PAST MASTERS 219

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PAST MASTERS 219

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

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1: The Retroactive Existence of Mr. Juggins

Stephen Leacock

1869-1944

The Popular Magazine 15 Aug 1913

I FIRST met Juggins— to really notice him— as a boy out camping. Somebody was trying to nail up a board on a tree for a shelf, and Juggins interfered to help him.

"Stop a minute," he said; "you need to saw the end of that board off before you put it up." Then Juggins looked around for a saw, and when he got it he had hardly made more than a stroke or two with it before he stopped. "This saw," he said, "needs to be filed up a bit." So he went and hunted up a file to sharpen the saw, but found that before he could use the file he needed to put a proper handle on it; and to make the handle he went to look for a sapling in the bush; but to cut the sapling he found that he needed to sharpen up the ax. To do this, of course, he had to fix the grindstone so as to make it run properly. This involved making wooden legs for the grindstone. To do this decently Juggins decided to make a carpenter's bench. This was quite impossible without a better set of tools. Juggins went to the village to get tools, and, of course, he never came back.

He was rediscovered, weeks later, in the city, getting prices on wholesale tool machinery.

After that first episode I got to know Juggins very well. For some time we were students at college together. But Juggins somehow never got far with his studies.

He always began with great enthusiasm, and then something happened. For a time he studied, French with tremendous eagerness. But he soon found that for a real knowledge of French you need to first get a thorough grasp of old French and Provençal. But it proved impossible to do anything with these without an absolutely complete command of Latin. This Juggins discovered could only be obtained, in any thorough way, through Sanskrit, which, of course, lies at the base of it. So Juggins devoted himself to Sanskrit until he realized that for a proper understanding of Sanskrit one needs to study the ancient Iranian, the root language underneath. This language, however, is lost.

So Juggins had to begin over again. He did, it is true, make some progress in natural science. He studied physics, and rushed rapidly backward from forces to molecules, and from molecules to atoms, and from atoms to electrons, and then his whole studies exploded backward into the infinities of space, still searching a first cause.

Juggins, of course, never took a degree, so he made no practical use of his education. But it didn't matter. He was very well off, and was able to go straight into business with a capital of about a hundred thousand dollars. He put it at first into a gas plant, but found that he lost money at that because of the high price of purchasing the coal to make gas. So he sold out for ninety thousand dollars, and went into coal mining. This was unsuccessful because of the awful cost of mining machinery. So Juggins sold his shares in the mine for eighty thousand dollars, and went in for manufacturing mining machinery. At this he would have undoubtedly made money but for the enormous cost of gas needed as motive power for the plant. Juggins sold out of the manufacture for seventy thousand, and after that he went whirling in a circle, like skating backward, through the different branches of allied industry.

He lost a certain amount of money each year, especially in good years when trade was brisk. In dull times when everything was unsalable he did fairly well,

Juggins' domestic life was very quiet.

Of course, he never married. He did, it is true, fall in love several times, but each time it ended without result. I remember well his first love story, for I was very intimate with him at the time. He had fallen in love with the girl in question utterly and immediately. It was literally love at first sight. There was no doubt of his intentions. As soon as he had met her he was quite frank about it. "I intend," he said, "to ask her to be my wife."

"When?" I asked. "Right away?"

"No," he said; "I want first to fit myself to be worthy of her."

So he went into moral training to fit himself. He taught in a Sunday school for six weeks, till he realized that a man has no business in divine work of that sort without first preparing himself by serious study of the history of Palestine. And he felt that a man was a cad to force his society on a girl while he is still only half acquainted with the history of the Israelites. So Juggins stayed away. It was neatly two years before he was fit to propose: By the time he was fit, the girl had already married a brainless thing in patent-leather boots who didn't even know who Moses was.

Of course, Juggins fell in love again.

People always do. And, at any rate, by this time he was in a state of moral fitness that made it imperative.

So he fell in love— deeply in love this time— with the eldest Miss Moneycuft. Naturally he did; who wouldn't? She was only called eldest because she had five younger sisters; and she was very poor, and awfully clever, and trimmed all her own hats. Any man, if he's worth the name, falls in love with that sort at first sight. So of course Juggins would have proposed to her, only when he went to the house he met her next sister; and of course she was younger still, and, I suppose, poorer, and made not only her own hats but her

own blouses. So Juggins fell in love with her. But one night when he went to call the door was opened by the sister younger still, who not only made her own blouses and trimmed her own hats, but even made her own tailor-made suits. After that Juggins backed up from sister to sister till he went through the whole family, and in the end got none of them.

Perhaps it was just as well that Juggins never married. It would have made things very difficult, because of course he got poorer all the time. You see, after he sold out his last share in his last business he bought with it a diminishing life annuity, so planned that he always got rather less next year than this year, and still less the year after. Thus if he lived long enough he would starve to death.

Meantime, he has become a quaint looking elderly man, with coats a little too short and trousers a little above his boots, like a boy. His face, too, is like that of a boy with wrinkles.

And his talk now has grown to be always reminiscent. He is perpetually telling long stories of amusing times that he has had with different people that he names.

He says, for example:

"I remember a rather queer thing that happened to me on a train one day—"

And if you say "When was that, Juggins?" he looks at you in a vague way, as if calculating, and says: "In eighteen-seventy-five, or eighteen-seventy-six, I think, as near as I recall."

I notice, too, that his reminiscences are going farther and farther back. He used to base his stories on his recollections as a young man; now they are farther back.

The other day he told me a story about himself and two people that he called the Harper brothers, Ned and Joe. Ned, he said, was a tremendously powerful fellow.

I asked how old Ned was, and Juggins said that he was three. He added that there was another brother not so old, but a very clever fellow, about— here Juggins paused and calculated— about eighteen months.

So then I realized where Juggins' retroactive existence is carrying him to. He has passed back through childhood into infancy, and presently, just as his annuity runs to a point and vanishes, he will back up clear through the Curtain of Existence, and die— or be born— I don't know which to call it.

Meantime, he remains to me as one of the most illuminating allegories I have met.

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2: A Journey in Search of Nothing

Wilkie Collins

1824-1889

In: *Humorous Readings and Recitations*, 1889

"YES," said the doctor, pressing the tips of his fingers with a tremulous firmness on my pulse, and looking straight forward into the pupils of my eyes, "yes, I see: the symptoms all point unmistakeably towards one conclusion— Brain. My dear sir, you have been working too hard; you have been following the dangerous example of the rest of the world in this age of business and bustle. Your brain is over-taxed— that is your complaint. You must let it rest— there is your remedy."

"You mean," I said, "that I must keep quiet, and do Nothing?"

"Precisely so," replied the doctor. "You must not read or write; you must abstain from allowing yourself to be excited by society; you must have no annoyances; you must feel no anxieties; you must not think; you must be neither elated nor depressed; you must keep early hours and take an occasional tonic, with moderate exercise, and a nourishing but not too full a diet— above all, a perfect repose is essential to your restoration, you must go away into the country, taking any direction you please, and living just as you like, as long as you are quiet and as long as you do Nothing."

"I presume he is not to go away into the country without ME," said my wife, who was present at the interview.

"Certainly not," rejoined the doctor, with an acquiescent bow. "I look to your influence, my dear madam, to encourage our patient in following my directions. It is unnecessary to repeat them, they are so extremely simple and easy to carry out. I will answer for your husband's recovery if he will but remember that he has now only two objects in life— to keep quiet, and to do Nothing."

My wife is a woman of business habits. As soon as the doctor had taken his leave, she produced her pocket-book, and made a brief abstract of his directions for our future guidance. I looked over her shoulder and observed that the entry ran thus:—

"Rules for dear William's Restoration To Health.— No reading; no writing; no excitement; no annoyance; no anxiety; no thinking. Tonic. No elation of spirits. Nice dinners. No depression of spirits. Dear William to take little walks (with me). To go to bed early. To get up early. *N.B.*— Keep him quiet. *Mem.* Mind he does Nothing."

Mind I do nothing? No need to mind that. I have not had a holiday since I was a boy. Oh, blessed Idleness, after the years of merciless industry that have separated us, are you and I to be brought together again at last? Oh, my weary right hand, are you really to ache no longer with driving the ceaseless pen? May

I, indeed, put you in my pocket and let you rest there, indolently, for hours together? Yes! for I am now, at last, to begin— doing Nothing. Delightful task that performs itself! Welcome responsibility that carries its weight away smoothly on its own shoulders!

These thoughts shine in pleasantly on my mind after the doctor has taken his departure, and diffuse an easy gaiety over my spirits when my wife and I set forth, the next day, for the journey. We are not going the round of the noisy watering-places, nor is it our intention to accept any invitations to join the circles assembled by festive country friends. My wife, guided solely by the abstract of the doctor's directions in her pocket-book, has decided that the only way to keep me absolutely quiet, and to make sure of my doing nothing, is to take me to some pretty, retired village, and to put me up at a little primitive, unsophisticated country inn. I offer no objection to this project— not because I have no will of my own, and am not master of all my movements— but only because I happen to agree with my wife. Considering what a very independent man I am naturally, it has sometimes struck me, as a rather remarkable circumstance, that I always do agree with her.

