess whom— for your dear husband! Must have been pretty bad, mustn't I? Shall I give it to you to take to him— no? Well, perhaps he has outgrown such things now, so here goes!' and he pitches the box over the railings, and it falls with a shiver of broken glass as the pieces of painted tin rattle out upon the flag-stones.

'And now I'll wish you good evening,' he says, sweeping off his battered hat with mock courtesy.

She tries to keep him back. 'No, Wilfred, no; you must not go like that. We live here still, Lionel and I, in the same old house,' and she indicates the house next door; 'he will be home very soon. Will you' (she cannot help a little shudder at the thought of such a guest)— 'will you come in and wait for him?'

'Throw myself into his arms, eh?' he says. 'How delighted he would be! I'm just the sort of brother to be a credit to a highly respectable young barrister like him. You really think he'd like it? No; it's all right, Ethel; don't be alarmed: I was only joking. I shall never come in your way, I promise you. I'm just going to take myself off.'

'Don't say that,' she says (in spite of herself she feels relieved); 'tell me—is there nothing we can do— no help we can give you?'

'Nothing,' he answers fiercely; 'I don't want your pity. Do you think I can't see that you wouldn't touch me with the tongs if you could help it? It's too late to snivel over me now, and I'm well enough as I am. You leave me alone to go to the devil my own way; it's all I ask of you. Good-bye. It's Christmas, isn't it? I haven't dreamed *that* at all events. Well, I wish you and Lionel as merry a Christmas as I mean to have. I can't say more than that in the way of enjoyment.'

He turns on his heel at the last words and slouches off down the narrow lane by which he had come. Ethel Rolleston stands for a while, looking after his receding form till the fog closes round it and she can see it no more. She feels as if she had seen a ghost; and for her at least the enclosure before the deserted house next door will be haunted evermore— haunted by a forlorn and homeless figure sobbing there by the railings.

As for the man, he goes on his way until he finds a door which— alas!— is not closed against him.

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13: The Black Bag Left on a Door-Step

C. L. Pirkis

Catherine Louisa Pirkis 1839-1910

The Ludgate Monthly, Feb 1893

Collected in: *The Experiences of Loveday Brooke, Lady Detective*, 1894

The first of several longish short stories featuring one of the first lady detectives.

"IT'S a big thing," said Loveday Brooke, addressing Ebenezer Dyer, chief of the well-known detective agency in Lynch Court, Fleet Street; Lady Cathrow has lost £30,000 worth of jewellery, if the newspaper accounts are to be trusted."

"They are fairly accurate this time. The robbery differs in few respects from the usual run of country-house robberies. The time chosen, of course, was the dinner-hour, when the family and guests were at table and the servants not on duty were amusing themselves in their own quarters. The fact of its being Christmas Eve would also of necessity add to the business and consequent distraction of the household. The entry to the house, however, in this case was not effected in the usual manner by a ladder to the dressing-room window, but through the window of a room on the ground floor— a small room with one window and two doors, one of which opens into the hall, and the other into a passage that leads by the back stairs to the bedroom floor. It is used, I believe, as a sort of hat and coat room by the gentlemen of the house."

"It was, I suppose, the weak point of the house?"

"Quite so. A very weak point indeed. Craigen Court, the residence of Sir George and Lady Cathrow, is an oddly-built old place, jutting out in all directions, and as this window looked out upon a blank wall, it was filled in with stained glass, kept fastened by a strong brass catch, and never opened, day or night, ventilation being obtained by means of a glass ventilator fitted in the upper panes. It seems absurd to think that this window, being only about four feet from the ground, should have had neither iron bars nor shutters added to it; such, however, was the case. On the night of the robbery, someone within the house must have deliberately, and of intention, unfastened its only protection, the brass catch, and thus given the thieves easy entrance to the house."

"Your suspicions, I suppose, centre upon the servants?"

"Undoubtedly; and it is in the servants' hall that your services will be required. The thieves, whoever they were, were perfectly cognizant of the ways of the house. Lady Cathrow's jewellery was kept in a safe in her dressing-room, and as the dressing-room was over the dining-room, Sir George was in the habit of saying that it was the 'safest' room in the house. (Note the pun, please; Sir George is rather proud of it.) By his orders the window of the dining-room immediately under the dressing-room window was always left unshuttered and

without blind during dinner, and as a full stream of light thus fell through it on to the outside terrace, it would have been impossible for anyone to have placed a ladder there unseen."

"I see from the newspapers that it was Sir George's invariable custom to fill his house and give a large dinner on Christmas Eve."

"Yes. Sir George and Lady Cathrow are elderly people, with no family and few relatives, and have consequently a large amount of time to spend on their friends."

"I suppose the key of the safe was frequently left in the possession of Lady Cathrow's maid?"

"Yes. She is a young French girl, Stephanie Delcroix by name. It was her duty to clear the dressing-room directly after her mistress left it; put away any jewellery that might be lying about, lock the safe, and keep the key till her mistress came up to bed. On the night of the robbery, however, she admits that, instead of so doing, directly her mistress left the dressing-room, she ran down to the housekeeper's room to see if any letters had come for her, and remained chatting with the other servants for some time— she could not say for how long. It was by the half-past-seven post that her letters generally arrived from St. Omer, where her home is."

"Oh, then, she was in the habit of thus running down to enquire for her letters, no doubt, and the thieves, who appear to be so thoroughly cognizant of the house, would know this also."

"Perhaps; though at the present moment I must say things look very black against the girl. Her manner, too, when questioned, is not calculated to remove suspicion. She goes from one fit of hysterics into another; contradicts herself nearly every time she opens her mouth, then lays it to the charge of her ignorance of our language; breaks into voluble French; becomes theatrical in action, and then goes off into hysterics once more."

"All that is quite *Français*, you know," said Loveday. "Do the authorities at Scotland Yard lay much stress on the safe being left unlocked that night?"

"They do, and they are instituting a keen enquiry as to the possible lovers the girl may have. For this purpose they have sent Bates down to stay in the village and collect all the information he can outside the house. But they want someone within the walls to hob-nob with the maids generally, and to find out if she has taken any of them into her confidence respecting her lovers. So they sent to me to know if I would send down for this purpose one of the shrewdest and most clear-headed of my female detectives. I, in my turn, Miss Brooke, have sent for you— you may take it as a compliment if you like. So please now get out your note-book, and I'll give you sailing orders."

Loveday Brooke, at this period of her career, was a little over thirty years of age, and could be best described in a series of negations.

She was not tall, she was not short; she was not dark, she was not fair; she was neither handsome nor ugly. Her features were altogether nondescript; her one noticeable trait was a habit she had, when absorbed in thought, of dropping her eyelids over her eyes till only a line of eyeball showed, and she appeared to be looking out at the world through a slit, instead of through a window.

Her dress was invariably black, and was almost Quaker-like in its neat primness.

Some five or six years previously, by a jerk of Fortune's wheel, Loveday had been thrown upon the world penniless and all but friendless. Marketable accomplishments she had found she had none, so she had forthwith defied convention, and had chosen for herself a career that had cut her off sharply from her former associates and her position in society. For five or six years she drudged away patiently in the lower walks of her profession; then chance, or, to speak more precisely, an intricate criminal case, threw her in the way of the experienced head of the flourishing detective agency in Lynch Court. He quickly enough found out the stuff she was made of, and threw her in the way of better-class work— work, indeed, that brought increase of pay and of reputation alike to him and to Loveday.

Ebenezer Dyer was not, as a rule, given to enthusiasm; but he would at times wax eloquent over Miss Brooke's qualifications for the profession she had chosen.

"Too much of a lady, do you say?" he would say to anyone who chanced to call in question those qualifications. "I don't care twopence-halfpenny whether she is or is not a lady. I only know she is the most sensible and practical woman I ever met. In the first place, she has the faculty— so rare among women— of carrying out orders to the very letter: in the second place, she has a clear, shrewd brain, unhampered by any hard-and-fast theories; thirdly, and most important item of all, she has so much common sense that it amounts to genius— positively to genius, sir."

But although Loveday and her chief as a rule, worked together upon an easy and friendly footing, there were occasions on which they were wont, so to speak, to snarl at each other.

Such an occasion was at hand now.

Loveday showed no disposition to take out her note-book and receive her "sailing orders."

"I want to know," she said, "If what I saw in one newspaper is true— that one of the thieves before leaving, took the trouble to close the safe-door, and to write across it in chalk: 'To be let, unfurnished'?"

"Perfectly true; but I do not see that stress need be laid on the fact. The scoundrels often do that sort of thing out of insolence or bravado. In that robbery at Reigate, the other day, they went to a lady's Davenport, took a sheet

of her note-paper, and wrote their thanks on it for her kindness in not having had the lock of her safe repaired. Now, if you will get out your note-book—"

"Don't be in such a hurry," said Loveday calmly: "I want to know if you have seen this?" She leaned across the writing-table at which they sat, one either side, and handed to him a newspaper cutting which she took from her letter-case.

Mr. Dyer was a tall, powerfully-built man with a large head, benevolent bald forehead and a genial smile. That smile, however, often proved a trap to the unwary, for he owned a temper so irritable that a child with a chance word might ruffle it.

The genial smile vanished as he took the newspaper cutting from Loveday's hand.

"I would have you to remember, Miss Brooke," he said severely, "that although I am in the habit of using dispatch in my business, I am never known to be in a hurry; hurry in affairs I take to be the especial mark of the slovenly and unpunctual."

Then, as if still further to give contradiction to her words, he very deliberately unfolded her slip of newspaper and slowly, accentuating each word and syllable, read as follows:—

SINGULAR DISCOVERY

A black leather bag, or portmanteau, was found early yesterday morning by one of Smith's newspaper boys on the doorstep of a house in the road running between Easterbrook and Wreford, and inhabited by an elderly spinster lady. The contents of the bag include a clerical collar and necktie, a Church Service, a book of sermons, a copy of the works of Virgil, a facsimile of Magna Charta, with translations, a pair of black kid gloves, a brush and comb, some newspapers, and several small articles suggesting clerical ownership. On the top of the bag the following extraordinary letter, written in pencil on a long slip of paper, was found:

"The fatal day has arrived. I can exist no longer. I go hence and shall be no more seen. But I would have Coroner and Jury know that I am a sane man, and a verdict of temporary insanity in my case would be an error most gross after this intimation. I care not if it is felo de se*, as I shall have passed all suffering. Search diligently for my poor lifeless body in the immediate neighbourhood— on the cold heath, the rail, or the river by yonder bridge— a few moments will decide how I shall depart. If I had walked aright I might have been a power in the Church of which I am now an unworthy member and priest; but the damnable sin of gambling got hold on me, and betting has been my ruin, as it has been the ruin of thousands who have preceded me. Young man, shun the bookmaker and the race-course as you would shun the devil and hell. Farewell, chums of Magdalen. Farewell, and take warning. Though I can claim relationship with a Duke, a Marquess, and a Bishop, and though I am the son of a noble woman, yet am I a tramp and an outcast, verily and indeed. Sweet death, I greet thee. I dare not sign my name. To one and all, farewell. O, my poor Marchioness mother, a dying kiss to thee. R.I.P."*

The police and some of the railway officials have made a 'diligent search' in the neighbourhood of the railway station, but no 'poor lifeless body' has been found. The police authorities are inclined to the belief that the letter is a hoax, though they are still investigating the matter.

In the same deliberate fashion as he had opened and read the cutting, Mr. Dyer folded and returned it to Loveday.

"May I ask," he said sarcastically, "what you see in that silly hoax to waste your and my valuable time over?"

"I wanted to know," said Loveday, in the same level tones as before, "if you saw anything in it that might in some way connect this discovery with the robbery at Craigen Court?"

Mr. Dyer stared at her in utter, blank astonishment.

"When I was a boy," he said sarcastically as before, "I used to play at a game called 'what is my thought like?' Someone would think of something absurd— say the top of the monument— and someone else would hazard a guess that his thought might be— say the toe of his left boot, and that unfortunate individual would have to show the connection between the toe of his left boot and the top of the monument. Miss Brooke, I have no wish to repeat the silly game this evening for your benefit and mine."

"Oh, very well," said Loveday, calmly; "I fancied you might like to talk it over, that was all. Give me my 'sailing orders,' as you call them, and I'll endeavour to concentrate my attention on the little French maid and her various lovers."

Mr. Dyer grew amiable again.

"That's the point on which I wish you to fix your thoughts," he said; "you had better start for Craigen Court by the first train to-morrow— it's about sixty miles down the Great Eastern line. Huxwell is the station you must land at. There one of the grooms from the Court will meet you, and drive you to the house. I have arranged with the housekeeper there— Mrs. Williams, a very worthy and discreet person— that you shall pass in the house for a niece of hers, on a visit to recruit, after severe study in order to pass board-school teachers' exams. Naturally you have injured your eyes as well as your health with overwork; and so you can wear your blue spectacles. Your name, by the way, will be Jane Smith— better write it down. All your work will be among the servants of the establishment, and there will be no necessity for you to see either Sir George or Lady Cathrow— in fact, neither of them have been apprised of your intended visit— the fewer we take into our confidence the better. I've no doubt, however, that Bates will hear from Scotland Yard that you are in the house, and will make a point of seeing you."

"Has Bates unearthed anything of importance?"

"Not as yet. He has discovered one of the girl's lovers, a young farmer of the name of Holt; but as he seems to be an honest, respectable young fellow, and entirely above suspicion, the discovery does not count for much."

"I think there's nothing else to ask," said Loveday, rising to take her departure. "Of course, I'll telegraph, should need arise, in our usual cipher."

The first train that left Bishopsgate for Huxwell on the following morning included, among its passengers, Loveday Brooke, dressed in the neat black supposed to be appropriate to servants of the upper class. The only literature with which she had provided herself in order to beguile the tedium of her journey was a small volume bound in paper boards, and entitled, "*The Reciter's Treasury*." It was published at the low price of one shilling, and seemed specially designed to meet the requirements of third-rate amateur reciters at penny readings.

Miss Brooke appeared to be all-absorbed in the contents of this book during the first half of her journey. During the second, she lay back in the carriage with closed eyes, and motionless as if asleep or lost in deep thought.

The stopping of the train at Huxwell aroused her, and set her collecting together her wraps.

It was easy to single out the trim groom from Craigen Court from among the country loafers on the platform. Someone else beside the trim groom at the same moment caught her eye— Bates, from Scotland Yard, got up in the style of a commercial traveller, and carrying the orthodox "commercial bag" in his hand. He was a small, wiry man, with red hair and whiskers, and an eager, hungry expression of countenance.

"I am half-frozen with cold," said Loveday, addressing Sir George's groom; "if you'll kindly take charge of my portmanteau, I'd prefer walking to driving to the Court."

The man gave her a few directions as to the road she was to follow, and then drove off with her box, leaving her free to indulge Mr. Bate's evident wish for a walk and confidential talk along the country road.

Bates seemed to be in a happy frame of mind that morning.

"Quite a simple affair, this, Miss Brooke," he said: "a walk over the course, I take it, with you working inside the castle walls and I unearthing without. No complications as yet have arisen, and if that girl does not find herself in jail before another week is over her head, my name is not Jeremiah Bates."

"You mean the French maid?"

"Why, yes, of course. I take it there's little doubt but what she performed the double duty of unlocking the safe and the window too. You see I look at it this way, Miss Brooke: all girls have lovers, I say to myself, but a pretty girl like that French maid, is bound to have double the number of lovers than the plain ones. Now, of course, the greater the number of lovers, the greater the chance

there is of a criminal being found among them. That's plain as a pikestaff, isn't it?"

"Just as plain."

Bates felt encouraged to proceed.

"Well, then, arguing on the same lines, I say to myself, this girl is only a pretty, silly thing, not an accomplished criminal, or she wouldn't have admitted leaving open the safe door; give her rope enough and she'll hang herself. In a day or two, if we let her alone, she'll be bolting off to join the fellow whose nest she has helped to feather, and we shall catch the pair of them 'twixt here and Dover Straits, and also possibly get a clue that will bring us on the traces of their accomplices. Eh, Miss Brooke, that'll be a thing worth doing?"

"Undoubtedly. Who is this coming along in this buggy at such a good pace?"

The question was added as the sound of wheels behind them made her look round.

Bates turned also. "Oh, this is young Holt; his father farms land about a couple of miles from here. He is one of Stephanie's lovers, and I should imagine about the best of the lot. But he does not appear to be first favourite; from what I hear someone else must have made the running on the sly. Ever since the robbery I'm told the young woman has given him the cold shoulder."

As the young man came nearer in his buggy he slackened pace, and Loveday could not but admire his frank, honest expression of countenance,

"Room for one— can I give you a lift?" he said, as he came alongside of them.

And to the ineffable disgust of Bates, who had counted upon at least an hour's confidential talk with her, Miss Brooke accepted the young farmer's offer, and mounted beside him in his buggy.

As they went swiftly along the country road, Loveday explained to the young man that her destination was Craigen Court, and that as she was a stranger to the place, she must trust to him to put her down at the nearest point to it that he would pass.

At the mention of Craigen Court his face clouded.

"They're in trouble there, and their trouble has brought trouble on others," he said a little bitterly.

"I know," said Loveday sympathetically; "it is often so. In such circumstances as these suspicions frequently fastens on an entirely innocent person."

"That's it! that's it!" he cried excitedly; "if you go into that house you'll hear all sorts of wicked things said of her, and see everything setting in dead against her. But she's innocent. I swear to you she is as innocent as you or I are."

His voice rang out above the clatter of his horse's hoots. He seemed to forget that he had mentioned no name, and that Loveday, as a stranger, might be at a loss to know to whom he referred.

"Who is guilty Heaven only knows," he went on after a moment's pause; "it isn't for me to give an ill name to anyone in that house; but I only say she is innocent, and that I'll stake my life on."

"She is a lucky girl to have found one to believe in her, and trust her as you do," said Loveday, even more sympathetically than before.

"Is she? I wish she'd take advantage of her luck, then," he answered bitterly. "Most girls in her position would be glad to have a man to stand by them through thick and thin. But not she! Ever since the night of that accursed robbery she has refused to see me— won't answer my letters— won't even send me a message. And, great Heavens! I'd marry her to-morrow, if I had the chance, and dare the world to say a word against her."

He whipped up his pony. The hedges seemed to fly on either side of them, and before Loveday realized that half her drive was over, he had drawn rein, and was helping her to alight at the servants' entrance to Craigen Court.

"You'll tell her what I've said to you, if you get the opportunity, and beg her to see me, if only for five minutes?" he petitioned before he re-mounted his buggy. And Loveday, as she thanked the young man for his kind attention, promised to make an opportunity to give his message to the girl.

Mrs. Williams, the housekeeper, welcomed Loveday in the servants' hall, and then took her to her own room to pull off her wraps. Mrs. Williams was the widow of a London tradesman, and a little beyond the average housekeeper in speech and manner.

She was a genial, pleasant woman, and readily entered into conversation with Loveday. Tea was brought in, and each seemed to feel at home with the other. Loveday in the course of this easy, pleasant talk, elicited from her the whole history of the events of the day of the robbery, the number and names of the guests who sat down to dinner that night, together with some other apparently trivial details.

The housekeeper made no attempt to disguise the painful position in which she and every one of the servants of the house felt themselves to be at the present moment.

"We are none of us at our ease with each other now," she said, as she poured out hot tea for Loveday, and piled up a blazing fire. "Everyone fancies that everyone else is suspecting him or her, and trying to rake up past words or deeds to bring in as evidence. The whole house seems under a cloud. And at this time of year, too; just when everything as a rule is at its merriest!" and here she gave a doleful glance to the big bunch of holly and mistletoe hanging from the ceiling.

"I suppose you are generally very merry downstairs at Christmas time?" said Loveday. "Servants' balls, theatricals, and all that sort of thing?"

"I should think we were! When I think of this time last year and the fun we all had, I can scarcely believe it is the same house. Our ball always follows my lady's ball, and we have permission to ask our friends to it, and we keep it up as late as ever we please. We begin our evening with a concert and recitations in character, then we have a supper and then we dance right on till morning; but this year!"— she broke off, giving a long, melancholy shake of her head that spoke volumes.

"I suppose," said Loveday, "some of your friends are very clever as musicians or reciters?"

"Very clever indeed. Sir George and my lady are always present during the early part of the evening, and I should like you to have seen Sir George last year laughing fit to kill himself at Harry Emmett dressed in prison dress with a bit of oakum in his hand, reciting the "Noble Convict!" Sir George said if the young man had gone on the stage, he would have been bound to make his fortune."

"Half a cup, please," said Loveday, presenting her cup. "Who was this Harry Emmett then— a sweetheart of one of the maids?"

"Oh, he would flirt with them all, but he was sweetheart to none. He was footman to Colonel James, who is a great friend of Sir George's, and Harry was constantly backwards and forwards bringing messages from his master. His father, I think, drove a cab in London, and Harry for a time did so also; then he took it into his head to be a gentleman's servant, and great satisfaction he gave as such. He was always such a bright, handsome young fellow and so full of fun, that everyone liked him. But I shall tire you with all this; and you, of course, want to talk about something so different;" and the housekeeper sighed again, as the thought of the dreadful robbery entered her brain once more.

"Not at all. I am greatly interested in you and your festivities. Is Emmett still in the neighbourhood? I should amazingly like to hear him recite myself."

"I'm sorry to say he left Colonel James about six months ago. We all missed him very much at first. He was a good, kind-hearted young man, and I remember he told me he was going away to look after his dear old grandmother, who had a sweet-stuff shop somewhere or other, but where I can't remember."

Loveday was leaning back in her chair now, with eyelids drooped so low that she literally looked out through "slits" instead of eyes.

Suddenly and abruptly she changed the conversation.

"When will it be convenient for me to see Lady Cathrow's dressing-room?" she asked.

The housekeeper looked at her watch. "Now, at once," she answered: "it's a quarter to five now and my lady sometimes goes up to her room to rest for half an hour before she dresses for dinner."

"Is Stephanie still in attendance on Lady Cathrow?" Miss Brooke asked as she followed the housekeeper up the back stairs to the bedroom floor.

"Yes, Sir George and my lady have been goodness itself to us through this trying time, and they say we are all innocent till we are proved guilty, and will have it that none of our duties are to be in any way altered."

"Stephanie is scarcely fit to perform hers, I should imagine?"

"Scarcely. She was in hysterics nearly from morning till night for the first two or three days after the detectives came down, but now she has grown sullen, eats nothing and never speaks a word to any of us except when she is obliged. This is my lady's dressing-room, walk in please."

Loveday entered a large, luxuriously furnished room, and naturally made her way straight to the chief point of attraction in it— the iron safe fitted into the wall that separated the dressing-room from the bedroom.

It was a safe of the ordinary description, fitted with a strong iron door and Chubb lock. And across this door was written with chalk in characters that seemed defiant in their size and boldness, the words: "To be let, unfurnished."

Loveday spent about five minutes in front of this safe, all her attention concentrated upon the big, bold writing.

She took from her pocket-book a narrow strip of tracing-paper and compared the writing on it, letter by letter, with that on the safe door. This done she turned to Mrs. Williams and professed herself ready to follow her to the room below.

Mrs. Williams looked surprised. Her opinion of Miss Brooke's professional capabilities suffered considerable diminution.

"The gentlemen detectives," she said, "spent over an hour in this room; they paced the floor, they measured the candles, they—"

"Mrs. Williams," interrupted Loveday, "I am quite ready to look at the room below." Her manner had changed from gossiping friendliness to that of the business woman hard at work at her profession.

Without another word, Mrs. Williams led the way to the little room which had proved itself to be the "weak point" of the house.

They entered it by the door which opened into a passage leading to the back-stairs of the house. Loveday found the room exactly what it had been described to her by Mr. Dyer. It needed no second glance at the window to see the ease with which anyone could open it from the outside, and swing themselves into the room, when once the brass catch had been unfastened.

Loveday wasted no time here. In fact, much to Mrs. Williams's surprise and disappointment, she merely walked across the room, in at one door and out at the opposite one, which opened into the large inner hall of the house.

Here, however, she paused to ask a question:

"Is that chair always placed exactly in that position?" she said, pointing to an oak chair that stood immediately outside the room they had just quitted.

The housekeeper answered in the affirmative. It was a warm corner. "My lady" was particular that everyone who came to the house on messages should have a comfortable place to wait in.

"I shall be glad if you will show me to my room now," said Loveday, a little abruptly; "and will you kindly send up to me a county trade directory, if, that is, you have such a thing in the house?"

Mrs. Williams, with an air of offended dignity, led the way to the bedroom quarters once more. The worthy housekeeper felt as if her own dignity had, in some sort, been injured by the want of interest Miss Brooke had evinced in the rooms which, at the present moment, she considered the "show" rooms of the house.

"Shall I send someone to help you unpack?" she asked, a little stiffly, at the door of Loveday's room.

"No, thank you; there will not be much unpacking to do. I must leave here by the first up-train to-morrow morning."

"To-morrow morning! Why, I have told everyone you will be here at least a fortnight!"

"Ah, then you must explain that I have been suddenly summoned home by telegram. I'm sure I can trust you to make excuses for me. Do not, however, make them before supper-time. I shall like to sit down to that meal with you. I suppose I shall see Stephanie then?"

The housekeeper answered in the affirmative, and went her way, wondering over the strange manners of the lady whom, at first, she had been disposed to consider "such a nice, pleasant, conversable person!"

At supper-time, however, when the upper-servants assembled at what was, to them, the pleasantest meal of the day, a great surprise was to greet them.

Stephanie did not take her usual place at table, and a fellow-servant, sent to her room to summon her returned, saying that the room was empty, and Stephanie was nowhere to be found.

Loveday and Mrs. Williams together went to the girl's bed-room. It bore its usual appearance: no packing had been done in it, and, beyond her hat and jacket, the girl appeared to have taken nothing away with her.

On enquiry, it transpired that Stephanie had, as usual, assisted Lady Cathrow to dress for dinner; but after that not a soul in the house appeared to have seen her.

Mrs. Williams thought the matter of sufficient importance to be at once reported to her master and mistress; and Sir George, in his turn, promptly dispatched a messenger to Mr. Bates, at the "King's Head," to summon him to an immediate consultation.

Loveday dispatched a messenger in another direction— to young Mr. Holt, at his farm, giving him particulars of the girl's disappearance.

Mr. Bates had a brief interview with Sir George in his study, from which he emerged radiant. He made a point of seeing Loveday before he left the Court, sending a special request to her that she would speak to him for a minute in the outside drive.

Loveday put her hat on, and went out to him. She found him almost dancing for glee.

"Told you so! told you so! Now, didn't I, Miss Brooke?" he exclaimed. "We'll come upon her traces before morning, never fear. I'm quite prepared. I knew what was in her mind all along. I said to myself, when that girl bolts it will be after she has dressed my lady for dinner— when she has two good clear hours all to herself, and her absence from the house won't be noticed, and when, without much difficulty, she can catch a train leaving Huxwell for Wreford. Well, she'll get to Wreford safe enough; but from Wreford she'll be followed every step of the way she goes. Only yesterday I set a man on there— a keen fellow at this sort of thing— and gave him full directions; and he'll hunt her down to her hole properly. Taken nothing with her, do you say? What does that matter? She thinks she'll find all she wants where she's going— 'the feathered nest' I spoke to you about this morning. Ha! ha! Well, instead of stepping into it, as she fancies she will, she'll walk straight into a detective's arms, and land her pal there into the bargain. There'll be two of them netted before another forty-eight hours are over our heads, or my name's not Jeremiah Bates."

"What are you going to do now?" asked Loveday, as the man finished his long speech.

"Now! I'm back to the "King's Head" to wait for a telegram from my colleague at Wreford. Once he's got her in front of him he'll give me instructions at what point to meet him. You see, Huxwell being such an out-of-the-way place, and only one train leaving between 7.30 and 10.15, makes us really positive that Wreford must be the girl's destination and relieves my mind from all anxiety on the matter."

"Does it?" answered Loveday gravely. "I can see another possible destination for the girl— the stream that runs through the wood we drove past this morning. Good night, Mr. Bates, it's cold out here. Of course so soon as you have any news you'll send it up to Sir George."

The household sat up late that night, but no news was received of Stephanie from any quarter. Mr. Bates had impressed upon Sir George the ill-advisability of setting up a hue and cry after the girl that might possibly reach her ears and scare her from joining the person whom he was pleased to designate as her "pal."

"We want to follow her silently, Sir George, silently as, the shadow follows the man," he had said grandiloquently, "and then we shall come upon the two, and I trust upon their booty also." Sir George in his turn had impressed Mr.

Bates's wishes upon his household, and if it had not been for Loveday's message, dispatched early in the evening to young Holt, not a soul outside the house would have known of Stephanie's disappearance.

Loveday was stirring early the next morning, and the eight o'clock train for Wreford numbered her among its passengers. Before starting, she dispatched a telegram to her chief in Lynch Court. It read rather oddly, as follows:—

"Cracker fired. Am just starting for Wreford. Will wire to you from there. L. B."

Oddly though it might read, Mr. Dyer did not need to refer to his cipher book to interpret it. "Cracker fired" was the easily remembered equivalent for "clue found" in the detective phraseology of the office.

"Well, she has been quick enough about it this time!" he soliquised as he speculated in his own mind over what the purport of the next telegram might be.

Half an hour later there came to him a constable from Scotland Yard to tell him of Stephanie's disappearance and the conjectures that were rife on the matter, and he then, not unnaturally, read Loveday's telegram by the light of this information, and concluded that the clue in her hands related to the discovery of Stephanie's whereabouts as well as to that of her guilt.

A telegram received a little later on, however, was to turn this theory upside down. It was, like the former one, worded in the enigmatic language current in the Lynch Court establishment, but as it was a lengthier and more intricate message, it sent Mr. Dyer at once to his cipher book.

"Wonderful! She has cut them all out this time!" was Mr. Dyer's exclamation as he read and interpreted the final word.

In another ten minutes he had given over his office to the charge of his head clerk for the day, and was rattling along the streets in a hansom in the direction of Bishopsgate Station.

There he was lucky enough to catch a train just starting for Wreford.

"The event of the day," he muttered, as he settled himself comfortably in a corner seat, "will be the return journey when she tells me, bit by bit, how she has worked it all out."

It was not until close upon three o'clock in the afternoon that he arrived at the old-fashioned market town of Wreford. It chanced to be cattle-market day, and the station was crowded with drovers and farmers. Outside the station Loveday was waiting for him, as she had told him in her telegram that she would, in a four-wheeler.

"It's all right," she said to him as he got in; "he can't get away, even if he had an idea that we were after him. Two of the local police are waiting outside the

house door with a warrant for his arrest, signed by a magistrate. I did not, however, see why the Lynch Court office should not have the credit of the thing, and so telegraphed to you to conduct the arrest."

They drove through the High Street to the outskirts of the town, where the shops became intermixed with private houses let out in offices. The cab pulled up outside one of these, and two policemen in plain clothes came forward, and touched their hats to Mr. Dyer.

"He's in there now, sir, doing his office work," said one of the men pointing to a door, just within the entrance, on which was printed in black letters, "The United Kingdom Cab-drivers' Beneficent Association." "I hear however, that this is the last time he will be found there, as a week ago he gave notice to leave."

As the man finished speaking, a man, evidently of the cab-driving fraternity, came up the steps. He stared curiously at the little group just within the entrance, and then chinking his money in his hand, passed on to the office as if to pay his subscription.

"Will you be good enough to tell Mr. Emmett in there," said Mr. Dyer, addressing the man, "that a gentleman outside wishes to speak with him."

The man nodded and passed into the office. As the door opened, it disclosed to view an old gentleman seated at a desk apparently writing receipts for money. A little in his rear at his right hand, sat a young and decidedly good-looking man, at a table on which were placed various little piles of silver and pence. The get-up of this young man was gentleman-like, and his manner was affable and pleasant as he responded, with a nod and a smile, to the cab-driver's message.

"I sha'n't be a minute," he said to his colleague at the other desk, as he rose and crossed the room towards the door.

But once outside that door it was closed firmly behind him, and he found himself in the centre of three stalwart individuals, one of whom informed him that he held in his hand a warrant for the arrest of Harry Emmett on the charge of complicity in the Craigen Court robbery, and that he had "better come along quietly, for resistance would be useless."

Emmett seemed convinced of the latter fact. He grew deadly white for a moment, then recovered himself.

"Will someone have the kindness to fetch my hat and coat," he said in a lofty manner. "I don't see why I should be made to catch my death of cold because some other people have seen fit to make asses of themselves."