We find the pretty, retired village. A charming place, full of thatched cottages, with creepers at the doors, like the first easy lessons in drawing-masters' copy-books. We find the unsophisticated inn— just the sort of house that the novelists are so fond of writing about, with the snowy curtains, and the sheets perfumed by lavender, and the matronly landlady, and the amusing signpost.

This Elysium is called the Nag's Head.

Can the Nag's Head accommodate us? Yes, with a delightful bedroom, and a sweet parlour. My wife takes off her bonnet, and makes herself at home directly. She nods her head at me with a look of triumph. "Yes, dear, on this occasion also I quite agree with you. Here we have found perfect quiet; here we may make sure of obeying the doctor's orders; here we have at last discovered— Nothing."

Nothing! Did I say Nothing? We arrive at the Nag's Head late in the evening, have our tea, go to bed tired with our journey, sleep delightfully till about three o'clock in the morning, and, at that hour, begin to discover that there are actually noises, even in this remote country seclusion. They keep fowls at the Nag's Head; and at three o'clock, the cock begins to crow, and the hen to cluck, under our window. Pastoral, my dear, and suggestive of eggs for breakfast whose reputation is above suspicion; but I wish these cheerful fowls did not wake quite so early. Are there, likewise, dogs, love, at the Nag's Head, and are they trying to bark down the crowing and clucking of the cheerful fowls? I should wish to guard myself against the possibility of making a mistake, but I think I hear three dogs. A shrill dog, who barks rapidly; a melancholy dog, who

howls monotonously; and a hoarse dog, who emits barks at intervals, like minute guns. Is this going on long? Apparently it is. My dear, if you will refer to your pocket-book, I think you will find that the doctor recommended early hours. We will not be fretful and complain of having our morning sleep disturbed; we will be contented, and will only say that it is time to get up.

Breakfast. Delicious meal, let us linger over it as long as we can,— let us linger, if possible, till the drowsy mid-day tranquillity begins to sink over this secluded village.

Strange! but now I think of it again, do I, or do I not, hear an incessant hammering over the way? No manufacture is being carried on in this peaceful place, no new houses are being built; and yet, there is such a hammering, that, if I shut my eyes, I can almost fancy myself in the neighbourhood of a dock-yard. Waggons, too. Why does a waggon which makes so little noise in London, make so much noise here? Is the dust on the road detonating powder, that goes off with a report at every turn of the heavy wheels? Does the waggoner crack his whip or fire a pistol to encourage his horses? Children, next. Only five of them, and they have not been able to settle for the last half-hour what game they shall play at. On two points alone do they appear to be unanimous— they are all agreed on making a noise, and on stopping to make it under our window. I think I am in some danger of forgetting one of the doctor's directions; I rather fancy I am actually allowing myself to be annoyed.

Let us take a turn in the garden, at the back of the house. Dogs again. The yard is on one side of the garden. Every time our walk takes us near it, the shrill dog barks, and the hoarse dog growls. The doctor tells me to have no anxieties. I am suffering devouring anxieties. These dogs may break loose and fly at us, for anything I know to the contrary, at a moment's notice. What shall I do? Give myself a drop of tonic? or escape for a few hours from the perpetual noises of this retired spot, by taking a drive? My wife says, take a drive. I think I have already mentioned that I invariably agree with my wife.

The drive is successful in procuring us a little quiet. My directions to the coachman are to take us where he pleases, so long as he keeps away from secluded villages. We suffer much jolting in by-lanes, and encounter a great variety of bad smells. But a bad smell is a noiseless nuisance, and I am ready to put up with it patiently. Towards dinner time we return to our inn. Meat, vegetables, pudding, all excellent, clean and perfectly cooked. As good a dinner as ever I wish to eat;— shall I get a little nap after it? The fowls, the dogs, the hammer, the children, the waggons, are quiet at last. Is there anything else left to make a noise? Yes: there is the working population of the place.

It is getting on towards evening, and the sons of labour are assembling on the benches placed outside the inn, to drink. What a delightful scene they would make of this homely everyday event on the stage! How the simple creatures

would clink their tin mugs, and drink each other's healths, and laugh joyously in chorus! How the peasant maidens would come tripping on the scene and lure the men tenderly to the dance! Where are the pipe and tabour that I have seen in so many pictures; where the simple songs that I have read about in so many poems? What do I hear as I listen, prone on the sofa, to the evening gathering of the rustic throng? Oaths,— nothing, on my word of honour, but oaths! I look out, and see gangs of cadaverous savages drinking gloomily from brown mugs, and swearing at each other every time they open their lips. Never in any large town, at home or abroad, have I been exposed to such an incessant fire of unprintable words, as now assail my ears in this primitive village. No man can drink to another without swearing at him first. No man can ask a question without adding a mark of interrogation at the end in the shape of an oath. Whether they quarrel (which they do for the most part), or whether they agree; whether they talk of their troubles in this place, or their good luck in that; whether they are telling a story, or proposing a toast, or giving an order, or finding fault with the beer, these men seem to be positively incapable of speaking without an allowance of at least five foul words for every one fair word that issues from their lips. English is reduced in their mouths to a brief vocabulary of all the vilest expressions in the language. This is an age of civilisation; this is a Christian country; opposite me I see a building with a spire, which is called, I believe, a church; past my window, not an hour since, there rattled a neat pony chaise with a gentleman inside clad in glossy black broad cloth, and popularly known by the style and title of clergyman. And yet, under all these good influences, here sit twenty or thirty men whose ordinary table-talk is so outrageously beastly and blasphemous, that not a single sentence of it, though it lasted the whole evening, could be printed as a specimen for public inspection, in these pages. When the intelligent foreigner comes to England, and when I tell him (as I am sure to do) that we are the most moral people in the universe, I will take good care that he does not set his foot in a secluded British village when the rural population is reposing over its mug of small beer after the labours of the day.

I am not a squeamish person, neither is my wife, but the social intercourse of the villagers drives us out of our room, and sends us to take refuge at the back of the house. Do we gain anything by the change? None whatever.

The back parlour to which we have now retreated, looks out on a bowling-green; and there are more benches, more mugs of beer, more foul-mouthed villagers on the bowling-green. Immediately under our window is a bench and table for two, and on it are seated a drunken old man and a drunken old woman. The aged sot in trousers is offering marriage to the aged sot in petticoats with frightful oaths of endearment. Never before did I imagine that swearing could be twisted to the purposes of courtship. Never before did I

suppose that a man could make an offer of his hand by bellowing imprecations on his eyes, or that all the powers of the infernal regions could be appropriately summoned to bear witness to the beating of a lover's heart under the influence of the tender passion. I know it now, and I derive little satisfaction from gaining the knowledge of it. The ostler is lounging about the bowling-green, scratching his bare brawny arms and yawning grimly in the mellow evening sunlight. I beckon to him, and ask him at what time the tap closes? He tells me at eleven o'clock. It is hardly necessary to say that we put off going to bed until that time, when we retire for the night, drenched from head to foot, if I may so speak, in floods of bad language.

I cautiously put my head out of window, and see that the lights of the tap-room are really extinguished at the appointed time. I hear the drinkers oozing out grossly into the pure freshness of the summer night. They all growl together; they all go together. All?

Sinner and sufferer that I am, I have been premature in arriving at that happy conclusion! Six choice spirits, with a social horror in their souls of going home to bed, prop themselves against the wall of the inn, and continue the evening's conversazione in the darkness. I hear them cursing at each other by name. We have Tom, Dick, and Sam, Jem, Bill, and Bob, to enliven us under our window after we are in bed. They begin improving each other's minds, as a matter of course, by quarrelling. Music follows, and soothes the strife, in the shape of a local duet, sung by voices of vast compass, which soar in one note from howling bass to cracked treble. Yawning follows the duet; long, loud, weary yawning of all the company in chorus. This amusement over, Tom asks Dick for "backer," and Dick denies that he has got any, and Tom tells him he lies, and Sam strikes in and says, "No, he doan't," and Jem tells Sam he lies, and Bill tells him that if he was Sam he would punch Jem's head, and Bob, apparently snuffing the battle afar off, and not liking the scent of it, shouts suddenly a pacific "good night" in the distance. The farewell salutation seems to quiet the gathering storm. They all roar responsive to the good night of Bob. Next, a song in chorus from Bob's five friends. Outraged by this time beyond all endurance, I spring out of bed and seize the water-jug. I pause before I empty the water on the heads of the assembly beneath; I pause, and hear— O! most melodious, most welcome of sounds!— the sudden fall of rain. The merciful sky has anticipated me; the "clerk of the weather" has been struck by my idea of dispersing the Nag's Head Night Club by water. By the time I have put down the jug and got back to bed, silence— primeval silence, the first, the foremost of all earthly influences— falls sweetly over our tavern at last.