His hat and coat were fetched, and he was handed into the cab between the two officials.

"Let me give you a word of warning, young man," said Mr. Dyer, closing the cab door and looking in for a moment through the window at Emmett. "I don't suppose it's a punishable offence to leave a black bag on an old maid's doorstep,

but let me tell you, if it had not been for that black bag you might have got clean off with your spoil."

Emmett, the irrepressible, had his answer ready. He lifted his hat ironically to Mr. Dyer; "You might have put it more neatly, guv'nor," he said; "if I had been in your place I would have said: 'Young man, you are being justly punished for your misdeeds; you have been taking off your fellow-creatures all your life long, and now they are taking off you.'"

Mr. Dyer's duty that day did not end with the depositing of Harry Emmett in the local jail. The search through Emmett's lodgings and effects had to be made, and at this he was naturally present. About a third of the lost jewellery was found there, and from this it was consequently concluded that his accomplices in the crime had considered that he had borne a third of the risk and of the danger of it.

Letters and various memoranda discovered in the rooms, eventually led to the detection of those accomplices, and although Lady Cathrow was doomed to lose the greater part of her valuable property, she had ultimately the satisfaction of knowing that each one of the thieves received a sentence proportionate to his crime.

It was not until close upon midnight that Mr. Dyer found himself seated in the train, facing Miss Brooke, and had leisure to ask for the links in the chain of reasoning that had led her in so remarkable a manner to connect the finding of a black bag, with insignificant contents, with an extensive robbery of valuable jewellery.

Loveday explained the whole thing, easily, naturally, step by step in her usual methodical manner.

"I read," she said, "as I dare say a great many other people did, the account of the two things in the same newspaper, on the same day, and I detected, as I dare say a great many other people did not, a sense of fun in the principal actor in each incident. I notice while all people are agreed as to the variety of motives that instigate crime, very few allow sufficient margin for variety of character in the criminal. We are apt to imagine that he stalks about the world with a bundle of deadly motives under his arm, and cannot picture him at his work with a twinkle in his eye and a keen sense of fun, such as honest folk have sometimes when at work at their calling."

Here Mr. Dyer gave a little grunt; it might have been either of assent or dissent.

Loveday went on:

"Of course, the ludicrousness of the diction of the letter found in the bag would be apparent to the most casual reader; to me the high falutin sentences sounded in addition strangely familiar; I had heard or read them somewhere I felt sure, although where I could not at first remember. They rang in my ears,

and it was not altogether out of idle curiosity that I went to Scotland Yard to see the bag and its contents, and to copy, with a slip of tracing paper, a line or two of the letter. When I found that the handwriting of this letter was not identical with that of the translations found in the bag, I was confirmed in my impression that the owner of the bag was not the writer of the letter; that possibly the bag and its contents had been appropriated from some railway station for some distinct purpose; and, that purpose accomplished, the appropriator no longer wished to be burthened with it, and disposed of it in the readiest fashion that suggested itself. The letter, it seemed to me, had been begun with the intention of throwing the police off the scent, but the irrepressible spirit of fun that had induced the writer to deposit his clerical adjuncts upon an old maid's doorstep had proved too strong for him here, and had carried him away, and the letter that was intended to be pathetic ended in being comic."

"Very ingenious, so far," murmured Mr. Dyer: "I've no doubt when the contents of the bag are widely made known through advertisements a claimant will come forward, and your theory be found correct."

"When I returned from Scotland Yard," Loveday continued, "I found your note, asking me to go round and see you respecting the big jewel robbery. Before I did so I thought it best to read once more the newspaper account of the case, so that I might be well up in its details. When I came to the words that the thief had written across the door of the safe, 'To be Let, Unfurnished,' they at once connected themselves in my mind with the 'dying kiss to my Marchioness Mother,' and the solemn warning against the race-course and the book-maker, of the black-bag letter-writer. Then, all in a flash, the whole thing became clear to me. Some two or three years back my professional duties necessitated my frequent attendance at certain low class penny-readings, given in the South London slums. At these penny-readings young shop-assistants, and others of their class, glad of an opportunity for exhibiting their accomplishments, declaim with great vigour; and, as a rule, select pieces which their very mixed audience might be supposed to appreciate. During my attendance at these meetings, it seemed to me that one book of selected readings was a great favourite among the reciters, and I took the trouble to buy it. Here it is."

Here Loveday took from her cloak-pocket "*The Reciter's Treasury*," and handed it to her companion.

"Now," she said, "if you will run your eye down the index column you will find the titles of those pieces to which I wish to draw your attention. The first is 'The Suicide's Farewell;' the second, 'The Noble Convict;' the third, 'To be Let, Unfurnished.'"

"By Jove! so it is!" ejaculated Mr. Dyer.

"In the first of these pieces, 'The Suicide's Farewell,' occur the expressions with which the black-bag letter begins— 'The fatal day has arrived,' etc., the

warnings against gambling, and the allusions to the 'poor lifeless body.' In the second, 'The Noble Convict,' occur the allusions to the aristocratic relations and the dying kiss to the marchioness mother. The third piece, 'To be Let, Unfurnished,' is a foolish little poem enough, although I dare say it has often raised a laugh in a not too-discriminating audience. It tells how a bachelor, calling at a house to enquire after rooms to be let unfurnished, falls in love with the daughter of the house, and offers her his heart, which, he says, is to be let unfurnished. She declines his offer, and retorts that she thinks his head must be to let unfurnished, too. With these three pieces before me, it was not difficult to see a thread of connection between the writer of the black-bag letter and the thief who wrote across the empty safe at Craigen Court. Following this thread, I unearthed the story of Harry Emmett— footman, reciter, general lover and scamp. Subsequently I compared the writing on my tracing paper with that on the safe-door, and, allowing for the difference between a bit of chalk and a steel nib, came to the conclusion that there could be but little doubt but what both were written by the same hand. Before that, however, I had obtained another, and what I consider the most important, link in my chain of evidence— how Emmett brought his clerical dress into use."

"Ah, how did you find out that now?" asked Mr. Dyer, leaning forward with his elbows on his knees.

"In the course of conversation with Mrs. Williams, whom I found to be a most communicative person, I elicited the names of the guests who had sat down to dinner on Christmas Eve. They were all people of undoubted respectability in the neighbourhood. Just before dinner was announced, she said, a young clergyman had presented himself at the front door, asking to speak with the Rector of the parish. The Rector, it seems, always dines at Craigen Court on Christmas Eve. The young clergyman's story was that he had been told by a certain clergyman, whose name he mentioned, that a curate was wanted in the parish, and he had travelled down from London to offer his services. He had been, he said, to the Rectory and had been told by the servants where the Rector was dining, and fearing to lose his chance of the curacy, had followed him to the Court. Now the Rector had been wanting a curate and had filled the vacancy only the previous week; he was a little inclined to be irate at this interruption to the evening's festivities, and told the young man that he didn't want a curate. When, however, he saw how disappointed the poor young fellow looked— I believe he shed a tear or two— his heart softened; he told him to sit down and rest in the hall before he attempted the walk back to the station, and said he would ask Sir George to send him out a glass of wine. the young man sat down in a chair immediately outside the room by which the thieves entered. Now I need not tell you who that young man was, nor suggest to your mind, I am sure, the idea that while the servant went to fetch him his

wine, or, indeed, so soon as he saw the coast clear, he slipped into that little room and pulled back the catch of the window that admitted his confederates, who, no doubt, at that very moment were in hiding in the grounds. The housekeeper did not know whether this meek young curate had a black bag with him. Personally I have no doubt of the fact, nor that it contained the cap, cuffs, collar, and outer garments of Harry Emmett, which were most likely redonned before he returned to his lodgings at Wreford, where I should say he repacked the bag with its clerical contents, and wrote his serio-comic letter. This bag, I suppose, he must have deposited in the very early morning, before anyone was stirring, on the door-step of the house in the Easterbrook Road."

Mr. Dyer drew a long breath. In his heart was unmitigated admiration for his colleague's skill, which seemed to him to fall little short of inspiration. By-and-by, no doubt, he would sing her praises to the first person who came along with a hearty good will; he had not, however, the slightest intention of so singing them in her own ears— excessive praise was apt to have a bad effect on the rising practitioner.

So he contented himself with saying:

"Yes, very satisfactory. Now tell me how you hunted the fellow down to his diggings?"

"Oh, that was mere ABC work," answered Loveday. "Mrs. Williams told me he had left his place at Colonel James's about six months previously, and had told her he was going to look after his dear old grandmother, who kept a sweet stuff-shop; but where she could not remember. Having heard that Emmett's father was a cab-driver, my thoughts at once flew to the cabman's vernacular— you know something of it, no doubt— in which their provident association is designated by the phase, 'the dear old grandmother,' and the office where they make and receive their payments is styled 'the sweet stuff-shop.'"

"Ha, ha, ha! And good Mrs. Williams took it all literally, no doubt?"

"She did; and thought what a dear, kind-hearted fellow the young man was. Naturally I supposed there would be a branch of the association in the nearest market town, and a local trades' directory confirmed my supposition that there was one at Wreford. Bearing in mind where the black bag was found, it was not difficult to believe that young Emmett, possibly through his father's influence and his own prepossessing manners and appearance, had attained to some position of trust in the Wreford branch. I must confess I scarcely expected to find him as I did, on reaching the place, installed as receiver of the weekly moneys. Of course, I immediately put myself in communication with the police there, and the rest I think you know."

Mr. Dyer's enthusiasm refused to be longer restrained.

"It's capital, from first to last," he cried; "you've surpassed yourself this time!"

"The only thing that saddens me," said Loveday, "is the thought of the possible fate of that poor little Stephanie."

Loveday's anxieties on Stephanie's behalf were, however, to be put to flight before another twenty-four hours had passed. The first post on the following morning brought a letter from Mrs. Williams telling how the girl had been found before the night was over, half dead with cold and fright, on the verge of the stream running through Craigen Wood—"found too"— wrote the housekeeper, "by the very person who ought to have found her, young Holt, who was, and is so desperately in love with her. Thank goodness! at the last moment her courage failed her, and instead of throwing herself into the stream, she sank down, half-fainting, beside it. Holt took her straight home to his mother, and there, at the farm, she is now, being taken care of and petted generally by everyone."

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14: No Defense

Melville Davisson Post

1869-1930

Saturday Evening Post, 31 Dec 1910

One of the authors non-series stories, which does not appear to have been collected, nor anthologised, since publication.

Fatality, which on the marble of ancient tragedies bears the name of a god, and on the tattooed brow of the galleys is called "No Luck."—De Goncourt.

THERE was no sun. The city sat like a ghost in a shroud of dirty yellow fog. This fog entered the courtroom. The gas jets were lighted. The air, heated by these jets, was tainted with the stench of the janitor's mop. It was early in the morning. The judge, a number of prisoners who had been brought over the arched bridge from the jail, the officials of the court and a little group of young attorneys, awaiting assignments to defend those without counsel, were alone in the courtroom.

There was an atmosphere of silence. The whispering of the attorneys, the scratching of the clerk's pen, the words of the judge, the responses of the prisoners, their breathing, the moving of their feet, the creaking of their chairs as they arose and as they reseated themselves, were all sounds detached and audible in this silence. There was here no one of those things that warm and color life. The heat of passion, moving men to violence; the love of adventure; the lust of gain; the lights, the sounds, the words, the gestures— the infinite stimuli that had urged these men against the law— were absent. There was here only the presence of penalty.

When the clerk called the State versus Johnson a young man arose from the line of seated prisoners. Judging by his dress, the man might have been a bank clerk. He got up slowly and stood with his chin lifted, looking at the judge. There was no interest in his face. There was in its stead a profound unconcern. His white, nimble hands, always moving, fingered his coat-pockets. It was a habit rather than a nervous gesture. The resignation in the man's face, in the lift of his head, in the pose of his figure, precluded anxiety. He knew exactly what was going to happen.

The judge did not look up. He inquired whether the prisoner was represented by counsel, and being told that he was not appointed one of the attorneys to defend him. He continued, addressing the attorney:

"If you wish to talk with the prisoner you can take him into the vacant jury room; I will have a page call you before I adjourn; be ready to plead to the indictment."

The attorney beckoned to the prisoner and the two of them went into the jury room. The attorney sat down and indicated a neighboring chair with his hand.

"Well," he said, "what is it— not guilty?" The prisoner did not at once reply; he went over to the window and stood a moment, looking idly through the dirty window-panes. Then he answered.

"I don't care," he said.

The attorney was astonished. "Do you want to go to the penitentiary?"

The man turned sharply on his heel.

"No," he said, "I don't want to go; nobody wants to go.... Do you know what it's like down there?... It's hell down there."

"Then we have got to get busy."

The prisoner shrugged his shoulders. The flash of energy, moving him when he spoke of the penitentiary, was past; he was again listless.

"Come," said the attorney, "we must tell the judge something."

"You can tell him the truth if you want to," replied the prisoner.

"Well," said the attorney, "cut along with the story. If there's anything in it that will do any good I'll put it up to the judge."

The prisoner again shrugged his shoulders.

"It's no use," he said.

The attorney was beginning to be annoyed.

"How do you know it's no use?"

The prisoner sat down in a chair; he put his nervous white hands firmly on his knees. He looked the attorney in the face; a bitter resolution entered his voice.

"I know it very well," he said; "when you hear the story you'll know it too. Listen: I'm what the police call a 'dip'— that is, a pickpocket; and I'm a good one— the cops never pick me up on a job. I know my business."

He suddenly flashed his white, nimble hands. "I can go into a jam at a railroad station and get a pocketbook whenever I want to, or I can go into a crowd any time and get a watch. There's no fly cop that can pinch me at it; they have all had a try. I pass them all up. Of course the police know I do it. You can't keep them from knowing that. But they never caught me at a job; they never could catch me."

"They seem to have caught you this time," said the attorney.

"They— the police!" The prisoner made a contemptuous gesture. "It was something bigger than the police. Did you ever hear of Scott, the man who invented the method of sawing through an iron bar with silk thread and emery dust? No? Well, when it came to brains he had us all trimmed. Scott understood it. He used to say: 'Boys, it's not the police. You always have a chance against the

police, but when that other Thing gets in the game you haven't got a ghost of a chance.'"

The attorney was puzzled.

"I don't understand," he said.

"Never mind, " replied the prisoner; "you'll understand in a minute."

He stopped and sat a moment with the muscles of his mouth drawn, his teeth together; then he continued:

"I thought Scott was dopey; I thought he was talking rot. I laughed. 'All right, young man,' he said; 'you're too little yet for the Thing to notice you; but just you wait until you attract its attention! That Thing's on some big job; it has no time for you until you begin to annoy it. Then look out! Mind, it won't land you with a clean upper cut. That's not its method; its way is to do you with a lot of little, trivial, picayune tricks that you will mistake for a run of hard luck. It's like this: it's like an ant crawling over a man's hand when he's busy; for a good while he doesn't notice it, but when he does he knocks it off into the fire.... Only there's this difference: a man, when he finally did notice it, would brush that ant off into the fire at once; but this Thing takes its finger and heads the ant off here, and it heads it off there, and it steers it and turns it until it drops off into the fire of itself; and every one of those turns and twists and head-offs that ant thinks is an accident.'"

He paused a moment, his slender fingers tightening on his knees.

"I thought Scott was giving me a line of hot air. 'Everybody has luck,' I said. 'Sure they do,' said Scott, 'but this Thing's not luck—it's intention. Luck's a thing that comes by chance, but there's no chance about this Thing. Luck's an accident here and an accident there, without any connection; but this Thing's a system.'"

"What has all this got to do with your case?" asked the attorney.

"I'm coming to that," replied the prisoner. "Listen: It was in the afternoon; the sun had brought everybody out. The snow was melting and the gutters were running full of dirty slush, but the sidewalks were dry and warm. I was coming along the street. I wasn't out for business. I wasn't looking for anything. Finally I hit a crowd on the corner. A faker had a piece of black carpet laid along the sidewalk, and he was selling a mechanical toy— two little dummy figures. He'd make a speech about the wonders of science, then he'd put his mechanical toy down on this carpet, and the two little figures would begin to dance, and they'd keep on dancing— they'd dance forever. The crowd was wild. The faker was selling this toy for twenty-five cents, put up in a neat box with instructions, and they were going like gold dollars.