That night, before sinking wearily to rest, I have once more the satisfaction of agreeing with my wife. Dear and admirable woman! she proposes to leave this secluded village the first thing to-morrow morning. Never did I share her

opinion more cordially than I share it now. Instead of keeping myself composed, I have been living in a region of perpetual disturbance; and, as for doing nothing, my mind has been so agitated and perturbed that I have not even had time to think about it. We will go, love— as you so sensibly suggest— we will go the first thing in the morning to any place you like, so long as it is large enough to swallow up small sounds. Where, over all the surface of this noisy earth, the blessing of tranquility may be found, I know not; but this I do know: a secluded English village is the very last place towards which any man should think of turning his steps, if the main object of his walk through life is to discover quiet.

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3: Make Believe

"Weeroona"

Mary Simpson, 1884-1952
Punch (Melbourne) 10 Dec 1925

A popular writer of humorous stories for The Bulletin *and other Australian magazines. In this story, a meek sales clerk fancies himself to be Rudolf Valentino, the magnetic star of silent romance movies.*

WHEN Griggs, the manager of the Emporium, wanted actors for Christmas week, he called for volunteers from the staff. There were none. But Griggs soon settled matters. He conscripted Jones from the "Carpets," Torbey from the "Mercery," and me from the "Silks," for the parts of Santa Claus, Ranger the gift-giving Kangaroo, and Abdul, the Elephant man. We drew lots for these parts— a mere matter of form, as, being physically unfitted to play Santa Claus or the leaping 'roo, I knew the part of Abdul was a foregone conclusion for me.

I viewed the elephant with new eyes now that he was to be my charge. He occupied a recess just off the "Manchester"— adjacent to the calico "snows" of Santa's land and within sniffing distance of the 'roo as he grazed in a paddock of green carpet.

This elephant was much larger than life. He was built of dingy black sateen with red flannel touches and celluloid tusks. His trunk was fitted with a spring which I was to control from the dais on his back, causing Jumbo to select with it any article, to the value of sixpence, desired by his patrons— all prepaid by tickets at the door.

When wound up Jumbo could also waddle a short journey in an endeavor to imitate a vile day in the Bight. Anyhow, those passengers who had paid a penny for the experience were suitably indisposed. Our charges may seem small. Let those who will be extortionate. As Griggs is fond of saying, "*Our* appeal is to the small investors."

The whole thing seemed revolting to me, and, only that my mind at this time was too much pre-occu-pied with love to realise thoroughly the indignity of my position, I should probably have resigned from Shoddee and Co. on account of it. But many are the uses of adversity, as I was to recognise.

Opportunity, in the garb of Abdul's outfit, was knocking at my door. This outfit was a magnificent affair. The complete costume of an Arabian of high degree, with annexations from the French and British. As Abdul, the elephant driver, I should of course wear it, so it was with a strange feeling of metamorphosis that I, Henry Meek, of the "Silks," got into the thing. Leggings of shiny leather reached to my breeches of yellow cloth, A velvet Zouave, lavishly jewelled, came next, above which my "Made in Australia" linen stood out with

fine effect. There were a scarlet sash and a scimitar of tin set with glass rubies. Over my head a white robe formed a cap, being kept in place— just above my glasses— by a jewelled circlet, the rest of the garment tangling round my legs. A cash bag of British make joined the waist line, but, loathing a solecism as I do, I concealed the commonplace article beneath the sash. I flashed with jewels, each worth a King's ransom— in marks— and about my person hung a faintly rancid odor, due to the costume's storage within the same box as the skin of the kangaroo in which my friend Torbey was now capering.

I have mentioned subtle changes taking place in my individuality. As a matter of fact. I was, along with my suit of twill, shedding Henry Meek, and the inner man— that hidden man that lurks in each of us— was emerging. And as surely as clothes make the man, I was being re-born— a Turk.

At last, fixed to the last spangle, I looked into the mercery mirror and was immediately struck by my resemblance to a figure I had seen somewhere — a handsome, dreamy-eyed devil... who was he again? For my life I could not recollect. Trying to identify this illusive memory, I still monopolised the mirror, staring at my reflection. That figure, insolent, compelling, Eastern... what subtlety there was... what charm, but who the—

The question got me down, worrying me, and then came Light, Revelation. I was like— and so like— the Sheik. Yes I, Henry Meek, was a Rudolph— a super Rudolph, indeed, for had I not surrounded that popular hero with my own personality? And now showed the uses of adversity.

I have said that I was in love. As Abdul, in the garments of a sheik, adversity had provided my chance, for, though I love, my love is not returned. Look at Blanche Parkin in "the Laces." Does she appreciate me? No? I am less to her than a free pass to a political meeting. Yet I love Blanche madly. I love her strong voice and the way she tramps upon me with her flat-heeled shoes.

I adore her muscular outlines and sunburnt neck. Her jaw-line is a Sandow curve to me. So, where this girl is I naturally long for power to subdue her bold athletic spirit. Power to hold her heart a fluttering captive in my hand— power to have her looking at me with infatuated eyes. I feel, of course, that within me this power lies embryo, unsuspected by my fellow-helots, least of all Blanche. She, indeed, has alluded to me as a "10½ pence remnant"... has said that I need vitaminous foods... that I lack the red corpuscles. But she is wrong, as are all my detractors, for, in the wrappings of Abdul, King of Elephant Men, I feel the long-suppressed "devil" rising within me. The pale features and spectacles, the creeds and shibboleths of Henry Meek decline with a final flicker, and an Eastern Potentate reigns in his stead. Such a fascinating Eastern, too, diabolic yet angelic. Savage, yet capable of being softened to the meekness of the original Meek by an inviting smile from Blanche. I was indeed a handsome demon, a

Sultan to monopolise any flapper's dreams— with caravans, camels and captives at command.

And talking of captives, it was nearly time for Blanche to stride by on her way to tea. She should see the flare of two Valentines in my vivid orbs. Business was quiet as yet. It was a dull Christmas, anyhow, so I posed and waited. Griggs, I could see, was impressed, for with true Oriental subtlety I was always busy with my elephant, giving the last loving touches to its hide when ever he passed. And all the while despotic power welled within me. While waiting for Blanche I enslaved passing messenger girls with my languorous glance. And this gaze became a complex thing. Combining, as it did, the scowl of a bull fighter, the fascination of the cobra, and the allure of a Venetian night, it took some mixing. It was a kind of mental sausage meat.

Yet I could do it better than most, for I had imagination. As great artists absorb the parts they play, so it was with me— forgetting the Emporium altogether and drenching myself in the "atmosphere" of the Orient. Unconsciously I made believe. To my enchanted senses what had been a group of bargainised lawn mowers became a band of Arabian camel drivers, crossing a desert of coir matting. A household wringer— an Arab kneeling in prayer.

But even sheiks must think in terms of thrift, and so, to keep my job in "the silks," I rehearsed my part of elephant driver. I mounted (by a flight of wooden steps) and became letter perfect in directing its trunk in the art of selecting the most minute, as well as the largest, bargain upon the "All at half-price" table.

Also I learnt to balance upon his back and from there to distribute largesse of prepaid sweets to crowds of small deluded Australians. Revelling in the position I realised that not every day can a man become a handsome devil of a sheik.

Time was passing, and so were the girls, in twos, threes and groups. They adored me, it was plain to see. They, too, having imagination, figured me as the Masterful Oriental and themselves silken-clad captives of my will (though always safe guarded with the return half of a railway ticket, as "select" girls always are.) But, as would any Sultan, I spurned these willing ones. Blanche it was I wished to subjugate. And she did not pass. Heavens! Suppose she did not take tea— being perhaps on one of her Health Stunts... "no tea for tennis tarts"... such a one as she was for slogans... or "one meal less for happiness."

If this were so she might not see me. It was a horrible thought, for I longed ardently for her, the more so that the department was now becoming crowded with a generous people all searching for cheap gifts for their friends. Soon it would be starting time, and I would be besieged. The customers eddied about,

rooting among the bar gains and metaphorically burning incense or hasheesh or something similar at my shrine. This created more "atmosphere," and to my active imagination these ordinary folk became an Eastern bazaar — a

wonder crowd in Baghdad, chattering, picturesque — and I their master. They revolved round me gloating and seeing in my personality the living embodiment of that thwarted romance that lies in the heart of every woman even when buying remnants. I basked in this atmosphere. I also waited. Blanche. Where was she?

And then, by an unhappy reverse of Fate, when she did come, my back was turned, so she missed the hypnotic effect of my first look. And I heard her voice (not unlike a cornet) ask in amazed tones:

"Say, girls, whatever's *that*?"

"What *is* it?"

Ah! My moment had come. I was to subjugate her, enslave her senses... bring her to heel. In spirit I was to carry her away across leagues of burning sand... she would be my toy... creature of my whim...