"It took me a minute to get on to his game. There was a tiny black thread stretched along this carpet, and out at the other end— on the edge of the crowd— a hobo with his hands in his pockets was working the thread. The faker

just hooked his toy on to this thread, and of course it would dance until the hobo's elbow wore out.

"I was standing there watching this bunch of suckers take the hook when, out in the crowd, I noticed a big man with his hat on the back of his head, a cigar in his mouth, a diamond in his shirtfront, and a gold watch-chain, as thick as your little finger, stretched across his waistcoat. The thing was like an invitation. I didn't have a pair of nippers on me, so I didn't go after the diamond, but I moved out into the crowd and lifted the watch. I dropped it into my pocket, edged out of the crowd and sauntered on up the street toward home. The big man never missed the watch; he was standing there spread out, with the cigar in his mouth, when I passed out of sight.

"I went on. As I turned into the street on which I live I met a policeman. I knew him; he was a friend of mine.

" 'Hello, Johnson,' he said, 'I was looking for you.'

" 'What do you want with me?' I said.

" 'Well,' he said, 'I guess I've got to take you along to the station-house.'

"I was astonished, but I kept my nerve.

" 'Now, look here, Scally,' I said, 'you haven't got any charge against me.'

" 'I know it,' he said.

"I was more astonished now.

" 'Then what kind of a bluff are you running?' I said.

" 'I'm not running a bluff,' he said; 'the chief has just issued an order for us to round-up all the old suspects and bring them down to the station-house.'

"I understood it then. Whenever a new chief has nothing else to do he takes the census. I tried to get off.

" 'Now, look here, Scally,' I said, 'what's the use of taking me down there?'

" 'No use,' he said.

" 'Then pass me up, old man.'

" 'Can't do it, Johnson,' he said; 'you're on my list and I've got to account for you. If you didn't show up they'd say I tipped you off.'

"Then he tried to smooth it over.

" 'They've got nothing against you; they'll turn you loose in an hour.'

"'I know that,' I said, 'but I'm tired of the same old questions, and the same old Bertillon measurements, and all that rot— ain't there some way round?'

"He shook his head.

"'Not this time; you're located in my district. I've got to produce you.'

"I saw it was no use, so I tried to get him to permit me to go into my house before we started— so I could get rid of the watch in my pocket. It was only a few doors farther on. I gave him a good excuse and he would have done it, but just then a mounted sergeant came along. He knew us, and we had to start for the station-house.

"We went out to the corner and turned down the street that I had just come up. We walked along until we approached the faker and his bunch of suckers. Then, just as we were coming up to them, that big man out in the crowd suddenly missed his watch, grabbed the man who was standing next to him and began to holler. There was a general mix-up, and some one turned in the patrol alarm. The wagon came in a hurry. They hustled the big fellow and the man he had nailed into it just as we came up. And Scally said to me:

" 'It's a mile to the station-house; let's ride.'"

The prisoner stopped. He got up and went over to the window. The fog lying on the city had deepened. The million lights struggling in it seemed about to be extinguished.

There was a knocking on the door.

The attorney replied.

"All right," he said; "in a minute."

Then he turned toward the prisoner leaning on the sill, looking out over the submerged city.

"Well," he said.

The prisoner continued:

"We got in.... There's not much more.... I had to get rid of that watch. The dirty slush was running deep in the gutters. I determined on a plan. As I got out of the wagon I would make a misstep, put my right foot into the slush and let the watch slip down the leg of my trousers. I worked the watch out of my pocket into my hand, and when we stopped I stepped down, stumbled, lost my balance; my right foot went down into the slush, I caught the rail with my left hand, leaned back and let go of the watch.

"The next minute I knew that I was all in. In catching the band of my trousers between my thumb and finger I caught also the band of my undergarment, and the watch was in my shoe!"

Note—The germinal incident of this story is true. It occurred in a Western court and was related to the writer by one of the ablest criminal prosecutors in America.

15: Bail Bait

Robert Reeves

1912-1945

Black Mask Jan 1942

Robert Reeves' pulp writing career had barely begun when he died in the last days of WW2, while serving with a USAAF B25 Mitchell bomber squadron based in the Phillipines. Cellini Smith was his major series character.

HE CHECKED a curved wrist watch that you knew he couldn't have come by honestly and found that it was just two minutes short of nine in the morning. Chewing away at the toothpick between his thin, slitted lips, he entered the Hall of Justice.

His colorless eyes surveyed the signs and arrows on the walls of the vaulted vestibule. Coroner, Traffic, Small Claims, Bail— there were dozens. He read them all and when he didn't find what he wanted he walked over to the elevator starter.

"Reynolds." He spoke the word without moving the toothpick.

"Huh?" asked the starter.

"Reynolds," he repeated. "Where do I find the guy?"

"Oh, you mean Judge Reynolds."

"I know what I mean. Where do I find him?"

The starter named a floor and office number and he entered a waiting elevator. Other passengers pushed in, crowding him to the back. A big man, well-cushioned with fat, squeezed him to the wall but suddenly stiffened. The fat man wasn't sure, but he thought he felt something hard and unyielding— something like a gun— over the other one's chest. The fat man swung around to find himself looking into the colorless eyes. The fat man swallowed heavily, said nothing, and got off at the first stop.

He left the elevator four stops later and walked down the hall till he found the door he wanted. He pushed through without knocking. An elderly man sat alone behind a desk, robed in judicial black.

He spat out the toothpick and asked: "You Reynolds?"

"Yes," replied the jurist. "What can I do for you?"

"Plenty. My handle is Manny Simms."

"Yes?"

Manny Simms reached into his breast pocket and tossed an envelope onto the glass top. "Look at that first, Reynolds."

The judge removed a rubber band from the envelope and emptied its contents on the blotter. It was a packet of twenty-dollar bills.

"Count them, Reynolds."

The judge frowned. "Mr. Simms, I want to be certain before I do something about it. Are you trying to bribe me?"

Simms ignored the question. "There's fifty slices of that lettuce there— just one grand— and you can buy a lot of gavels with that. You got a case coming up in your court this morning. A guy called Jimmy Legg." Manny Simms shoved another toothpick into his face before continuing. "That grand, Reynolds, is to let Jimmy Legg go."

AN HOUR later, at precisely ten o'clock, Judge Reynolds left his chambers, crossed the hall, and passed through a door that gave into the rear of Magistrate's Court, Division Six.

The bailiff saw him coming and intoned: "Los Angeles County Magistrate's Court Division Six the Honorable Frank Reynolds presiding rise please sit down please thank you quiet everybody."

The crowd in the courtroom made a half-hearted gesture toward standing up as His Honor entered with dignified steps and sat behind the massive, elevated desk.

Reynolds fitted pince-nez to his razorback nose and thumbed through the mound of papers before him. They concerned the cases that were scheduled for hearing that day. He read the first sheet carefully, scanned through several of the following, then nodded to the clerk.

The clerk called the first case. A henpecked husband had gone berserk and forced his mother-in-law to eat his marriage certificate and had then proceeded to beat her with a telephone. The husband pled not guilty and Reynolds remanded him for trial. The second, third, and fourth cases were disposed of with equal rapidity. It was hardly ten twenty by the clock when the case of James Legg was called.

Jimmy Legg stood up and gazed at His Honor with all the doe-eyed innocence that a two-time loser can muster. Beside him stood Howard Garrett, one of the better mouthpieces, a comforting hand on his client's shoulder. Garrett gave the impression that this thing would make the Dreyfus case look like a traffic violation. A young, pimplyfaced deputy district attorney rose for the state. He had Jimmy Legg dead to rights and he sounded very bored.

Legg, it seemed, had jimmied his way into the Lansing Investment Company, at the Tower Building, two nights before and had souped open the office safe. The janitor of the building heard the detonation and rushed up to be sapped for his pains. Legg made good his escape after slugging a screaming stenographer who was returning for some papers she'd forgotten..

Through a thumbprint on the outside door jamb of the Lansing offices, the police were able to identify Legg and haul him in two days later. Both janitor and

stenographer picked Jimmy Legg out of a lineup as the man who had assaulted them. The deputy D. A. concluded the bare recital by asking for an early trial.

Judge Reynolds regarded the accused. It was an open and shut case but Legg looked jaunty and confident. Howard Garrett, his attorney, pled not guilty. Legg was a victim of circumstances, the lawyer nearly sobbed. That thumbprint was on the door because Legg had gone up earlier that day to invest some money. As for the identification by janitor and stenographer— who knew what sinister forces were behind this whole thing?

Judge Reynolds asked several perfunctory questions. He didn't seem very * interested in the replies but seemed, rather, to be debating something within himself. Finally, he buried his nose in the papers before him and said in a low voice: "Insufficient evidence for trial. Release the accused."

The deputy laughed. His Honor was some joker!

"I was not aware of my reputation for wit," flared Judge Reynolds. "I said there was insufficient evidence to waste the taxpayers' money on a trial."

The pimples on the deputy's face reddened. "Insufficient— "

"Enough of this," snapped His Honor. "Next case."

A hiss of shocked astonishment passed over the courtroom. The deputy sat down weakly, staring at the judge in dumbfounded wonder. Even James Legg could hardly believe his good fortune and stood without moving till Garrett grabbed him by the arm and hustled him out.

More cases were called. White-faced, his hands clenched tensely, Reynolds handed down his decisions. It was some thirty minutes later when he rapped for silence and said: "Clerk, what time is it?"

The clerk checked. "Five minutes past eleven, Your Honor."

"In that case I should like to interrupt these proceedings to explain my behavior in freeing James Legg who should pat ently have been held for trial."

The pimple-faced deputy D. A. swore softly under his breath. A couple of reporters sat up straight, their noses twitching at the scent of a headline.

"This morning at nine," continued the judge, "I received a visitor in my chambers. He introduced himself as one Manny Simms, and offered to bribe me if I freed James Legg. Naturally, I refused and sent out an alarm but he escaped. When I later entered court I found this paper on my bench. Clerk, read it aloud."

The judge passed it down. The clerk's voice sounded strange in the hushed room as he read aloud the scrawled writing. "I'm hiding under your desk and I've got a rod on your belly so you better not move from the desk. Do as I tell you. Let Jimmy Legg go and give him a half-hour start. Not a second less if you want to live." The clerk looked up. "It is signed, Manny Simms."

A swelling murmur swept the courtroom and the bailiff called for silence. Judge Reynolds stood up and passed a weary hand over his eyes. He said:

"Perhaps I should not have considered my own life so valuable. I don't know. At any rate, bailiff, arrest that man hiding under the bench."

Manny Simms stepped out and viewed the courtroom with a sardonic smile. The toothpick in his mouth was now soft and pulpy. He laid the gun in his hand on the bench. "O. K., Reynolds. You followed orders. I ain't kicking."

A FREE man, Jimmy Legg left the Hall of Justice with Howard Garrett, his attorney, at his side. The lawyer was frowning. "Jimmy, you must have been born with a gold horseshoe in your mouth."

"The judge knew I was innocent," declared Legg with a grin.

"I'm your lawyer, Jimmy," Garrent reminded, "and I know better. And Reynolds knew better too."

"Yeah," said Jimmy Legg softly, "and you know better than to stick your beak where it don't belong. I'm dusting now, Garrett."

The lawyer grabbed him by the arm. "Hold it, Jimmy. Where are you going?"

"None of your business."

"What's got into you? The D. A. might make a stink because Reynolds didn't hold you. I- may have to get in touch with you."

"You got my address."

"Don't take me for a child* Jimmy. You wouldn't go near your apartment till you were sure the police didn't want you again."

"I'll ring you at your office."

Howard Garrett shook his head slowly. "I don't like it."

Jimmy Legg laughed. It sounded like a glass cutter in action. "What's the beef?"

"Why," asked the attorney, "should a judge as scrupulously honest as Reynolds even think of letting you go scot free? Why do you refuse to tell me where you're holing in? Do you expect more trouble? And why did you come to me in the first place?"

"You know damned well why I come to you, Garrett."

The lawyer nodded. "Because I happen to own stock in Lansing Investment and you thought I could persuade them to go easy on you."

"So they went easy and I still don't get your beef."

"You're acting dumb, Jimmy. You know the Lansing people did nothing because I haven't even had a chance to talk to them. Still you got off— and I don't like it."

Jimmy Legg absently rearranged the silk handkerchief in the lawyer's breast pocket. "Everything's just ducky, Garrett."

"But—"

Jimmy Legg said, "Easy does it," and ambled off. He rounded the corner into Sunset and the instant he was out of his lawyer's sight his casual saunter

became a rapid stride. His quick, purposeful steps faltered only when he looked behind to see if he was being tailed. But he saw no one and soon he gained a corner cut-rate drugstore.

He made for one of the phone booths at the far end, hunted in the directory, then dialed a number. The voice that responded said, "Hamilton Apartments," with an inflection calculated to let you know that the rents there were plenty high.

"Let's have Winnie Crawford." Jimmy Legg's voice sounded dry, almost frightened, and he had to repeat the name.

Another few moments and a languid contralto said: "Yes?"

"Are you alone, Winnie?"

There was a contralto gasp. "Jimmy! I thought they arrested you."

"I asked if you were alone."

"Yes." A moment's hesitation and she added: "Yes, darling."

"That's good. Now listen, honey," Legg said rapidly, "I'm coming up to your place. Pull the shades, lock the doors, and don't let anyone into your apartment till I get there."

"But I don't understand," said Winnie Crawford. "How did you get off? Did you get bail?"

"I'll tell you later, honey. I'm sitting on top of the world now and if you're smart there's a place right next to me for you. Get what I mean?"

"Of course, Jimmy. Only you'll have to give me a little time. You know I like you a lot but you mustn't rush—"

"That's good enough for me, sugar. You'll find out I like you enough for both of us when I get up there."

"But, Jimmy, maybe you shouldn't come up here. They'll see you at the desk downstairs."

"Don't worry, sugar. I'm coming up the back way."

Winnie Crawford said, "Good-bye, darling." She also said, "A fat chance you got to play bingo with me, you lousy bum," but Jimmy never heard that part for she had already cradled the receiver.

ONCE again Jimmy Legg consulted the directory. This time it was the yellow book and he searched under Private Detectives until he had his number, then dialed. The brittle, somewhat bored voice of a man answered.

"Is this Cellini Smith?" asked Jimmy Legg.

"Yes."

"Well, this is Jimmy Legg. I want to hire you to—"

"Listen, you underslung gunsel," interrupted Cellini Smith, "you couldn't hire me to laugh at you. Where'd you get the nickel to phone me ?"

"It's on the level, Smith," protested Jimmy Legg. "I want you to do a job for me and I'm willing to give you a retainer."

"Get back under your damp rock, Legg. You couldn't retain a square meal, let alone retain me."

It never occurred to Jimmy Legg to get insulted. He said: "Look, Smith, there's real dough in this for you if you can help me out. I want you to come around and meet me."

"In the pig's eye," scoffed Cellini. "Whatever mess you're in, Legg, you probably deserve it."

"Now don't go off the deep end, Smith. You know your way around and you got to help me out. I'll pay in advance. I've got sugar on me right now."

There was a slight pause before Cellini Smith said: "That sounds better, crumb. How come you're out? I thought you were hooked on that Lansing Investment job."

"That's just what I want to see you about, Smith. I want you to meet me at the Hamilton Apartments on Rossmore."

"Listen, you animated sewer, I'm not stepping out of this office till I find out what kind of a job you want me for— so you'd better tell me right now."

Jimmy Legg swore. "It's about that Lansing Investment job, Smith. I was in court this morning. The judge had me with my pants down but still he let me go. I want you to find out why that judge didn't hold me. Something stinks and I got to know."

"That sounds kind of interesting," said Cellini. "O. K. I don't promise to do anything but I'll drop around for a look-see."

"Fine, Smith. The Hamilton Apartments in about forty minutes and make it the bade entrance. If I ain't down there I'll have someone waiting to bring you up to the right apartment."

Cellini Smith promised to be there. Jimmy Legg pronged the receiver and left the booth. He went over to the counter and ordered a double-decker sandwich. Still eating the sandwich, he left the store and caught a Wilshire bus. After a while, he reached Rossmore,' left the bus, and cut up the block toward a marble-fronted building.

When Jimmy Legg came abreast of the Hamilton Apartments, he paused to light a cigarette till the doorman's back was turned, then took the narrow alley on the north side. He walked down its length till he reached a fireproof door, pushed it open, and then stopped dead in his tracks.

Jimmy Legg's eyes bulged at what he saw and his Adam's apple bobbed up and down. His face was suddenly shiny with cold sweat. "No, no." His voice was almost a whisper. "Please don't."

Even as he spoke he knew his pleas were futile. There was a sharp report as a small-caliber gun went off and Jimmy Legg slowly tumbled forward— as if carefully choosing the spot of ground on which to die.

2: Rendezvous

CELLINI SMITH worked his feet back and forth, trying to get the sleep out of them. Finally, he yawned and stood up. He decided that he might as well get around and see what that Jimmy Legg business was about. Detectives who live in rent-due offices can't be choosy about clients.

Some twenty minutes later, Cellini turned off Wilshire at Rossmore and parked his heap of scrap iron opposite the Hamilton. He remembered that Legg had asked to meet him at the back entrance and he crossed the street and padded down the length of the alley on the north side— then stopped short. His face was a bored blank as he said: "Hello. Haenigson."

Ira Haenigson, detective-sergeant of Homicide, stood up from his examination of Jimmy Legg's corpse and made a wry face. "Why don't they draft you or something, Smith?"

"A killing?" asked Cellini disinterestedly. "Anyone I know?"

"Anyone you know!" The detectivesergeant seemed to swell like a blowfish. He turned to a porcine rookie. "Our friend wonders if it's anyone he knows."

The rookie laughed uncertainly.

"You're bloody well right it's someone you know!" Ira Haenigson suddenly shouted.

"How do you figure that?"

The Homicide man calmed himself, substituting irony for anger. "Now, I'm only a cop that goes out on homicide calls, Smith. Just a dumb cop from Homicide. Do you understand?"

Cellini's brows furrowed as he gave the appearance of concentration. "You're a dumb cop from Homicide. I think I understand. Go on."

"That's right, Smith. And then I get a call to go out on a killing. Where is it? On Hollywood and Vine? On Wilshire and La Brea? Any place where it would be reasonable for you to show up? No indeedy. The corpse is hidden in an alley by the rear door of an apartment building. Then by sheer coincidence you happen to show up in a place a quarter-hour later and you ask me if the body is anyone you know. Come, Smith, let me pinch your cheeks. You're so goddamned cute!"

The photographer finished taking his pictures of the body and chalk marks were made on the concrete outlining the position and angle at which it had fallen. Jimmy Legg was lifted on a stretcher and carted away. Then the fingerprint experts, sighing hopelessly as they regarded the stucco walls and the dull metal finish on the fireproof door, set about their jobs.

Cellini said: "I happened to be passing outside, Haenigson, when I noticed the department cars and I just came in here out of sheer curiosity to find out what had happened."

"Now that's entirely different, Smith. I shouldn't have left our cars on Rossmore right plunk in front of the apartment, eh?"

"I guess not."

"You great detective," said the detective-sergeant witheringly. "It so happens the department cars are not on Rossmore because I don't like to advertise my arrival. The cars are in back of this building. Anyone but a moron would have noticed that the body was just carried down the alley through to the street on the opposite side."

"That's what I meant," said Cellini smoothly. "I was passing through the other street and figured you were stopping at the Hamilton here so I came around the front—"

"All right," snapped the Homicide man. "Wrap it in Kleenex. Were you supposed to meet James Legg right here?"

Cellini Smith was a picture of innocence. "What's a Legg?"

"If you didn't show up here to meet Legg, then you came to meet his murderer. Which one was it?"

"I get it, Haenigson. Have I stopped beating my wife? Why don't you tell me what this is all about?" Cellini demanded.

"James Legg muscled his way out of court on a burglary rap this morning. An hour later he's garbage. A two-bit homicide, Smith, but the kind that makes good headlines. Can the underworld make a mockery out of our courts? Get what I'm driving at?"

"Sure," nodded Cellini. "If you don't crack it quick you need somebody to throw to the wolves— and I'm handy."

"Exactly, Smith. This happens to be the wrong kind of case to play button-button with the police. So you better open up and say what you're doing here and who you were supposed to meet."

"I was driving by and saw the department cars," began Cellini, "and I figured I'd see what was cooking—"

Ira Haenigson's bulky figure slowly advanced on Cellini. "Get out! Quick!"

Cellini didn't move. Other than a narrowing of the eyes, his face was infuriatingly calm But the tapered body was braced with catlike tensity to meet the Homicide man's elephantine rush.

Haenigson suddenly thought better of it and halted. "That's better," said Cellini, "—and safer." He wheeled and walked out.

CELLINI SMITH sat in his parked car debating with himself. His client had been murdered. It would be little better than sucker stuff to try and nail the

killer out of charity. Besides, whoever mayhemmed Jimmy Legg didn't do mankind any disservice. But there was Ira Haenigson and his threat could not be regarded idly. He could make much of Cellini's appearance at the scene shortly after the murder— and he would certainly refuse to accept the true explanation for it. Haenigson would never believe that a gunsel of Legg's caliber would hire a peeper.

Cellini sighed and got out of the car. He had no alternative but to follow through— and to do so before Haenigson began wondering what Legg was doing in these parts.

He passed through the palm-studded doorway of the Hamilton and approached the desk. He asked: "Does Mr. James Legg live here?"

The clerk, a delicate, lavender specimen, flipped through his files. "Now let me see. That should be under L. No, sir, I'm sorry. I've never heard of Mr. Legg."

"You've heard, all right. That's the guy who was shot outside in your alley an hour ago."

"Oh, you know of it?" said the clerk brightly. "I'm so glad. I'm such a poor liar."

"Fine. But did Legg have an apartment here?"

"Certainly not." The clerk sounded offended. "We don't lease apartments to such rowdies— such, such potential corpses."

Cellini leaned, over the desk. "Listen, my androgynous friend. If Legg didn't park his shoes here then he visited somebody and the chances are you know who it is. Now why don't you open up and dish out an intelligible remark?"

"Fine, sir! I'm glad you asked that because we like to bruit about the idea that we supply no information about our lessees. And it's no use glowering because I know you're not from the police and I simply refuse to be intimidated by—"

Cellini didn't trust himself to linger longer. He walked out and circled around to the alley where Jimmy Legg had met, in rapid succession, his destroyer and his Maker. Haenigson hadn't even bothered to post a cop. Murderers, he well knew, rarely return to the scene of their crime.

Cellini passed by the tradesmen's entrance and pushed through a smaller door beyond. He found himself in the cellar. The janitor, a grimy individual in overalls, was laying out a game of solitaire on a side-turned wardrobe trunk.

Cellini dropped a dollar bill on the trunk. "I'll bet you that buck you don't know how many cards there are in that deck."

"Fifty-two," said the surprised janitor.

"It's yours. Now, what do you know about Jimmy Legg?"

The janitor palmed the greenback "For a moment I thought you was Santa Claus. Well, all I know is some dame found this Legg guy and started screaming like she lost her virtue so I run outside and called the cops. That's all."

"Didn't you hear any shots some time before that?"

"So a car backfired," said the janitor. "So what? That's like I asked the cops. I asked am I expected to go about having premonitions about a murder?"

"And you never saw or heard of Jimmy Legg before?'?

"Nope. Not even for a sawbuck."

"Well, he must have been visiting somebody here and I've got to get a line on it. Start telling me about the tenants."

"We got five floors and six big apartments on each," began the janitor. "In 1-A we got a nice old couple. They're vegetarians. Next to them in 2-A is a family that's vacationing. Then—"

"Forget that. No families. Legg must have been visiting a dame or a man. What single tenants are there?"

"Only three because the apartments are pretty expensive for one guy. In 2-D we got an old maid."

"No good. Next."

"Then there's a guy with a Vandyke beard in 4-C. He owns a few oil wells and he hides under his bed all day and drinks."

"No good. Who's the other?"

"A blonde that's something. Her body ain't ersatz either. She's strictly the wrong side of the tracks but you got to have sugar to live here so I guess she's got it."

"That's a good bet," said Cellini eagerly. "What's her name?"

"Winnie Crawford in 4-E."

"Who's keeping her?"

"This'll kill you— nobody!"

"Are you sure?"

"So help .me. She don't like men and it's sure a waste because if I ever seen production for use she's it. It's ridiculous !" The janitor sounded offended.

"It's impossible," said Cellini, "and I'll check right now."

CELLINI leaned on the button and heard the chimes sounding inside of 4-E. A husky contralto yelled: "Relax. I'm not deaf."

A moment later the door was opened by a woman in her late twenties and Cellini could see what the janitor had meant. She was something that the Hayes office would have banned even in a burlap bag. At the moment, however, she wore a form-clinging, silk dress that would have caught male eyes in a nudist colony.

"Who asked for you?" Her hands rested aggressively on her hips and she seemed surprised to see him.

"Are you Winnie Crawford?" Cellini asked.

"Uh-huh. Spring it."

"It's about Jimmy Legg. He's not coming."

"Why not?"

Cellini grinned. This was the right party. He walked by her through a short foyer and found himself in the living-room. He wondered if there was anyone else around and toured through kitchen, dinette, bedroom, bath, and dressing alcove but drew a blank. He returned to the living-room to find Winnie Crawford leveling a huge revolver at him with both hands.

Cellini sighted some bourbon on an end table and poured himself a stiff drink. He said: "That thing you got in your soft, white, creamy hands. You'd better put it down."

"What's the idea smelling around this place?" she countered. "What are you looking for?"

Cellini tasted the drink. It was good liquor. "I was just wondering if you were alone, Winnie— whether you had a couple of boy friends in the Frigidaire or something."

"I got no boy friends and I'm alone and I can take care of myself. You better tell me what you want. Make it quick."

"And you'd better ditch that rod," said Cellini casually, "if it hapuens to be the one that killed Jimmy Legg this morning."

Winnie Crawford sat down heavily on a divan. Cellini gave silent approval of the exposed legs. He walked over, removed the revolver from her unresisting fingers, and broke it. It was fully loaded and didn't smell as if it had been recently fired.

He tossed the revolver aside, halffilled a glass with straight bourbon, and handed it to her. Her face was white and drawn and her fingers trembled. He decided that Jimmy Legg must have meant a lot to her.

She drank deeply and seemed to regain control of herself. "I never got anything but trouble from that chiseling heel," she muttered.

Cellini decided, on second thought, that Jimmy Legg meant nothing to her and that she was worried about her own skin. "Did you kill him?" he asked.

She registered a look of disgust and pulled her skirts over her knees. She was her normal self again. "Where did it happen?"

"Downstairs in the alley at the side of this building. He was sneaking up the back way to see you."

"What gives you the ridiculously fantastic idea that he was visiting me?" Her head went back and the nose up in what she hoped was a chilling, regal look.

He grinned. "Too late to backwater now, Winnie. Get down to the monosyllables. You're more at home there."

She regarded him speculatively for a moment, then sighed resignedly. "All right. Tell me about it and especially what your racket is."

"My handle is Cellini Smith and I'm a private op. Legg phoned me to meet him in the back alley but when I got there he wasn't receiving. So I cherchez-ed the dame and here I am."

"What did he want you for?"

Cellini shrugged. "Something about the cops and a safe-cracking job. At the Lansing Investment Company, I think it was."

"I know all that. How come they didn't hold him?"

"That's exactly what Mr. Legg wanted me to find out."

"Oh. Listen, Smith, you know I didn't kill Jimmy. I'm just not the type."

"Perish the thought," he said. "Go on."

"BUT I got other reasons for wanting to be kept out of this mess," Winnie Crawford continued. "Good reasons. Get out of here, Smith, and just forget all about me."

"Not a chance. The shams are down on me because they think I know more than I do and I'm not the kind of hero that'll get in a mess to save the name of some fair twist. Besides, Winnie, you forget the cops'll get around to you just as easily as I did."

"I guess that's so," she admitted. She drained her glass and nervously poured more bourbon.

"Of course it's so. Loosen up, Winnie, and tell me what you know about all this."

"Nothing. Jimmy phoned that he was coming up here. That's all. I was surprised, too, they let him go."

"Why was Jimmy Legg coming here? This is a pretty classy place you've got— not the kind of thing Legg could afford."

She drew herself up. "I beg your pardon?"

"Oh, come off it, Winnie. You know as well as I do that you look like a love captive in a penthouse."

"Get this, you louse! I'm nobody's keptie. Just because I'm beautiful and there ain't no cockroaches in the kitchen is no sign I am."

"All right. Simmer down. Your dimples disappear when you get angry. If you're not doing light housekeeping for a male, then who pays for all this?"

"Men," pronounced Winnie Crawford, "are beasts."

"Sure— the cads— but Jimmy Legg was still liquidated right outside this building," he reminded her, "and the cops will be here in a little while."

"I'm not worried about the cops. I was up here all the time and it's no crime if Jimmy was visiting me."

"That kind of weasel talk doesn't jell," he hammered. "I've got to get some kind of lead on this and I think you can cupply it. So come across."

She chewed at one of her long, vermilion nails. "Listen, could you tell me why Jimmy was killed?"

"Holy mother of hell!" he exploded. "What do you think I'm trying to find out?"

"Well, when you do find out you'll tell me, won't you?"

"Sure and I'll pass out a ten dollar bill with each syllable," he repied not too subtly.

She stood up and waked over to a corner taboret that served as the bar. She opened a cocktail shaker and removed a fat roll of bills. Carefully, she counted five wrinkled twenty dollar bills into his hand. "Here. I'm hiring you to find out why Jimmy was killed."

"Why he was killed? Don't you want to know who killed him?"

"That's not so important."

"And suppose I pin it on you?"

"I'll take the chance."

He slipped the money into his slender wallet, frowning. "And I'll take the job, Winnie, though you're a rather phoney client. Are you sure you and Jimmy weren't soulmates?"

"You heard me. Why do men always think of only one thing?"

"I remember— because they're beasts. But you're not Bryn Mawr stock, Winnie, and you weren't born with any gold shovel in your mouth. Someone's paying your bills. Who?"

"Why can't you get it through your head I'm nobody's woman? I spent my life shining up to slick chiselers and visiting firemen. Now I'm through with the whole lousy breed and I'm relaxing."

Her voice was hard and grating and carried conviction. Cellini surrendered the point. "All right, you're stainless. Then where did you get that fat roll of kohl-rabi you flashed before and how do you pay the rent here?"

"That's none of your business. Just go and find out why Jimmy was killed."

"What difference does it make to you? Why was he coming up here anyway?"

"Nothing doing."

"Then at least tell me what time Jimmy Legg phoned to say he was coming."

"Around eleven."

"That's about when he phoned me," said Cellini. "All right. When the cops get around to you just tell them I'm handling your interests and they'll put you under arrest immediately."

3: Careless Lead

CELLINI SMITH a stepped into the hall-way, shutting the door to Minnie Crawford's apartment behind him, pulled level with the floor and a huge man stepped out.

Cellini said: "Hello, Mack. No, I'm not betting."

Mack was square and solid as the truck he was named after. There was a lot of him and his customers never fooled with him for he was one of the town's toughest bookmakers. But they liked him. "Your loss," he replied. "Everybody's taking me. Say, don't tell me you just came out of Winnie's stable. Please don't tell me that."

"Why not?"

"Because then I'd have to beat you to a gooey pulp, Cellini, and I hate to beat friends to gooey pulps."

Cellini looked up at the big man and smiled crookedly. "Maybe," he said, "but I never fight Queensberry with monsters like you. But I don't get it— why should you jump me for coming out of Winnie Crawford's apartment?"

"Because I long ago decided that if I can't have her then nobody else will."

"You can relax. That type's a little too synthetic for my tastes."

"You just don't know her, Cellini. She's the laziest white woman in the country without hookworm— but what a build!"

"You beast," said Cellini. "How come she snaps her fingers at a great big he-man like you?"

"Now you'd think Winnie would know better, wouldn't you?" His voice was charged with complaint. "That double-dealing twist gets her mitts on some real dough and right away she's through with men."

"Where'd she get the dough?"

"I wish I knew. I keep asking her but she don't even bother to lie. It's a hell of a life."

"She might have gotten it from her family," suggested Cellini. "Heiress stuff— like in the movies."

Mack's laughter sounded like the fall of bowling pins. "Her family is the backbone of the W.P.A., when it's sober, and she was a carhop in a drive-in."

"Then how'd she get out of it?"