So I started in to subdue the beloved rebel with my burning gaze. But there was a hitch somewhere. She did not wilt. Instead, there she stood, the centre of a bunch of feminines, stabbing me with her glance, cold and cutting as a poniard.

"What is it?" she again demanded. "Give it a name, girls, and you can keep it."

I trembled and felt sick. Surely there was some thing wrong. But, having faith in myself, I rallied all my forces, seductive, bullying, and what not. I scowled, supplicated, terrorised, all in one. No use. She didn't quiver. My heart burst with disappointment, yet I reasoned how it was. Blanche, always literal, had not absorbed my "atmosphere." With the clarity of vision that comes to the drowning I realised the mistake too late. Had I been disguised as a Tilden she would have rushed me into the darkest place in a picture-dive and doubled my blood pressure— for Tilden and Tennis are her gods.

But no matter. Even the feminine athlete is a cave-woman at heart, and to the cavewoman I would make my Oriental appeal. So, focussing all my expressions in one basilisk whole, I stared her down. And she laughed. Laughed in my face. Shades of the Desert— of Omar, of Kismet— she laughed. Planting her feet firmly apart, with her hands on her hips, this rebel slave loudly enquired of no one in particular: "For the third and last time, What is it?"

In spirit I was to carry her away across leagues of shining sand.

Her friends made no reply. Less critical than she, allure is sufficient for them without data. Not so Blanche. She has been Record-keeper for the Tennis Club so long that she wouldn't pass her own mother without a guarantee.

"He's a sheik, Blanche," giggled a small girl from the "Penny Dip." "You know, Blanche — a Rudolph — yes, a sheik." They pressed round me, happy in proximity.

"A sheik?" quoth Blanche, with derision. "A shriek, more like— fancy a sheik in spectacles."

Words could not express the contempt she packed into her voice, and I admit this was a sore blow to my pride. Few are aware that without glasses my left eye swivels, but such is the sad truth — and for Blanche to jolly me about it. . . But she spoke again.

"*Are* you a *sheik*?" she demanded.

"Yes, and a pretty desperate one, too," I hissed. "Don't try me too far, girl," and I seized her wrist. But she freed herself fastidiously, saying calmly as though quoting statistics, "*I hate sheiks*."

"What!" cried several voices in amaze. "Hate sheiks? Why, they're just lovely."

Blanche, quite unsubdued, carried on.

"Yes, I hate sheiks," she said, "like I hate spiders. Sheiks are dirty; they don't wash. They know nothing of hygiene. I wouldn't be a sheikess— not for— not for any money. Sheiks are foreigners. They never use a toothbrush. They don't wear boots. They use the bath to keep their wood in."

It was an indictment. With a look of freezing contempt she took me and my decorations in with a sweep of her eyelashes and cast me out forever, "Oh damn!" And yet how like Blanche was this. She had ruined everything — had torn illusion from every eye and trampled it beneath her No. 6 shoe. All was over. My atmosphere lost, and I could not regain it. That beastly matter-of-fact girl had destroyed it. Of what use to me now even if re-constructed? Suddenly I revolted.

"Damn and double damn," I hissed to my elephant. "She doesn't want us, so I'll do in my job. I'm thirsty. I'll go and get drunk. I— I've got a coupla bob somewhere."

I began a hurried inventory of my pockets, quite forgetting they were Abdul's pockets, when a miracle happened. In one of them was a flask of gin, evidence that some previous sheik had been driven to the waters of Lethe as I should be. And furtively, behind the elephant's hindquarters, I upended the priceless bottle, letting the nectar slither down my throat. Its effect was in stantaneous. I turned Bolshy. I saw redder than any Trotzky. Down with "the Firm." Down with Blanche. Down with Work. *Me*? A Sheik? Work? Never!

With my scimitar I impulsively carved an opening in my faithful elephant just below his kidneys and, without waiting to count the cost, vaulted into the interior with my gin and my broken heart. And there, while the public with their sixpences waited and Griggs raked the premises for me, I drank deep.

The liquor made me profoundly, prankishly happy. I cut peepholes in the elephant's sides and took observations, laughing gleefully at the worry my disappearance had caused. I saw, too, that the day was closing in — that the

lights in preparation for our late shopping night were already burn ing. All round my ele phant a disappointed crowd had gathered, but, as the performance was necessarily postponed, many were taking their "sprats" and their brats elsewhere. From my hid ing place I heard hints of foul play toward the Firm. Other Abduls had been known to levant to the pub, and history ever repeats itself.

Griggs (the liar) said some nasty things about me, and I, warm and happy, decided to sue him for libel— some day. He was like a madman, and his scouts searched far and near for me but without avail. Blanche blandly continued to sell gloves and lace quite unaware, seemingly, that she was the cause of it all. And trade was being lost wholesale. Something had to be done, and seeing that he could drug the crowd with lies no longer, Griggs arrayed himself, impromptu, in a colored bed quilt and Chinese slippers and took my place as Elephant Man.

Through a peephole I saw him, the scarecrow.

Griggs, a sheik! I split with laughter. He was too busy to hear me, for gift-giving was due, so he mounted the dais. But en route he felt a sharp nip on the shoulder blade. It was from the point of my scimitar. The braggart felt it through the elephant hide.

"What the blazes!" yelled Griggs, forgetting there were ladies present. Horrified mothers of Young Australia backed away saying he was "no gentleman."

Again Griggs essayed the dais, but the gin inside me would not let me be quiet inside the elephant. I tried to stand up, and the scimitar stabbed him in advertently just as he sat down. He gave a frightful yell, and at that moment the electric current failed. The Emporium was plunged into darkness.

Everyone knows what happens in a big depart ment store when the light fails, but almost before panic and chaos took control the lights switched on again. I knew nothing of it, for during that temporary eclipse I had fallen asleep. Aeons of time were added to the past, it seemed, before I came into sudden contact with the floor, having fallen through the trap door of my own making. Further aeons passed while I lay, thinking and snoring in turn, until I became just sober enough to realise I was in a strange bed.

Aching mentally and physically I sat up, taking bearings and reconstructing yesterday out of a torch-lit muddle of impressions. It was just before the dawning of another day. The shrouded Emporium lay round me flooded in ghostly moonlight. Clearly I was the only one of the staff on duty. I moved furtively from beneath the elephant's bulk, fearing I knew not what. My feet swishing through a sea of litter and papers told me it was still very early, otherwise the cleaners would have been there sweeping. I was dazed and quite unable to concentrate on any plan, for getting out and home. I had reverted to

the dun decorum of every day. My glasses were lost, my eye had swivelled, and my Orientalism burned away by gin. I was Henry Meek, and none other.

Moving instinctively toward the en trance, I ran into the Lady Isobel, that haughty dummy who wears bridal *neglige* near the door. I bumped Lady Isobel hard, but not so hard as she bumped her waxen companions. One would have thought they had imbibed the gin the way they went down. And the last one fell through the window. On the instant appeared one of the constabulary, confusing me cruelly with his flashlight and his questions. And he, unlike Blanche, must have had a liking for sheiks, because he adopted me there and then, and kept me for seven days.

Thus ended my career, both as sheik and salesman. I work in a rubber mill now, making tennis balls. And it soothes me to think that with one of these Blanche Parkin will one day make Suzanne Lenglen look like a 10½ pence remnant, for I love Blanche still— I love her still.

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** Bill Tilden was amateur tennis World No 1, 1919-1925, and occasional movie actor.*

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4: In a Cellar

Harriet Elizabeth Spofford

1835-1921

The Atlantic Monthly Feb 1859, uncredited

IT WAS THE DAY of Madame de St. Cyr's dinner, an event I never missed; for, the mistress of a mansion in the Faubourg St. Germain, there still lingered about her the exquisite grace and good-breeding peculiar to the old regime, that insensibly communicates itself to the guests till they move in an atmosphere of ease that constitutes the charm of home. One was always sure of meeting desirable and well-assorted people here, and a contre-temps was impossible. Moreover, the house was not at the command of all; and Madame de St. Cyr, with the daring strength which, when found in a woman at all, should, to be endurable, be combined with a sweet but firm restraint, rode rough-shod over the parvenus of the Empire, and was resolute enough to insulate herself even among the old noblesse, who, as all the world knows, insulate themselves from the rest of France. There were rare qualities in this woman, and were I to have selected one who with an even hand should carry a snuffy candle through a magazine of powder, my choice would have devolved upon her; and she would have done it.