"A small-time crook saw her and picked her up. Maybe you know him. Jimmy Legg."

"Go on." Cellini hoped his voice was casual.

"So she stayed with him for a while. Jimmy Legg played the horses through me so I happened to meet Winnie. Then I took over and we made it a twosome until I made a big mistake."

"What was that?"

"I figured to keep her out of trouble while I was working so I got her a job with one of my customers. Switchboard girl at the Lansing Investment Company."

Cellini took a deep breath. At last something was beginning to connect. "Then what, Mack?"

"Then she left me flat and moved in with the head of that place— Lansing himself. Lansing is a big bettor with me so I didn't even have the satisfaction of beating him up. Then a few months later Winnie got this dough somehow and she ditched all of us."

"All this is very interesting."

"Winnie ain't interesting," said Mack. "This no-man business of hers is just irritating. There should be a law."

"I mean Jimmy Legg. He cracked the safe at this same Lansing Investment a few days ago."

"Yeah," frowned the big man. "I heard. But I don't catch."

"And that's not all," said Cellini slowly. "I was seeing Winnie Crawford before to get me a client and to let her know that Jimmy Legg was killed this morning."

The violence of the explosion was unexpected. For a full two minutes, colorful expletives issued from Mack's big mouth and bounced through the hallway of the Hamilton Apartments.

"Why the excitement?" Cellini was finally able to ask.

"Excitement! That guy Legg has been backing platers with me for the last year. On credit! I got over eight hundred bucks in I.O.U.'s from him."

"Well, you can't collect now."

"Say, nobody runs out on Mack. Not even a corpse. I'll get it if—" He suddenly paused. "Where's your angle in the killing?" he asked quietly.

Cellini shrugged. "Strictly the dough in it."

Mack's two large hands vised Cellini's shoulders. "Say, I don't like the way you were leading me on before."

"Your paws, Mack. I'm asking you only once. Drop them." Cellini stared fixedly at the big man's tie-pin.

The hands slowly loosened their grip. "Hell, Cellini, we're friends. We don't want to fight. There's a nag called Inquisitor running at Holly Park today. That should be a good hunch for a dick like you."

"Some other time." Cellini made for the elevator.

CELLINI SMITH went through every afternoon paper, reading the sensationalized accounts of how one Manny Simms had hidden under Judge. Reynolds' desk, forcing the jurist to release Jimmy Legg.

It puzzled him. Obviously, Jimmy Legg had neither instigated Manny Simms' enterprise nor had he been aware of it— else he would not have wanted to hire

Cellini to discover the cause of his release. This Manny Simms had acted either on his own or for someone else— but why? Why should Simms accept the certainty of a couple of years in jail to spring Jimmy Legg? Perhaps Howard Garrett, Legg's mouthpiece, had the answer.

Cellini turned his coupe around and urged it back to Hollywood. A half-hour later, he pushed by a frosted glass door in the Equitable Building that read: Howard Garrett— Attorney at Law. Under it were the names of a couple of junior partners.

The black-haired, eagle-beaked secretary-receptionist released the fetching smile reserved for men only and asked if she could help. Her voice had the high, irritating whine of a sawmill.

Cellini blocked the smile with a comeon leer. Secretaries can be useful. "I'm a very important guy," he said, "and I want to hold converse with Mr. Garrett about a crumb— one Jimmy Legg."

The secretary giggled, plugged in the switchboard, and announced him with that voice. He passed into an inner office and sank into a leather chair beside the desk. Howard Garrett, with a lawyer's caution, waited for him to speak first.

Flatly, without frills, Cellini explained who he was and what he wanted. When he was finished, Garrett said: "I'd like to help but I couldn't give even the police any information of value."

"I don't get it," insisted Cellini. "Don't tell me you didn't know that Jimmy Legg was probably guilty of cracking the Lansing Investment safe."

"We're both men of the world, Mr. Smith, and so I don't mind admitting, off the record, that I knew Legg was guilty. But even the guilty have the right to counsel."

"Sure— if they can pay for it. But if you knew Legg was guilty, weren't you surprised when Reynolds let him off?"

"Naturally. Surprised, and pleased because my client had won."

"Did you get Manny Simms to pull that trick of threatening the judge from under the desk?"

"No. I didn't know of it. I don't even know this Simms individual, and I don't know who later killed James Legg."

The lawyer was unruffled, even slightly amused. A smooth article, Cellini thought. He asked: "What happened after Legg and you went out of the courtroom?"

"Nothing. He simply left me in front of the Hall of Justice and we went our separate ways."

Cellini lit a cigarette and thoughtfully watched the smoke curl up. "I just remembered," he said abruptly, "I know a guy who was pinched for stealing a bottle of milk. He's broke and I wonder if you could give him a break and try to spring him."

"I'm sorry, Mr. Smith, but attorneys eat like everyone else and I can't afford charity cases."

"That's what I thought," snapped Cellini. "Yet you take on a nickelmooching gunsel like Jimmy Legg. How come?"

"I don't understand, Mr. Smith."

"Where did Legg get the retainer to hire you? It certainly wasn't from any dough he stole from Lansing because you're too smart to stick your neck out like that. Why did you defend him?"

Howard Garrett stood up. "I don't understand your tricky antagonism toward me, Mr. Smith, and I certainly don't have to stand for it. I'm sorry I can't say I'm glad I met you."

Cellini left little doubt that the feeling was mutual and walked out, closing the door. He leaned over the secretary-receptionist's desk. "How about giving me Jimmy Legg's home address?"

"Have you asked Mr. Garrett?"

"Why ask him when I can have the pleasure of asking you?"

She giggled and reached for a box of filing cards. The leer was paying off. She supplied an address in her sawmill voice and added philosophically: "Isn't it just awful how the world is full of murder and sorrow, like this poor Mr. Legg?"

"Legg was no awful loss and he wasn't very poor. He probably stole a batch of bills from the Lansing Investment— crisp bills as shiny as your hair — and they're probably waiting to be found someplace right now."

The giggle sounded again. "My hair's shiny only because I haven't washed it in a long time. Isn't it funny? But it's peculiar how Mr. Garrett defended Mr. Legg in this Lansing burglary charge even though he owns a lot of stock in the Lansing company."

The strident-voiced secretary went on to say how she wasn't doing anything that night, but Cellini wasn't listening. He had hold of something good— a mouthpiece representing a burglar who had robbed a firm in which he was a heavy stockholder.

CELLINI SMITH fished among the tools under the seat of his car and selected a heavy screwdriver. It would be as good a jimmy for forcing a door as anything else.

The apartment building where the late Jimmy Legg had parked his hat was a dreary affair with dark halls that smelled of unappetizing cooking. Cellini walked up to the third floor, then down the hall, checking the name-plates, till he had the one he wanted.

He was glad to find the door a weak-looking affair. He inserted the screwdriver into the crack between lock and jamb, and the door suddenly sprang back inside. It had not been locked.

Puzzled, he stepped over the threshold. From the corner of one eye he thought he detected a movement and tried to duck but was too late. He felt himself yanked backward with one powerful jerk and a telegraph pole seemed to wind around his neck. It was unexpected and very efficient. The pole around Cellini's neck was an arm and his assailant's other arm circled his ribs with the same bone-crushing effect.

Cellini tried to twist around to get at his attacker but he was no match for those powerful arms. He kicked back and up at the groin with the heel of his shoe but connected with nothing. The other was an old hand at such tricks.

The arm around Cellini's neck tightened and he was slowly forced down till his back was in a painful arch. His breath became short and constricted. His fists clenched from the pain and he slowly became aware of the screwdriver still in his hand. He reversed it so that the point faced his attacker and drove it back, with all his power, in a short, vicious arc. There was a muffled yell of pain and the encircling arms dropped away from Cellini. He whirled— to find himself facing Mack's mammoth figure.

Astonishment mingled with the pain in Mack's face when he saw Cellini. He mumbled something indistinguishable and pulled his shirt up to examine the wound made in his side by the screwdriver. Though deep, the cut was small and narrow and the blood came only in a reluctant trickle. He took his undershirt off and tied it tightly around his body, binding the wound. Then he dressed again and suddenly became voluble.

"I know it looks bad jumping you like that, Cellini, but I swear I thought it was someone else. I wouldn't—"

"Who did you think I was?"

"Manny Simms. The guy that sprang Jimmy Legg out of court this morning."

"That's not good enough, Mack. Try again." Cellini's voice was not threatening but he kept one hand in his pocket over a small, .25 caliber automatic and the bookie suddenly broke into a sweat.

"I mean it," he insisted. "I know Manny Simms and I tell you I saw him downstairs. I thought it was him coming after me. I'll show you."

They walked over to a window and Mack pointed down at a black sedan on the other side of the street. Two men stood by it and they seemed to be staring at the very window where they were. "That's them. The one on the left is Simms. If you was close enough you'd spot the toothpick in his puss. Always has one."

CELLINI relaxed. "O.K. I didn't think Simms would be out on bail this quick. Who's the other guy with him?"

Mack shrugged. "Another torpedo. Birds of a feather. If you want to go after them to make up a bridge foursome I'll help you."

"Not right now. I'd first like to find out who killed Legg and it wasn't Manny Simms because he was under the judge's apron at the time. But let's hear what you're doing here."

"Hell, man, you know Jimmy Legg stuck me for eight hundred dollars. And when you told me he was fogged I started figuring that maybe the dough he stole from the Lansing outfit was up here, and I could kind of collect the debt on my own."

"How did you get in here without breaking the lock?"

Unexpectedly, Mack grinned. His voice was a conflict of modesty and bragging as he confessed: "You don't know it, man, but I was the smoothest thing in the safe-cracking line in my youth and it takes a good lock to stop me."

Cellini looked at him sharply but he seemed sincere. "How come you stayed out of college?"

"I was smart. When I become too big to be inconspicuous I just quit and become a bookie. I had a terrific technique, too, for those days."

"All right, you're wonderful. Let's look around for that Lansing dough."

It was a small, three-room apartment, sparsely furnished, and there weren't many likely hiding places. With a fine disregard for the furnishings, Mack took a jackknife from his pocket, and began slashing open cushions, pillows and bed mattress.

Cellini checked through closets and cupboards, searched under rugs and behind pictures, pawed through drawers, and even sounded walls. There was nothing even remotely suggesting the Lansing Investment loot. The only item of interest was a small cache of tools he came upon in the icebox. It contained hammer, nails, a spool of wire, pliers, and some files. It was, decided Cellini, a very sorry-looking burglar's kit.

He remembered that people often rolled money into shades and walked over to a window in time to hear the squeal of brakes as a car came to a halt in the street below. There was familiar authority about that squeal and Cellini looked down. Detective-sergeant Ira Haenigson and a couple of his men were getting out of the car below. Across the way, Manny Simms and his fellow hood climbed into their black sedan and decided to mosey along.

Cellini said: "We weren't the only ones with the bright idea of casing this place. The minions of the law are here."

"Let 'em come," replied the disgusted bookmaker. "They'll only find magnolia."

Cellini went into the kitchen and looked out the back window.. It was just an empty lot below. He returned to the living-room. "No fire escape."

"It's all right. There's a back way."

They went out, proceeded down the end of the hallway, and started down the back stairs as they heard the Homicide men come up the opposite way. They reached the street and saw no sign of Manny Simms.

"I could use a drink," declared Mack. "Let's try the Greek's."

Cellini agreed and a couple of minutes later they pulled up in front of a hole-in-wall honky-tonk.

They stepped out of the coupe and started inside when Cellini heard the sudden acceleration of a supercharged engine. He whirled in time to see a black sedan charging down the block toward them. Automatically, he wedged a foot between Mack's ankles, bringing the big man crashing to the ground, and, in the same instant, threw himself prone.

It was only split seconds before the sedan was by them and dime-turning the next corner. But in that time there was a crashing, trip-hammer rat-a-tat that made it seem very long, a vicious spatter of bullets that seemed never to stop. The counterpoint of a woman's hysterical scream, the hoarse shout of a passing motorist, the running, panicky feet that wanted only to get far away— ail made the moments seem that much longer.

And when Cellini and Mack finally stood up they could see a strip of small holes against the building that housed the Greek's saloon. The strip was at a height of some forty inches. If they had been standing up the bullets from Manny Simms' sub-machine gun would have flattened out inside their stomachs.

"Shades of Capone," said Cellini unsteadily.

4: Wild Goose

THE Greek, a bulbousnosed, stocky man, shoved two more glasses of suspect Scotch over the bar to Mack and Cellini Smith. "That kind shootings is beeg time," he said. He patted an obsolete and rusty .455 Webley revolver on the liquor case. "But next time they shoot bullets into my building I geeve them with this."

"I'll geeve that —— Manny Simms the lumps," said Mack darkly. He and Cellini were both several sheets to windward, their anger over serving as targets for Simms increasing with each drink.

Cellini tapped the bar for emphasis. "There can be only one explanation why he's gunning for us."

"He only needs one," Mack pointed out.

"He saw us go into Jimmy Legg's apartment and there must be something there that Simms was afraid we'd see or get our hands on."

"The haul from the Lansing job," guessed Mack.

"I wouldn't be so sure. That doesn't explain why Simms held up the judge to get Legg off. He would have let Jimmy go to jail and then gotten the loot for himself."

"I geeve them shootings," said the one-tracked Greek.

"Furthermore," Cellini persisted, "if it's just for the dough that Legg stole, then Manny Simms would be trying to get it from us— not just kill us."

"All right," hiccupped the overgrown bookie, "so you explain me why I got to go around ducking Thompson subs."

"I wish I knew."

The Greek said hopefully: "Thees people who do the shootings— maybe they are Eyetalian."

Cellini drained his glass. "We had plenty time to go through Jimmy Legg's apartment before Haenigson got there and we found nothing out of the ordinary— excepting what's in the icebox."

"What about it?"

"That's where Legg hid the tools of his trade."

"Such as?" asked Mack interestedly.

"Pliers, wire, nails, and stuff."

"That Legg was small-time," declared Mack professionally. "All I ever needed to clean a box was a fine sewing needle. But it still don't explain why Simms got Homicidal about us."

The Greek refilled their glasses with the dubious Scotch. Cellini snapped his fingers as a thought crossed his mind. "Say, do you think my luscious client is in back of this?"

"I love Winnie madly but I got to admit there's nothing that slut ain't capable of."

"Let's see." Cellini went to the wall phone and dialed the Hamilton Apartments. When he heard Winnie Crawford's voice he said: "A hundred-buck retainer doesn't give you the right to try and get me chopped down."

"What are you talking about? You sound drunk."

"That's only from the liquor in me and I'm talking about Manny Simms. Is he the guy who pays your bills? "Damn you!" Winnie Crawford exploded. "I told you I was alone and liking it. Cut out the sex stuff."

"O.K., Winnie. Simmer down. Do you know Manny Simms?"

"I never heard of the guy."

The throaty voice was hesitant and falsely casual. Cellini knew she was lying. She said: "Listen, I gave you a century to find out why Jimmy was killed. What about it?"

"Give me time, Winnie. I'm lousy with clues."

He pronged the receiver and returned unsteadily to the bar for another drink.

"What'd she say?" asked Mack.

"Nothing much. She blew her own strumpet about males and claimed she never heard of Manny Simms when know damned well she read all about him in the papers."

"I love her," Mack sighed. "It'd be funny if she killed Legg."

Cellini finished his drink. "Haenigson's probably still messing around Legg's place. I'll go see what he knows about Simms."

"And I'll see if I can pick up Simms," declared the bookie.

Cellini shook his head. "You wait here for me. I want to be around when we catch up with Manny Simms."

CELLINI Smith's head was somewhat clearer and his step steadier by the time he got back to Jimmy Legg's apartment. He pushed open the door to find the police still at it. Two of them were taking apart the plumbing in the hope of finding some tell-tale residue in the U-traps, another was dusting for prints, and yet another was tape-measuring the rooms to make sure they had missed no hiding place. Ira Haenigson was doing a thorough job.

The detective-sergeant himself sat on the ripped living-room sofa, supervising the proceedings. He fish-eyed Cellini. "I know," he said. "You were passing by downstairs and you saw the squad car."

"No. I knew you were here and I wanted to talk to you."

"Sure you knew, because"— Haenigson's voice became milder— "you took this place apart before we got here."

"Me?" Cellini was injured innocence.

"No one else. And so help me, Smith, if it really was you, you'll be eating San Quentin plum pudding next Christmas."