I often looked, and not unsuccessfully, to discern what heritage her daughter had in these little affairs. Indeed, to one like myself, Delphine presented the worthier study. She wanted the airy charm of manner, the suavity and tenderness of her mother,— a deficiency easily to be pardoned in one of such delicate and extraordinary beauty. And perhaps her face was the truest index of her mind; not that it ever transparently displayed a genuine emotion,— Delphine was too well bred for that,— but the outline of her features had a keen regular precision, as if cut in a gem. Her exquisite color seldom varied, her eyes were like blue steel, she was statuelike and stony. But had one paused there, pronouncing her hard and impassive, he had committed an error. She had no great capability for passion, but she was not to be deceived; one metallic flash of her eye would cut like a sword through the whole mesh of entanglements with which you had surrounded her; and frequently, when alone with her, you perceived cool recesses in her nature, sparkling and pleasant, which jealously guarded themselves from a nearer approach. She was infinitely spirituelle; compared to her, Madame herself was heavy.

At the first, I had seen that Delphine must be the wife of a diplomate. What diplomate? For a time asking myself the question seriously, I decided in the negative, which did not, however, prevent Delphine from fulfilling her destiny, since there were others. She was, after all, like a draught of rich old wine, all fire and sweetness. These things were not generally seen in her; I was more favored than many; and I looked at her with pitiless perspicacious eyes. Nevertheless, I

had not the least advantage; it was, in fact, between us, diamond cut diamond,— which, oddly enough, brings me back to my story.

Some years previously, I had been sent on a special mission to the government at Paris, and having finally executed it, I resigned the post, and resolved to make my residence there, since it is the only place on earth where one can live. Every morning I half expect to see the country, beyond the city, white with an encampment of the nations, who, having peacefully flocked there over night, wait till the Rue St. Honoré shall run out and greet them. It surprises me, sometimes, that those pretending to civilization are content to remain at a distance. What experience have they of life,— not to mention gayety and pleasure, but of the great purpose of life,— society? Man evidently is gregarious; Fourier's fables are founded on fact; we are nothing without our opposites, our fellows, our lights and shadows, colors, relations, combinations, our point d'appui, and our angle of sight. An isolated man is immensurable; he is also unpicturesque, unnatural, untrue. He is no longer the lord of Nature, animal and vegetable,— but Nature is the lord of him; the trees, skies, flowers, predominate, and he is in as bad taste as green and blue, or as an oyster in a vase of roses. The race swings naturally to clusters. It being admitted, then, that society is our normal state, where is it to be obtained in such perfection as at Paris? Show me the urbanity, the generosity in trifles, better than sacrifice, the incuriousness and freedom, the grace, and wit, and honor, that will equal such as I find here. Morality,— we were not speaking of it,— the intrusion is unnecessary; must that word with Anglo-Saxon pertinacity dog us round the world? A hollow mask, which Vice now and then lifts for a breath of air, I grant you this state may be called; but since I find the vice elsewhere, countenance my preference for the accompanying mask. But even this is vanishing; such drawing-rooms as Mme. de St. Cyr's are less and less frequent. Yet, though the delightful spell of the last century daily dissipates itself, and we are not now what we were twenty years ago, still Paris is, and will be to the end of time, for a cosmopolitan, the pivot on which the world revolves.

It was, then, as I have said, the day of Mme. de St. Cyr's dinner. Punctually at the hour, I presented myself,— for I have always esteemed it the least courtesy which a guest can render, that he should not cool his hostess's dinner.

The usual choice company waited. There was the Marquis of G., the ambassador from home; Col. Leigh, an attaché of that embassy; the Spanish and Belgian ministers;— all of whom, with myself, completed a diplomatic circle. There were also wits and artists, but no ladies whose beauty exceeded that of the St. Cyrs. With nearly all of this assemblage I held certain relations, so that I was immediately at ease. G. was the only one whom, perhaps, I would rather not have met, although we were the best of friends. They awaited but one, the Baron Stahl. Meanwhile Delphine stood coolly taking the measurement of the

Marquis of G., while her mother entertained one and another guest with a low-toned flattery, gentle interest, or lively narration, as the case might demand.

In a country where a coup d'état was as easily given as a box on the ear, we all attentively watched for the arrival of one who had been sent from a neighboring empire to negotiate a loan for the tottering throne of this. Nor was expectation kept long on guard. In a moment, "His Excellency, the Baron Stahl!" was announced.

The exaggeration of his low bow to Mme. de St. Cyr, the gleam askance of his black eye, the absurd simplicity of his dress, did not particularly please me. A low forehead, straight black brows, a beardless cheek with a fine color which give him a fictitiously youthful appearance, were the most striking traits of his face; his person was not to be found fault with; but he boldly evinced his admiration for Delphine, and with a wicked eye.

As we were introduced, he assured me, in pure English, that he had pleasure in making the acquaintance of a gentleman whose services were so distinguished.

I, in turn, assured him of my pleasure in meeting a gentleman who appreciated them.

I had arrived at the house of Mme. de St. Cyr with a load on my mind, which for four weeks had weighed there; but before I thus spoke, it was lifted and gone. I had seen the Baron Stahl before, although not previously aware of it; and now, as he bowed, talked my native tongue so smoothly, drew a glove over the handsome hand upon whose first finger shone the only incongruity of his attire, a broad gold ring, holding a gaudy red stone,— as he stood smiling and expectant before me, a sudden chain of events flashed through my mind, an instantaneous heat, like lightning, welded them into logic. A great problem was resolved. For a second, the breath seemed snatched from my lips; the next, a lighter, freer man never trod in diplomatic shoes.

I really beg your pardon,— but perhaps from long usage, it has become impossible for me to tell a straight story. It is absolutely necessary to inform you of events already transpired.

In the first place, then, I, at this time, possessed a valet, the pink of valets, an Englishman,— and not the less valuable to me in a foreign capital, that, notwithstanding his long residence, he was utterly unable to speak one word of French intelligibly. Reading and writing it readily, his thick tongue could master scarcely a syllable. The adroitness and perfection with which he performed the duties of his place were unsurpassable. To a certain extent I was obliged to admit him into my confidence; I was not at all in his. In dexterity and despatch he equalled the advertisements. He never condescended to don my cast-off apparel, but, disposing of it, always arrayed himself in plain but gentlemanly garments. These do not complete the list of Hay's capabilities. He speculated.

Respectable tenements in London called him landlord; in the funds certain sums lay subject to his order; to a profitable farm in Hants he contemplated future retirement; and passing upon the Bourse, I have received a grave bow, and have left him in conversation with an eminent capitalist respecting consols, drafts, exchange, and other erudite mysteries, where I yet find myself in the A B C. Thus not only was my valet a free-born Briton, but a landed proprietor. If the Rothschilds blacked your boots or shaved your chin, your emotions might be akin to mine. When this man, who had an interest in the India traders, brought the hot water into my dressing-room, of a morning, the Antipodes were tributary to me. To what extent might any little irascibility of mine drive a depression in the market! and I knew, as he brushed my hat, whether stocks rose or fell. In one respect, I was essentially like our Saxon ancestors,— my servant was a villain. If I had been merely a civilian, in any purely private capacity, having leisure to attend to personal concerns in the midst of the delicate specialties intrusted to me from the cabinet at home, the possession of so inestimable a valet might have bullied me beyond endurance. As it was, I found it rather agreeable than otherwise. He was tacitly my secretary of finance.

Several years ago, a diamond of wonderful size and beauty, having wandered from the East, fell into certain imperial coffers among our Continental neighbors; and at the same time some extraordinary intelligence, essential to the existence, so to speak, of that government, reached a person there who fixed as its price this diamond. After a while he obtained it, but, judging that prudence lay in departure, took it to England, where it was purchased for an enormous sum by the Duke of— as he will remain an unknown quantity, let us say X. There are probably not a dozen such diamonds in the world,— certainly not three in England. It rejoiced in such flowery appellatives as the Sea of Splendor, the Moon of Milk; and, of course, those who had but parted with it under protest, as it were, determined to obtain it again at all hazards;— they were never famous for scrupulosity The Duke of X. was aware of this, and, for a time, the gem had lain idle, its glory muffled in a casket; but finally, on some grand occasion a few months prior to the period of which I have spoken above, it was determined to set it in the Duchess's coronet. Accordingly, one day, it was given by her son, the Marquis of G., into the hands of their solicitor, who should deliver it to her Grace's jeweller. It lay in a small shagreen case, and before the Marquis left, the solicitor placed the case in a flat leathern box, where lay a chain of most singular workmanship, the clasp of which was deranged. This chain was very broad, of a style known as the brickwork, but every brick was a tiny gem, set in a delicate filagree linked with the next, and the whole rainbowed lustrousness moving at your will, like the scales of some gorgeous Egyptian serpent;— the solicitor was to take this also to the jeweller. Having laid the box in his private desk, Ulster, his confidential clerk, locked it, while he

bowed the Marquis down. Returning immediately, the solicitor took the flat box and drove to the jeweller's. He found the latter so crowded with customers, it being the fashionable hour, as to be unable to attend to him; he, however, took the solicitor into his inner room, a dark fire-proof place, and there quickly deposited the box within a safe, which stood inside another, like a Japanese puzzle, and the solicitor, seeing the doors double-locked and secured, departed; the other promising to attend to the matter on the morrow.