"Why pick on me? Why couldn't Manny Simms have searched this place before you got here?"

"What about Manny Simms?"

Cellini could see that the Homicide man was interested and followed up his advantage. "I'm here for an armistice, Haenigson. You stop treating me like a dishrag and I'll open up."

"It's a deal," said the detective-sergeant after a moment's hesitation. "If you're really on the level. Let's hear."

"Fine. I went to the alley behind the Hamilton to meet Jimmy Legg there. He wanted me to find out why he wasn't held in court this morning."

"He didn't put Simms up to that job of springing him?"

"That's what it looks like. After you and I had our sweet parting I checked and found that Legg was going to the Hamilton to meet a dame. But I suppose you found that out."

Ira Haenigson nodded. "That Winnie Crawford tramp. I don't know what to make of her. She looks faster than Legg's speed."

"I'm wondering myself. Anyway, she hired me on the killing and I came around here about an hour ago with a friend of mine. Just then I saw you pull up so I didn't come in."

"You sure of that, Smith?"

"Honest Injun. I went away for a drink and when I got out of the car along comes this Manny Simms and tries to chop me down with a Thompson sub. "

Cellini wasn't sure whether the Homicide man's frown indicated perplexity or disappointment over Manny Simm's failure. He asked: "How come Simms is loose for such sport? Why wasn't he held?"

"Good lawyer, small bail," shrugged Haenigson. "He didn't commit any homicide— just threats— and there wasn't even any bullets in the rod he pulled on the judge so he got out on low bail. But what do you want me to do about it, Smith?"

"I want you to help me find Manny Simms. I don't like the idea of that baby gunning for me."

"Sure, Smith. I wouldn't mind finding out for myself why he's wasting bullets on you. What db you think?"

"I don't know. My hunch is that it's tied up with the dough that Jimmy Legg souped out of the Lansing. Investment safe."

"He didn't steal any dough from them."

Cellini stared at Haenigson. "I don't get it. What then did he steal from that safe?"

"That's what I'd like to find out, Smith. That's why I'm up here taking this place apart right now."

"Didn't Lansing Investment make any claims about stolen stuff?"

"Nothing at all. They just asked us to forget the whole thing. Mr. Lansing seemed to think his firm would get a bad reputation if the public found out it was successfully burgled."

"But if Lansing didn't charge Jimmy Legg with anything then why was he arrested and brought into court this morning?"

"They couldn't very well avoid it because Legg also slugged the janitor and a secretary and they identified him."

"Say," asked Cellini, "do you think this Lansing Investment is a crooked outfit?"

"Could be," said Ira Haenigson. "Could be."

CELLINI SMITH got out of the elevator and entered the offices of the Lansing Investment Company. The place was large with lots of pale-faced stenographers

and sleek-haired clerks who gave their investment spiels with all the fervor of a Fuller brush man.

Cellini asked to see Mr. Lansing himself. He told what it was about, gave his pedigree, showed identification, and when he refused to settle for a vicepresident he was finally shown past the balustrade and into an ornate inner office.

Mr. Lansing was bluff, confident, and obviously never tortured by self-doubt. Stocky from good feeding rather than hard work, he was in his forties and had a golf-tan complexion.

"Deplorable this murder of James Legg, very deplorable," declared the president of Lansing Investment without preamble. "Death except from God or the legal executioner has always shocked me."

"It's very cruel," said Cellini.

"Yes, quite. Of course you realize, Mr. Smith, that the murder of James Legg and his lamentable burglary of our offices is sheer coincidence and can have no conceivable connection."

"If I realized that," replied Cellini, "I wouldn't be here."

"My good man, do you imply that we may have a connection— even a remote one— with murder?"

"Perhaps not so remote."

Mr. Lansing blinked. His voice was sharp. "Sir, my wife always kills a good joke but my connection with homicide ends there. It's been a pleasure." He stood up.

Cellini didn't budge. "Is your wife a luscious blonde?" he asked innocently.

"I don't understand you, Mr. Smith, and I don't wish to. I'm afraid I can waste no more time."

Cellini snapped his fingers. "How stupid of me! Of course your wife isn't a blonde. I was confusing her with Winnie Crawford."

Lansing stopped in his tracks. He sat down again with a sickly smile, hauling forth brandy bottle and glasses from the desk. Cellini helped himself, then reached into the cigar humidor. He wondered if the investment manipulator had a solid alibi for the murder time.

Lansing finally broke the silence. "Mr. Smith, you don't seem the prudish sort so you probably understand the necessity for an occasional peccadillo to relieve marital boredom."

"Sure. Especially peccadillos built like Winnie."

"Quite, sir, quite. And I'm sorry that you and I got-off on the wrong foot."

"You mean the wrong Legg."

Lansing tried a laugh and missed. "It's just my natural desire to prevent any unsavory talk of murders and robberies in coneetion with Lansing Investment. Our business depends so much on public confidence."

"Then why don't you help me so that I might clear it up?" Cellini suggested.

"By all means," said Lansing with forced eagerness. "Only there's very little I can tell you."

CELLINI SMITH said: "Start with the reason why you people didn't press any charge against Jimmy Legg when he knocked over the safe in this place."

"That was only because we'd much rather absorb a small loss than have such bad publicity," replied Lansing.

"What did the small loss amount to?"

"Oh, nothing of importance really."

"Was it money? Did you have currency in the safe?"

"I don't think so," said Lansing evasively. "Just some non-negotiable bonds, I believe."

"Aren't you sure?"

"I happened to be out of town the day of the robbery, Mr. Smith, and I haven't had a chance to check. However, I'll do so and mail you a list of the items."

"That's a lie," said Cellini deliberately. "You know damned well what was stolen."

Lansing squeezed another smile out of his face. "Please allow a difference of opinion, Mr. Smith."

Cellini sampled the brandy again and got up to leave. Apprehensively, Lansing asked: "Mr. Smith, can I rely on your discretion about that Winnie Crawford— um— involvement ?"

"Yes. How come you two broke it up though?"

"You know how it is about these affairs of the heart, Mr. Smith. One or the other cools."

"How did you happen to meet her?"

"She used to work here as my secretary."

"And your checkbook said, 'I love you.' Which still doesn't explain where Winnie gets her dough if you're not around any more."

"I'm afraid I don't understand you, Mr. Smith."

"There's no need to." Cellini started out and Lansing took his arm in a brotherly fashion, telling him to drop around if he ever wished some real good investment tips. They passed into the outer office and Cellini noted a large safe built into one of the corners. "Is that the one Legg cracked?" he asked.

"Yes, Mr. Smith."

"I thought the door was blown off."

"Of course, but the safe manufacturers have been in since. They put on new hinges and repaired it."

"All right." Cellini walked out, past the balustrade, into the reception-room. Waiting in one of the club chairs was Howard Garrett, Jimmy Legg's mouthpiece in court that morning.

"Surprise," said Cellini. "Are you here to return what your dead client stole— or to split the loot with Lansing?"

Garrett examined his fingernails, studied the ceiling, and gave no indication that he had heard. Cellini shrugged and walked out of the Lansing Investment offices.

A stout woman worked a vacuum cleaner over the carpeting of the hallway. Cellini could see her key-ring, hanging from the keyhole of a broom closet farther down the hallway. As he passed by the closet, his hand reached out and silently and quickly transferred the ring of keys to his own pocket.

CELLINI SMITH phoned Ira Haenigson and asked if they had located Manny Simms and his Tommy. They had not and he returned to his car and headed for the Greek's gin-joint to get Mack.

The gargantuan bookie took his liquor well. With another eight or nine drinks fermenting in him, his neck was redder and his voice hoarser but he showed little other effect.

Cellini straddled a stool and poured for himself. The bookie asked what was cooking. "I just checked with Haenigson," Cellini replied. "They haven't caught up with Simms yet."

"That's good," said Mack. "Simms is our meat. What else you been doing?"

"I dropped up to see one of your customers— the president of Lansing Investment."

"What's he got to say?"

"He called my client a peccadillo and he showed me the safe that Jimmy Legg cracked."

"What about it?"

"Plenty," said Cellini. "Legg never touched that safe. The manufacturers were supposed to have put on new hinges but the ones I saw there aren't

"That's a laugh. We go nimrodding through Legg's dump looking for the stuff he stole and then you find out that he never even cleaned the Lansing safe."

"I didn't say that."

Mack stared accusingly at his drink. "I don't catch."

"I just said that our defunct friend didn't crack the safe Mr. Lansing showed me."

"Oh. I see it all now, Cellini. Like hell!"

The Greek said, "Thees shootings and the drinks are bad combination," and left to service a couple at a back table.

"Either Legg made a haul," Cellini said, "or he didn't. In either case, Lansing is not dishing out with information so I'd like to check just how phoney that investment company of his is."

"Check how?" asked the bookie.

Cellini took from his pocket the key-ring he had lifted. "One of these fits the Lansing office and you claim you were pretty handy with safes."

"I begin to catch," said Mack slowly. "All right. I'll play along."

"Fine. Let's go out and get something to eat. We've got a couple of hours to kill."

The Greek came back and Mack asked to borrow his museum-piece Webley.

"No, no. I need it to geeve that man shootings."

"Come on. He's after us— not you."

The Greek acknowledged the point and gave in. Cellini and Mack had another brace of drinks and left.

MACK banged long and hard on the rear service door of the Tower Building. After several minutes, the night watchman opened it, a cautious hand over the revolver on his hip.

"Oh, it's you," said the watchman after he had identified the bookie's big figure. "Can't let you in. We've been having us a robbery. Besides, I'm broke."

"You're passing up a sure-fire thing, Harry," said Mack persuasively. "It's for the seventh, tomorrow."

Mack pulled the Pacific edition of the Chicago racing form out of his pocket and beckoned the watchman to a transom light two doors down. Despite himself, the watchman followed the bookie and read the form over his shoulder. It never seemed to occur to him why they could not read the form by the overhead light of his own door. He was absorbed.

With his shoes in one hand, Cellini Smith silently left the shadows of the building and slipped through the door just a few feet behind the watchman's back.

He could spot no immediate hiding place so he padded up the rear stairway and lay down flat on the first landing. After a few minutes he heard the watchman come in, lock the door, and move down the hallway. He waited another minute, then let in Mack.

Noiselessly, they mounted the eight flights to the darkened offices of the Lansing Investment, found the right key on the chain, and entered. Cellini locked the door from the inside. They waited some time before they felt assured nothing stirred in the hallway or adjoining offices, then snapped on a desk lamp.

Cellini led the way inside the railing. "There," he said in lowered tone. "That's the strong-box Lansing claims Legg cracked."

Mack dropped on his knees before it. The safe was large and imposing and of recent vintage.

"Four tumblers," the bookie muttered. "No ordinary chrome steele either. Work on it all day with an acetylene torch and get no place. I guess you're right, Cellini."

"About what?"

"Them hinges are the originals. Jimmy Legg didn't blow this baby. I'd think twice before trying it myself. She's probably wired from the back and if you'd try moving her to get at the wires the alarm would sound off."

Cellini nodded with satisfaction. "That's the way I figured. Now let's try to find the box that Legg did crack. We'll start with Lansing's office first."

They switched off the desk lamp and went into Lansing's office, closing the door before snapping on the lights.

They did not have long to search. Behind a Currier and Ives print they found a small wall safe. Its door was glossy and untarnished, as if new.

"This is the baby all right," said Mack.

"Just about Jimmy Legg's speed, too."

"Think you can manage it?"

"Sure. And I don't need soup. All I want is a needle."

"A needle?" repeated Cellini, puzzled.

"Yeah. An ordinary sewing needle. Maybe we can find it in a secretary's desk."

Mack went out and returned a minute later. "Here it is. It's a little thick but maybe it'll work."

He clenched the needle by its eye between his front teeth and placed the point over the lock, his forehead touching the safe. Then he began to turn the combination slowly, feeling every tremor through the highly sensitive nerves of his teeth.

Cellini watched with interested admiration as the bookie grunted through clenched teeth each time he felt a tumbler slide into place. Here was no need for wires or pliers or even nitro. Mack's kit was a sewing needle.

Finally, the bookie stood up and let the needle fall from his mouth. "That does it."

Cellini went to open the safe door when Mack's voice halted him. "Not so damned fast."

Pointed at him was the Webley the bookie had borrowed from the Greek. "What's eating you?" asked Cellini quietly.

"The eight hundred smackers Jimmy Legg still owes me," stated Mack harshly. "I didn't come here and open this box to do you no favor."

"I didn't think so."

"That's right, Cellini. So I'm counting out my eight hundred first." Without taking his eye off Cellini, he reached behind him with his free hand, flipped the safe dpor open and stuck his huge paw into the opening.

It was empty.

Cellini felt like having a good belly laugh but was afraid that the watchman might be making his rounds nearby. Instead, he said: "Put up the rod, Mack. Fate is forcing you to stay straight. Whatever was in there, it looks like Legg beat us to it."

5: Cooked Goose

AFTER five minutes of searing concentration, Cellini Smith felt virtually certain that that I thing next to the bed he was lying on was - a telephone. Carefully, he lifted the receiver, brought it to an ear, and asked something. A honeyed voice informed him that he was in a downtown hotel and that it was ten in the morning.

He managed to replace the receiver and suddenly remembered what he was doing there and why someone seemed to be carrying out a scorched earth policy inside his head. It had reason.

After drawing a blank at the Lansing Investment offices, he and Mack had decided to go find Manny Simms— before Simms found them. They had gone from gin-mill to gin-mill but could not find the hood. And at each place they had drinks and after a while forgot to search for Mr. Simms. '

Vaguely, he remembered phoning Winnie Crawford at three in the morning to find out if she got her money by blackmailing Lansing Investment. The reply was colorful— so much so that he felt the blackmail hunch wasn't far wrong.

Somewhat less vaguely, he remembered deciding to sleep at a hotel, safely distant from any visit by Manny Simms during the night. And he did not at all remember what had happened to Mack. The bookie had spent most of the evening bemoaning the $800 he had lost through Legg's murder and yearning to get his hands on Manny Simms and Winnie Crawford— though for different reasons.

However, the night of alcoholic search had not been entirely fruitless. Nagging at Cellini's mind had been the problem of why Jimmy Legg troubled to conceal apparently innocent items such as a spool of wire, pliers, and hammer in the icebox of his apartment. Somewhere between the double Scotches the answer had come. It added up beautifully.

Slowly, Cellini eased himself out of bed and floated into the bathroom. A needle shower helped a little and the black coffee and bromo in a cafe downstairs finally decided him against suicide. He tried several nearby parking lots before finding his car and then made for his office.

CELLINI SMITH sat behind his desk nursing both the hangover and the wisp of an idea that was beginning to form about Legg's murder. And that was its one fault— that it did everything but solve Legg's murder. It was an idea founded on the assumption that the Lansing Investment Company was a crooked outfit.

The phone sounded. Cellini lifted the receiver and gave a weak "Hello."

He heard that horrible, sawmill voice of Howard Garrett's secretary giggle coquettishly and then tell him to wait a moment as she plugged the lawyer into the board.

A click and Jimmy Legg's mouthpiece was saying: "Mr. Smith, I am well aware that we dislike each other. Nevertheless, since you're working on the murder of my former client, I feel there's an explanation due you."

"Goody. Let's have it."

"As you know, I represented James Legg in court on that Lansing Investment affair and yesterday you found me in those very offices waiting to see Mr. Lansing. That may cause you to suspect something."

Cellini's headache wasn't getting any better. "Come on, Garrett. There's a shortage of gas, so save it."

"The point is, Mr. Smith, that I was up there because I'm a stockholder in the Lansing Investment Company."

"How come Lansing didn't object to your defending Legg?"

"As a matter of fact, Mr. Lansing was glad to have me handle the case because he didn't want Legg punished. He thought I might be able to handle it discreetly."

"What did you do when Legg was arrested? Chase after him to let you be his mouthpiece?"

"Certainly not. That's unethical. He got in touch with me."

Cellini almost felt like laughing. "Lansing would be glad to have you defend Legg just at the moment Legg decides to pick you."

"It's not that absurd," Howard Garrett conciliated. "Mr. Lansing got in touch with Jimmy Legg and asked him if he wished to have me for counsel."

A sweet mess, thought Cellini. A man is robbed and then goes to the burglar to recommend a mouthpiece to spring him. He asked: "Are you going to defend Manny Simms when he comes up for trial?"

"Certainly not."

"Did you or Lansing shell out the dough for Manny's bail?"

"Mr. Smith, I called to give you information as a favor. I regret that you're not sufficiently civilized to be polite about it."

"You didn't phone because you wanted to do me a favor."

"Perhaps you know better, Mr. Smith. Why did I phone you?"

"I don't know. But one thing I do know is that you and Lansing and that whole investment outfit will never have to worry about sunburn— you're too shady for that."

Cellini let the receiver drop into its cradle thinking that his parting shot would have been much better if he didn't have to cope with the damned hangover. He heard heavy, stumbling steps in the hallway outside and a moment later the door pushed in and Mack entered.

The giant bookie gaped silently at Cellini. He made a ludicrous picture. One side of his face was shaved and the other bearded, with lather still smeared over it. His jaw trembled as if from some nervous tic.

"I just heard about Winnie." Mack, spoke as if the words were being jerked out of him. "She's dying. She's been shot."

CELLINI pounded Mack with questions until he had, at last, a coherent picture of what had happened. As little as twenty minutes before, there had been several shots in Winnie Crawford's apartment at the Hamilton. A woman in an adjoining apartment had rushed out to see the back of a man disappearing around a bend in the hallway. She looked into Winnie's apartment to find the blonde on the floor, still alive but with three bullets lodged in her.

An ambulance from a nearby hospital made the round trip in record time and within ten minutes Winnie was on the operating table. An interne, who placed his bets through Mack, recognized Winnie and phoned him at the barber shop. The bookie had immediately come up to Cellini's office.

Winnie had evidently tried to put up a fight for the .45 was found by her side. No hope was held for her and her assailant had escaped.

Cellini felt a little sick. He remembered the clumsy way she held the big gun in her hands and thought that, unlike Legg, she was too decorative to be killed. But at last there was something to work on. It was now 11:25 and the murder had occurred at 11:05. It would be easy to check the alibis of the four persons who might have gunned for Jimmy Legg and Winnie Crawford.

Mack's voice broke hoarsely into Cellini's thoughts: "What the hell are you waiting for? I told you she's dying!"

They hurried downstairs and crowded into the coupe. "Which hospital?" asked Cellini.

"Who said anything about going to the hospital? We can't help her. Drive to the Greek's. I know I need a drink."

Cellini considered that to be sensible and turned over the starter. They reached the Greek's a short while later and entered. It was early and they had the place to themselves. The Greek .set out drinks and asked for the ancient Webley Mack had borrowed. After he got it he preserved a discreet silence for he saw that something was up.

Mack went to the wall phone and dialed his interne friend at the hospital. He returned to the bar, shaking his head. "Winnie ain't got a chance to pull ahead. Too big a handicap. Carrying too much weight."

"Sure you don't want to go down to the hospital?"

"No. The doc promised to phone me here."

"Good enough." Cellini tried his drink and found that it helped his hangover jitters. 11:05, he thought. He had to find out where the four men were then— the four men who had a motive to murder Winnie Crawford. Lansing, Howard Garrett, Manny Simms, and the bookie himself.

The phone rang and Mack jumped for it. When he came back, unashamed tears cut two trails down his tough cheeks. "She's dying, Cellini. My darling's rounding the three-quarter mark."

The bookie started to extol Winnie Crawford's physical virtues when the sound of the phone interrupted him fifteen minutes later. He returned with another bulletin. "No hope. She's nearing the home stretch."

It was another half-hour before the phone rang again. This time, Mack's voice was barely distinguishable. "Winnie just crossed the wire." He reached for the bottle and drank out of it.

They drank without speaking and it was the Greek who finally broke the silence. "Do you remember thees Seems, thees people who do the shootings yesterday?"

"What about him?" asked Cellini impatiently.

"He comes now— with beeg gun."

CELLINI and Mack whirled too late.

Manny Simms was entering the door, toothpick in mouth and the chatter gun in his hands. The torpedo who had been with him yesterday, flanked him now, sporting an automatic.

"All right," barked Manny Simms. "Line up against that wall and tell me where you got it."

Cellini and Mack backed slowly toward the wall. They were dealing with a known killer. Manny Simms spoke to the torpedo.

"You take care of the bartender," he growled.

"I show you who takes good cares!" The Greek was fighting mad. The Webley was in his hand, leveled at the advancing torpedo, and he pressed the trigger.

Nothing happened.

The rusted, obsolete weapon was jammed. The Greek delivered a Hellenic curse. He hurled the Webley at the torpedo and, that done, dived behind the bar just as the automatic planted a bullet in the mirror behind him.

"What the hell's the matter with you?" snapped Manny Simms, his eyes not leaving Cellini and Mack. "Stop piddling around."

"Leave him to me, Manny."

The torpedo leaped lithely onto the bar, after the Greek. From behind the bar an arm arced up in a swift, sure curve and the torpedo tumbled back, an agonized scream escaping him. Buried three inches deep into his shoulder was an ice pick.

Manny Simms tried a quick look in back of him to see what had happened. It was the break Cellini had waited and hoped for. At that same instant he dived forward, football fashion, and caught Manny Simms in the midriff, bearing him to the ground. Simms tried to angle .the clumsy Thompson sub at Cellini. But the weapon dropped as his arm was twisted back and up.

Mack was there now and he yanked Manny Simms away from Cellini. A queer, chilling laugh escaped him. Now he could do something about Winnie Crawford's murder.

On the floor, the torpedo stirred and moaned. Mack's foot lashed out and caught him under his chin, returning him to unconsciousness with a crack that indicated a broken, jawbone.

"Hold it, Mack," said Cellini. "I want to ask Simms a couple of things first."

"Sure. He'll tell you anything you want to know."

Cellini said to Simms: "What did you mean before, when you asked us where we've got it?"

Manny's yellow face stared impassively. registering no emotion. His shoulders tried to move in a shrug but they were vised tightly by Mack's big paws.

"Come on," said Cellini. "Did you want to know where we've got the stuff that Jimmy Legg stole from Lansing Investment?"

The same dead-pan stare.

Cellini asked: "Where were you at eleven five this morning when Winnie Crawford was shot?"

This time Manny's lips moved to say: "I been third-degreed by experts."

"Plenty time we got to become experts," stated the Greek who stood by them now.

He and the bookie dragged Manny Simms around one end of the bar. Mack said: "You killed the only twist I ever loved."

Simms made the mistake of laughing. Mack's arm moved and the hood dropped down. "Did you kill Winnie Crawford ?"

There was no answer from the floor. Cellini saw the bookie's face twitch and was glad that his name wasn't Simms. Mack's eyes scanned the back-bar searchingly and saw a tray. "What's that?"

"Dry ice," replied the Greek.

"Good. That'll be just fine to start with." Mack sat on Manny Simms' chest and the Greek held down the legs.

Mack ripped open the hood's jacket and shirt and clamped one hand over his mouth. With the other hand he inverted the tray of dry ice on the bare stomach.

Cellini strayed away. He tried not to hear the sudden writhing and stifled moans, tried not to imagine the ice searing and burning into Manny Simms' belly.

He felt he had to keep himself busy and phoned the barber shop where Mack claimed to be when Winnie was shot. There was no doubt of it, a barber replied to the question. Mack was there at 11:05, taking bets and waiting for his turn in the chair.

When Cellini turned away from the phone again it was over. Manny Simms, a tough hood a short while before, was now a gibbering, babbling mess—confessing to the murder of Winnie Crawford, moaning about crooked deals pulled by Lansing and Howard Garrett with the investment outfit.

Relenting, the Greek poured some olive oil over the burned, tortured flesh. The bookie, a little tired now that it was all over, held on to Simms and dully asked why and how he had killed Winnie.

Cellini said: "That's enough, Mack. You're doing fine. Let's go see Haenigson."

Cellini tried the phone again and was informed that the detective-sergeant was up at the investment company offices, seeing Mr. Lansing.

IT WAS a strange-looking crew that was ushered into Lansing's private office by the secretary. Leading them was the torpedo, his shoulder bandaged by one of the Greek's soiled napkins, his hands cupping the swollen, broken jaw. Behind, stumbled Manny Simms, every slight motion agonizing torture as clothing brushed against his skin. And bringing up the rear, Cellini and Mack, disheveled, sleepless, but satisfied.

"What's this?" asked Ira Haenigson. He was there with a couple of his men, dishing out what looked like a warm grilling to Mr. Lansing and Howard Garrett, the attorney.

"Here's your murderer," replied Mack.

"Manny Simms?" Haenigson's brows arched. "I was under the impression that Simms was under Judge Reynolds' bench while Jimmy Legg was being killed."

Mack, a little crestfallen, started to explain that it was probably the torpedo who did the Legg job but Cellini waved him into silence and turned to the Homicide man.

"It wasn't Simms who did the murders. I just brought him up here to show that we made him see the light and he's been talking. You can take them away to be fixed up."

"I don't like that kind of rough stuff, Smith, but we'll discuss it later." Haenigson nodded to one of his men and Simms and the torpedo were led out. "Now, who did you say the murderer was?"

"Not counting Simms, it has to be either Mack, or Lansing or Howard Garrett."

"Unless it was someone else. Thanks for the tip. Smith."

"They all had motive," Cellini continued, ignoring him. "Mack here, might have wanted to cut a slice of the blackmail for himself that I'll tell you about later. However, his alibi looks good. I'm pretty sure he was at a barber shop shortly after eleven this morning while Winnie Crawford was being killed."

"Thanks, pal." The bookie said it not sarcastically but threateningly. Lansing and the attorney were cautiously silent.

"Mr. Garrett's alibi," said Haenigson, "is equally good for the Crawford killing. It so happens he was in his office phoning me at just about that time."

"I know," nodded Cellini. "I happened to talk to him, too, around that time. That leaves Lansing."

The Homicide man's voice fairly purred. "He was at a board meeting, at the bank."

Cellini frowned. It was the kind of alibi that could be easily checked and Lansing wouldn't have tried it had it not been true. But still, one of the three alibis had to be a phoney.

Haenigson smiled benignly. "Let there be more revelations, Smith."

"Sure. Some I know, some is guesswork— but it's the only possible explanation. In the first place, Howard Garrett is the chief stockholder in this investment outfit and he and Lansing have been milking the company, juggling the books, for some time now."

Haenigson made a face. "You're a back number, Smith. And I didn't have to use torture methods to find it out."

"And you didn't have to stand in front of a sub-machine gun. But here's something else. Some time ago there had to be a murder connected with this place— a murder committed by Manny Simms."

THIS time the Homicide man's voice was serious. "Lansing and Forrester," he murmured. "That's what this place used to be called a couple of years ago. Forrester just disappeared and I remember we had Simms on the carpet for it but we couldn't prove anything."

"Perfect," said Cellini. "Lansing had his partner killed by Simms when his partner found out that he and Garrett were juggling the books."

"Preposterous!" snorted Mr. Lansing.

"Shut up!" countered Garrett.

"But," Cellini went on, "Lansing also knew that once Simms did such a job for him he'd be blackmailed the rest of his life so, at the same time, he got proof that Simms had murdered his partner. Whether it's in the form of an actual snapshot of the killing, a written confession, or something else, we'll know later because that's one of the things Jimmy Legg stole from here. Understand ?"

"I'm still listening, Smith."

"Then Winnie Crawford got a job here through Mack and soon she was playing office wife to Lansing. Being in a privileged position, she discovered that Lansing and Garrett were taking their gullible investors to the cleaners. So she simply left Lansing's couch, decided that all men were beasts, and blackmailed Lansing into supporting her in style."

"My relationship with Miss Crawford was purely personal," Lansing protested.

"I'll bet," remarked the detective-sergeant dryly.

"Enter now Jimmy Legg," continued Cellini. "He had been the first rung on Winnie's ladder to death. When he saw Winnie in clover without a panting male around, he was able to figure out the blackmail angle and decided to cut in."

Again Lansing protested. "This whole thing is based on the assumption that Mr. Garrett and I have misappropriated company funds."

"Grow up," said Howard Garrett wearily. "By tomorrow a dozen accountants will be going over the books with a fine comb and you know what they'll find. But unless you keep talking we'll only take a larceny rap and not murder."

Ira Haenigson rubbed his hands together. "And that," he announced, "is what I call making progress."

Cellini picked it up again. "So Legg burgled this place. He knew that blackmail material wouldn't be in the regular box so he looked around and found a small safe behind that picture."

"How did you know there's a wall safe behind there?"

"Sheer deduction," said Cellini blandly. "Anyway, Legg cracked it and found the real books— the ones showing what Lansing and Garrett have stolen. So when Legg was picked up by the police he told Garrett that if he and Lansing wanted to stay out of jail they'd better mother him. That's why Garrett became mouthpiece for a small-timer like Jimmy Legg."

"You're on the right track. Smith— for a change."

"Then Manny Simms became panicky because he knew Legg had also gotten the proof of his having murdered Lansing's partner. So he pulled that trick of forcing the judge to release Legg because taking such a rap is better than going up for murder. Simms had to get Legg away from the police where he could be killed at leisure and the stolen stuff recovered."

The Homicide man interrupted: "Where is that stolen stuff?"

"I'll tell you later. It's obvious why Legg was killed. In the meantime, Winnie had hired me, trying to find out what it was all about and when Manny Simms saw me hanging around Legg's house he thought I had recovered the loot and tried to chop me down."

"And why," asked Haenigson, "was Miss Crawford killed?"

"The murderer knew that Legg intended hiding out at Winnie's house and got the idea he might also have hidden the loot up there. So one of these three men here went up to Winnie's house to search and when she showed fight— simply killed her."

"Very beautiful," said Ira Haenigson, "but for one thing."

"What's that?"

"You still haven't named the killer."

CELLINI SMITH nodded and glumly studied the tips of his shoes. One of the three alibis for 11:05 that morning had to be wrong. Lansing was at a board meeting— with many witnesses. Mack was at the barber shop— also with witnesses. The lawyer was in his office — and there could be no question of that because the sawmill voice of his secretary could not be mistaken.

Cellini looked up to find Ira Haenigson standing over him. "It's my turn, Smith. I've warned you before that I'll break you and this is my chance. I found your prints all over Jimmy Legg's apartment and I'm pulling you in."

The detective-sergeant meant it. There was no doubt of that in Cellini's mind.

Cellini stood up. "I want to make a call first."

"Don't try any Indian rope tricks, Smith."

"Since you're arresting me, I want to let my lawyer know." He went out to the front office, a cop trailing, and dialed his number at one of the desk phones. The girl who answered informed him that the lawyer was at home.

"Give me his home number," said Cellini. "I'll ring him."

The girl replied: "Would you want me to call him and connect you two ? It would be no trouble."

Cellini gripped the phone hard. "How can you do that?"

The girl laughed. "Oh, that's just an across-the-board call. You can connect two outside calls on most any P-B-X board. It's—"

"I love you," said Cellini, "and I want you to marry me." He returned to Lansing's office, a happy grin dominating his face. He walked up to Howard Garrett and said bluntly: "You're going up for murder and not larceny after all."

"Indeed?"

"Indeed. When you came out of the courtroom with Jimmy Legg you followed him to the drugstore and listened while he called me and Winnie

Crawford. You heard him say he was going to the Hamilton Apartments through the side alley. Legg probably made sure nobody was following him to the Hamilton but you were already waiting there for him."

The lawyer didn't turn a hair. "And I suppose you'll deny talking to me and my secretary this morning just about when Miss Crawford was murdered."

"On the contrary. Right after you killed Winnie you made for the first phone and you had your secretary ring Haenigson and myself immediately on an across-the-board call to establish your alibi. Hearing your secretary's voice we naturally assumed that you were in your office. You thought— "

"All right." Howard Garrett's voice was very tired. "I know when I'm finished. Please don't lecture me."

Cellini beckoned Mack. "That's that. How about a drink at the Greek's?"

Ira Haenigson waved him back. "I don't know how you weasel your way out of these things, Smith, but I still want to know where that stuff is that Jimmy Legg stole from here."

"Certainly," said Cellini graciously. "Remember the pliers, hammer, and spool of wire hidden in Legg's icebox?"

"What about it? We looked through the whole place."

"But you didn't figure why Legg thought it necessary to hide those items. The stuff is hanging from wire underneath the outside sill of a window in Legg's apartment— probably the window facing the empty lot."

End