Early the next morning, the jeweller entered his dark room, and proceeded to unlock the safe. This being concluded, and the inner one also thrown open, he found the box in a last and entirely, as he had always believed, secret compartment. Anxious to see this wonder, this Eye of Morning, and Heart of Day, he eagerly loosened the band and unclosed the box. It was empty. There was no chain there; the diamond was missing. The sweat streamed from his forehead, his clothes were saturated, he believed himself the victim of a delusion. Calling an assistant, every article and nook in the dark room was examined. At last, in an extremity of despair, he sent for the solicitor, who arrived in a breath. The jeweller's alarm hardly equalled that of the other. In his sudden dismay, he at first forgot the circumstances and dates relating to the affair; afterward was doubtful. The Marquis of G. was summoned, the police called in, the jeweller given into custody. Every breath the solicitor continued to draw only built up his ruin. He swallowed laudanum, but, by making it an overdose, frustrated his own design. He was assured, on his recovery, that no suspicion attached to him. The jeweller now asseverated that the diamond had never been given to him; but though the jeweller had committed perjury, this was, nevertheless, strictly true. Of course, whoever had the stone would not attempt to dispose of it at present, and, though communications were opened with the general European police, there was very little to work upon. But by means of this last step the former possessors became aware of its loss, and I make no doubt had their agents abroad immediately.

Meanwhile, the case hung here, complicated and tantalizing, when one morning I woke in London. No sooner had G. heard of my arrival than he called, and, relating the affair, requested my assistance. I confess myself to have been interested,— foolishly so, I thought afterward; but we all have our weaknesses, and diamonds were mine. In company with the Marquis, I waited upon the solicitor, who entered into the few details minutely, calling frequently upon Ulster, a young, fresh-looking man, for corroboration. We then drove to the jeweller's new quarters, took him, under charge of the officers, to his place of business, where he nervously showed me every point that could bear upon the subject, and ended by exclaiming, that he was ruined, and all for a stone he had never seen. I sat quietly for a few moments. It stood, then, thus:— G. had given the thing to the solicitor, seen it put into the box, seen the box put into the

desk; but while the confidential clerk, Ulster, locked the desk, the solicitor waited on the Marquis to the door,— returning, took the box, without opening it again, to the jeweller, who, in the hurry, shut it up in his safe, also without opening it. The case was perfectly clear. These mysterious things are always so simple! You know now as well as I, who took the diamond.

I did not choose to volunteer, but assented, on being desired. The police and I were old friends; they had so often assisted me, that I was not afraid to pay them in kind, and accordingly agreed to take charge of the case, still retaining their aid, should I require it. The jeweller was now restored to his occupation, although still subjected to a rigid surveillance, and I instituted inquiries into the recent movements of the young man Ulster. The case seemed to me to have been very blindly conducted. But, though all that was brought to light concerning him in London was perfectly fair and aboveboard, it was discovered that, not long since, he had visited Paris,— on the solicitor's business, of course, but gaining thereby an opportunity to transact any little affairs of his own. This was fortunate; for if any one could do anything in Paris, it was myself.

It is not often that I act as a detective. But one homogeneous to every situation could hardly play a pleasanter part for once. I have thought that our great masters in theory and practice, Machiavel and Talleyrand, were hardly more, on a large scale.

I was about to return to Paris, but resolved to call previously on the solicitor again. He welcomed me warmly, although my suspicions had not been imparted to him, and, with a more cheerful heart than had lately been habitual to him, entered into an animated conversation respecting the great case of Biter v. Bit, then absorbing so much of the public attention, frequently addressing Ulster, whose remarks were always pertinent, brief, and clear. As I sat actively discussing the topic, feeling no more interest in it than in the end of that cigar I just cut off, and noting exactly every look and motion of the unfortunate youth, I recollect the curious sentiment that filled me regarding him. What injury had he done me, that I should pursue him with punishment? Me? I am, and every individual is, integral with the commonwealth. It was the commonwealth he had injured. Yet, even then, why was I the one to administer justice? Why not continue with my coffee in the morning, my kings and cabinets and national chess at noon, my opera at night, and let the poor devil go? Why, but that justice is brought home to every member of society,— that naked duty requires no shirking of such responsibility,— that, had I failed here, the crime might, with reason, lie at my door and multiply, the criminal increase himself?

Very possibly you will not unite with me; but these little catechisms are, once in a while, indispensable, to vindicate one's course to one's self.

This Ulster was a handsome youth;— the rogues have generally all the good looks. There was nothing else remarkable about him but his quickness; he was

perpetually on the alert; by constant activity, the rust was never allowed to collect on his faculties; his sharpness was distressing,— he appeared subject to a tense strain. Now his quill scratched over the paper unconcernedly, while he could join as easily in his master's conversation: nothing seemed to preoccupy him, or he held a mind open at every point. It is pitiful to remember him that morning, sitting quiet, unconscious, and free, utterly in the hands of that mighty Inquisition, the Metropolitan Police, with its countless arms, its cells and myrmidons in the remotest corners of the Continent,— at the mercy of so merciless a monster, and momently closer involved, like some poor prey round which a spider spins its bewildering web. It was also curious to observe the sudden suspicion that darkened his face at some innocent remark,— the quick shrinking and intrenched retirement, the manifest sting and rancor, as I touched his wound with a swift flash of my slender weapon and sheathed it again, and, after the thrust, the espionage, and the relief at believing it accidental. He had many threads to gather up and hold;— little electric warnings along them must have been constantly shocking him. He did that part well enough; it was a mistake, to begin with; he needed prudence. At that time I owed this Ulster nothing; now, however, I owe him a grudge, for some of the most harassing hours of my life were occasioned me by him. But I shall not cherish enmity on that account. With so promising a beginning, he will graduate and take his degree from the loftiest altitude in his line. Hemp is a narcotic; let it bring me forgetfulness.

In Paris I found it not difficult to trace such a person, since he was both foreign and unaccustomed. It was ascertained that he had posted several letters. A person of his description had been seen to drop a letter, the superscription of which had been read by one who picked it up for him. This superscription was the address of the very person who was likely to be the agent of the former possessors of the diamond, and had attracted attention. After all,— you know the Secret Force,— it was not so impossible to imagine what this letter contained, despite of its cipher. Such a person also had been met among the Jews, and at certain shops whose reputation was not of the clearest. He had called once or twice on Mme. de St. Cyr, on business relative to a vineyard adjoining her chateau in the Gironde, which she had sold to a wine merchant of England. I found a zest in the affair, as I pursued it.

We were now fairly at sea, but before long I found we were likely to remain there; in fact, nothing of consequence eventuated. I began to regret having taken the affair from the hands in which I had found it, and one day, it being a gala or some insatiable saint's day, I was riding, perplexed with that and other matters, and paying small attention to the passing crowd. I was vexed and mortified, and had fully decided to throw up the whole,— on such hairs do things hang,— when, suddenly turning a corner, my bridle-reins became

entangled in the snaffle of another rider. I loosened them abstractedly, and not till it was necessary to bow to my strange antagonist on parting, did I glance up. The person before me was evidently not accustomed to play the dandy; he wore his clothes ill, sat his horse worse, and was uneasy in the saddle. The unmistakable air of the *gamin* was apparent beneath the superficies of the gentleman. Conspicuous on his costume, and wound like an order of merit upon his breast, glittered a chain, the chain,— each tiny brick-like gem spiked with a hundred sparks, and building a fabric of sturdy probabilities with the celerity of the genii in constructing Aladdin's palace. There, a cable to haul up the treasure, was the chain;— where was the diamond? I need not tell you how I followed this young friend, with what assiduity I kept him in sight, up and down, all day long, till, weary at last of his fine sport, as I certainly was of mine, he left his steed in stall and fared on his way a-foot. Still pursuing, now I threaded quay and square, street and alley, till he disappeared in a small shop, in one of those dark crowded lanes leading eastward from the Pont Neuf, in the city. It was the sign of a *marchand des armures*, and having provided myself with those persuasive arguments, a sergent-de-ville and a gendarme, I entered.

A place more characteristic it would be impossible to find. Here were piled bows of every material, ash, and horn, and tougher fibres, with slackened strings, and among them peered a rusty clarion and battle-axe, while the quivers that should have accompanied lay in a distant corner, their arrows serving to pin long, dusty, torn banners to the wall. Opposite the entrance, an archer in bronze hung on tiptoe, and levelled a steel bow, whose piercing fleche seemed sparkling with impatience to spring from his finger and flesh itself in the heart of the intruder. The hauberk and halberd, lance and casque, arquebuse and sword, were suspended in friendly congeries; and fragments of costly stuff swept from ceiling to floor, crushed and soiled by the heaps of rusty firelocks, cutlasses, and gauntlets thrown upon them. In one place, a little antique bust was half hid in the folds of some pennon, still dyed with battle-stains; in another, scattered treasures of Dresden and Sevres brought the drawing-room into the campaign; and all around bivouacked rifles, whose polished barrels glittered full of death,— pistols, variously mounted, for an insurgent at the barricades, or for a lost millionnaire at the gaming-table,— foils, with buttoned bluntness,— and rapiers whose even edges were viewless as if filed into air. Destruction lay everywhere, at the command of the owner of this place, and, had he possessed a particle of vivacity, it would have been hazardous to bow beneath his doorway. It did not, I must say, look like a place where I should find a diamond. As the owner came forward, I determined on my plan of action.

"You have, sir," I said, handing him a bit of paper, on which were scrawled some numbers, "a diamond in your possession, of such and so many carats, size,

and value, belonging to the Duke of X., and left with you by an Englishman, Mr. Arthur Ulster. You will deliver it to me, if you please."

"Monsieur!" exclaimed the man, lifting his hands, and surveying me with the widest eyes I ever saw. "A diamond! In my possession! So immense a thing! It is impossible. I have not even seen one of the kind. It is a mistake. Jacques Noailles, the vender of jewels en gros, second door below, must be the man. One should perceive that my business is with arms, not diamonds. I have it not; it would ruin me."

Here he paused for a reply, but, meeting none, resumed. "M. Arthur Ulster!— I have heard of no such person. I never spoke with an Englishman. Bah! I detest them! I have no dealings with them. I repeat, I have not your jewel. Do you wish anything more of me?"

His vehemence only convinced me of the truth of my suspicions.

"These heroics are out of place," I answered. "I demand the article in question."

"Monsieur doubts me?" he asked, with a rueful face,— "questions my word, which is incontrovertible?" Here he clapped his hand upon a couteau-de-chasse lying near, but, appearing to think better of it, drew himself up, and, with a shower of nods flung at me, added, "I deny your accusation!" I had not accused him.

"You are at too much pains to convict yourself. I charge you with nothing," I said. "But this diamond must be surrendered."

"Monsieur is mad!" he exclaimed, "mad! he dreams! Do I look like one who possesses such a trophy? Does my shop resemble a mine? Look about! See! All that is here would not bring a hundredth part of its price. I beseech Monsieur to believe me; he has mistaken the number, or has been misinformed."

"We waste words. I know this diamond is here, as well as a costly chain— "

"On my soul, on my life, on my honor," he cried clasping his hands and turning up his eyes, "there is here nothing of the kind. I do not deal in gems. A little silk, a few weapons, a curiosity, a nicknack, comprise my stock. I have not the diamond. I do not know the thing. I am poor. I am honest. Suspicion destroys me!"

"As you will find, should I be longer troubled by your denials."

He was inflexible, and, having exhausted every artifice of innocence, wiped the tears from his eyes,— oh, these French! life is their theatre,— and remained quiet. It was getting dark. There was no gas in the place; but in the pause a distant street-lamp swung its light dimly round.

"Unless one desires to purchase, allow me to say that it is my hour for closing," he remarked, blandly, rubbing his black-bearded chin.

"My time is valuable," I returned. "It is late and dark. When your shop-boy lights up—"

"Pardon,— we do not light."

"Permit me, then, to perform that office for you. In this blaze you may perceive my companions, whom you have not appeared to recognize."

So saying, I scratched a match upon the floor, and, as the sergent-de-ville and the gendarme advanced, threw the light of the blue spirit of sulphurous flame upon them. In a moment more the match went out, and we remained in the demi-twilight of the distant lantern. The marchand des armures stood petrified and aghast. Had he seen the imps of Satan in that instant, it could have had no greater effect.

"You have seen them?" I asked. "I regret to inconvenience you; but unless this diamond is produced at once, my friends will put their seal on your goods, your property will be confiscated, yourself in a dungeon. In other words, I allow you five minutes; at the close of that time you will have chosen between restitution and ruin."

He remained apparently lost in thought. He was a big, stout man, and with one blow his powerful fist could easily have settled me. It was the last thing in his mind. At length he lifted his head,— "Rosalie!" he called.

At the word, a light foot pattered along a stone floor within, and in a moment a little woman stood in an arch raised by two steps from our own level. Carrying a candle, she descended and tripped toward him. She was not pretty, but sprightly and keen, as the perpetual attrition of life must needs make her, and wore the everlasting grisette costume, which displays the neatest of ankles, and whose cap is more becoming than wreaths of garden millinery. I am too minute, I see, but it is second nature. The two commenced a vigorous whispering amid sundry gestures and glances. Suddenly the woman turned, and, laying the prettiest of little hands on my sleeve, said, with a winning smile,—

"Is it a crime of *lèse-majesté*?"

This was a new idea, but might be useful.

"Not yet," I said; "two minutes more, and I will not answer for the consequence.'

Other whispers ensued.

"Monsieur," said the man, leaning on one arm over the counter, and looking up in my face, with the most engaging frankness,— "it is true that I have such a diamond; but it is not mine. It is left with me to be delivered to the Baron Stahl, who comes as an agent from his court for its purchase."

"Yes,— I know."

"He was to have paid me half a million francs,— not half its worth,— in trust for the person who left it, who is not M. Arthur Ulster, but Mme. de St. Cyr."

Madame de St. Cyr! How under the sun— No,— it could not be possible. The case stood as it stood before. The rogue was in deeper water than I had

thought; he had merely employed Mme. de St. Cyr. I ran this over in my mind, while I said, "Yes."

"Now, sir," I continued, "you will state the terms of this transaction."

"With pleasure. For my trouble I was myself to receive patronage and five thousand francs. The Baron is to be here directly, on other and public business. Reine du ciel, Monsieur! how shall I meet him?"

"He is powerless in Paris; your fear is idle."

"True. There were no other terms."

"Nor papers?"

"The lady thought it safest to be without them. She took merely my receipt, which the Baron Stahl will bring to me from her before receiving this."

"I will trouble you for it now."

He bowed and shuffled away. At a glance from me, the gendarme slipped to the rear of the building, where three others were stationed at the two exits in that direction, to caution them of the critical moment, and returned. Ten minutes passed,— the merchant did not appear. If, after all, he had made off with it! There had been the click of a bolt, the half-stifled rattle of arms, as if a door had been opened and rapidly closed again, but nothing more.

"I will see what detains my friend," said Mademoiselle, the little woman.

We suffered her to withdraw. In a moment more a quick expostulation was to be heard.

"They are there, the gendarmes, my little one! I should have run, but they caught me, the villains! and replaced me in the house. Oh, sacre!"— and rolling this word between his teeth, he came down and laid a little box on the counter. I opened it. There was within a large, glittering, curiously cut piece of glass. I threw it aside.

"The diamond!" I exclaimed.

"Monsieur had it," he replied, stooping to pick up the glass with every appearance of surprise and care.

"Do you mean to say you endeavored to escape with that bawble? Produce the diamond instantly, or you shall hang as high as Haman!" I roared.

Whether he knew the individual in question or not, the threat was efficient; he trembled and hesitated, and finally drew the identical shagreen case from his bosom.

"I but jested," he said. "Monsieur will witness that I relinquish it with reluctance."

"I will witness that you receive stolen goods!" I cried, in wrath.

He placed it in my hands.

"Oh!" he groaned, from the bottom of his heart, hanging his head, and laying both hands on the counter before him,— "it pains, it grieves me to part with it!"

"And the chain," I said.

"Monsieur did not demand that!"

"I demand it now."

In a moment, the chain also was given me.

"And now will Monsieur do me a favor? Will he inform me by what means he ascertained these facts?"

I glanced at the garçon, who had probably supplied himself with his masters finery illicitly;— he was the means;— we have some generosity;— I thought I should prefer doing him the favor, and declined.

I unclasped the shagreen case; the sergent-de-ville and the gendarme stole up and looked over my shoulder; the garcon drew near with round eyes; the little woman peeped across; the merchant, with tears streaming over his face, gazed as if it had been a loadstone; finally, I looked myself. There it lay, the glowing, resplendent thing! flashing in affluence of splendor, throbbing and palpitant with life, drawing all the light from the little woman's candle, from the sparkling armor around, from the steel barbs, and the distant lantern, into its bosom. It was scarcely so large as I had expected to see it, but more brilliant than anything I could conceive of. I do not believe there is another such in the world. One saw clearly that the Oriental superstition of the sex of stones was no fable; this was essentially the female of diamonds, the queen herself, the principle of life, the rejoicing receptive force. It was not radiant, as the term literally taken implies; it seemed rather to retain its wealth,— instead of emitting its glorious rays, to curl them back like the fringe of a madrepore, and lie there with redoubled quivering scintillations, a mass of white magnificence, not prismatic, but a vast milky lustre. I closed the case; on reopening it, I could scarcely believe that the beautiful sleepless eye would again flash upon me. I did not comprehend how it could afford such perpetual richness, such sheets of lustre.

At last we compelled ourselves to be satisfied. I left the shop, dismissed my attendants, and, fresh from the contemplation of this miracle, again trod the dirty, reeking streets, crossed the bridge, with its lights, its warehouses midway, its living torrents who poured on unconscious of the beauty within their reach. The thought of their ignorance of the treasure, not a dozen yards distant, has often made me question if we all are not equally unaware of other and greater processes of life, of more perfect, sublimed and, as it were, spiritual crystallizations going on invisibly about us. But had these been told of the thing clutched in the hand of a passer, how many of them would have know where to turn? and we,— are we any better?

FOR a few days I carried the diamond about my person, and did not mention its recovery even to my valet, who knew that I sought it, but communicated only with the Marquis of G., who replied, that he would be in Paris on a certain day, when I could safely deliver it to him.

It was now generally rumored that the neighboring government was about to send us the Baron Stahl, ambassador concerning arrangements for a loan to maintain the sinking monarchy in supremacy at Paris, the usual synecdoche for France.

The weather being fine, I proceeded to call on Mme. de St. Cyr. She received me in her boudoir, and on my way thither I could not but observe the perfect quiet and cloistered seclusion that prevaded the whole house,— the house itself seeming only an adjunct of the still and sunny garden, of which one caught a glimpse through the long open hall— windows beyond. This boudoir did not differ from others to which I have been admitted: the same delicate shades; all the dainty appliances of Art for beauty; the lavish profusion of bijouterie; and the usual statuettes of innocence, to indicate, perhaps, the presence of that commodity which might not be guessed at otherwise; and burning in a silver cup, a rich perfume loaded the air with voluptuous sweetness. Through a half-open door an inner boudoir was to be seen, which must have been Delphine's; it looked like her; the prevailing hue was a soft purple, or gray; a prie-dieu, a bookshelf, and desk, of a dark West Indian wood, were just visible. There was but one picture,— a sad-eyed, beautiful Fate. It was the type of her nation. I think she worshipped it. And how apt is misfortune to degenerate into Fate!— not that the girl had ever experienced the former, but, dissatisfied with life, and seeing no outlet, she accepted it stoically and waited till it should be over. She needed to be aroused;— the station of an ambassadrice, which I desired for her, might kindle the spark. There were no flowers, no perfumes, no busts, in this ascetic place. Delphine herself, in some faint rosy gauze, her fair hair streaming round her, as she lay on a white-draped couch, half-risen on one arm, while she read the morning's feuilleton, was the most perfect statuary of which a room could boast,— illumined, as I saw her, by the gay beams that entered at the loftily-arched window, broken only by the flickering of the vine-leaves that clustered the curiously-latticed panes without. She resembled in kind a Nymph, just bursting from the sea; so Pallas might have posed for Aphrodite. Madame de St. Cyr received me with empressement, and, so doing, closed the door of this shrine. We spoke of various things,— of the court, the theatre, the weather, the world,— skating lightly round the slender edges of her secret, till finally she invited me to lunch with her in the garden. Here, on a rustic table, stood wine and a few delicacies,— while, by extending a hand, we could grasp the hanging pears and nectarines, still warm to the lip and luscious with sunshine, as we

disputed possession with the envious wasp who had established a priority of claim.

"It is to be hoped," I said, sipping the Haut-Brion, whose fine and brittle smack contrasted rarely with the delicious juiciness of the fruit, "that you have laid in a supply of this treasure that neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, before parting with that little gem in the Gironde."

"Ah? You know, then, that I have sold it?"

"Yes," I replied. "I have the pleasure of Mr. Ulster's acquaintance."

"He arranged the terms for me," she said, with restraint,— adding, "I could almost wish now that it had not been."

This was probably true; for the sum which she hoped to receive from Ulster for standing sponsor to his jewel was possibly equal to the price of her vineyard.

"It was indispensable at the time, this sale; I thought best to hazard it on one more season.— If, after such advantages, Delphine will not marry, why— it remains to retire into the country and end our days with the barbarians!" she continued, shrugging her shoulders; "I have a house there."

"But you will not be obliged to throw us all into despair by such a step now," I replied.

She looked quickly, as if to see how nearly I had approached her citadel,— then, finding in my face no expression but a complimentary one, "No," she said, "I hope that my affairs have brightened a little. One never knows what is in store."

Before long I had assured myself that Mme. de St. Cyr was not a party to the theft, but had merely been hired by Ulster, who, discovering the state of her affairs, had not, therefore, revealed his own,— and this without in the least implying any knowledge on my part of the transaction. Ulster must have seen the necessity of leaving the business in the hands of a competent person, and Mme. de St. Cyr's financial talent was patent. There were few ladies in Paris who would have rejected the opportunity. Of these things I felt a tolerable certainty.

"We throng with foreigners," said Madame, archly, as I reached this point. "Diplomates, too. The Baron Stahl arrives in a day."

"I have heard," I responded. "You are acquainted?"

"Alas! no," she said. "I knew his father well, though he himself is not young. Indeed, the families thought once of intermarriage. But nothing has been said on the subject for many years. His Excellency, I hear, will strengthen himself at home by an alliance with the young Countess, the natural daughter of the Emperor."

"He surely will never be so imprudent as to rivet his chain by such a link!"

"It is impossible to compute the dice in those despotic countries," she rejoined,— which was pretty well, considering the freedom enjoyed by France at that period.

"It may be," I suggested, "that the Baron hopes to open this delicate subject with you yourself, Madame."

"It is unlikely," she said, sighing. "And for Delphine, should I tell her his excellency preferred scarlet, she would infallibly wear blue. Imagine her, Monsieur, in fine scarlet, with a scarf of gold gauze, and rustling grasses in that unruly gold hair of hers! She would be divine!"

The maternal instinct as we have it here at Paris confounds me. I do not comprehend it. Here was a mother who did not particularly love her child, who would not be inconsolable at her loss, would not ruin her own complexion by care of her during illness, would send her through fire and water and every torture to secure or maintain a desirable rank, who yet would entangle herself deeply in intrigue, would not hesitate to tarnish her own reputation, and would, in fact, raise heaven and earth to— endow this child with a brilliant match. And Mme. de St. Cyr seemed to regard Delphine, still further, as a cool matter of Art.

These little confidences, moreover, are provoking. They put you yourself so entirely out of the question.

"Mlle. de St. Cyr's beauty is peerless," I said, slightly chagrined, and at a loss. "If hearts were trumps, instead of diamonds!"

"We are poor," resumed Madame, pathetically. "Delphine is not an heiress. Delphine is proud. She will not stoop to charm. Her coquetry is that of an Amazon. Her kisses are arrows. She is Medusa!" And Madame, her mother, shivered.

Here, with her hair knotted up and secured by a tiny dagger, her gauzy drapery gathered in her arm, Delphine floated down the green alley toward us, as if in a rosy cloud. But this soft aspect never could have been more widely contradicted than by the stony repose and cutting calm of her beautiful face.

"The Marquis of G.," said her mother, "he also arrives ambassador. Has he talent? Is he brilliant? Wealthy, of course,— but gauche?"

Therewith I sketched for them the Marquis and his surroundings.

"It is charming," said Madame. "Delphine, do you attend?"

"And why?" asked Delphine, half concealing a yawn with her dazzling hand. "It is wearisome; it matters not to me."

"But he will not go to marry himself in France," said her mother. "Oh, these English," she added, with a laugh, "yourself, Monsieur, being proof of it, will not mingle blood, lest the Channel should still flow between the little red globules! You will go? but to return shortly? You will dine with me soon? Au revoir!" and she gave me her hand graciously, while Delphine bowed as if I were already gone, threw herself into a garden-chair, and commenced pouring the wine on a stone for a little tame snake which came out and lapped it.

Such women as Mme. de St. Cyr have a species of magnetism about them. It is difficult to retain one's self-respect before them,— for no other reason than

that one is, at the moment, absorbed into their individuality, and thinks and acts with them. Delphine must have had a strong will, and perpetual antagonism did not weaken it. As for me, Madame had, doubtless, reasons of her own for tearing aside these customary bands of reserve— reasons which, if you do not perceive, I shall not enumerate.

iii

"HAVE YOU MET WITH anything further in your search, sir?" asked my valet next morning.

"Oh, yes, Hay," I returned, in a very good humor,— "with great success. You have assisted me so much, that I am sure I owe it to you to say that I have found the diamond."

"Indeed, sir, you are very kind. I have been interested, but my assistance is not worth mentioning. I thought likely it might be, you appeared so quiet."— The cunning dog!— "How did you find it, sir, may I ask?"

I briefly related the leading facts, since he had been aware of the progress of the case to that point,— without, however, mentioning Mme. de St. Cyr's name.

"And Monsieur did not inform us!" a French valet would have cried.

"You were prudent not to mention it, sir," said Hay. "These walls must have better ears than ordinary; for a family has moved in on the first floor recently, whose actions are extremely suspicious. But is this precious affair to be seen?"

I took it from an inner pocket and displayed it, having discarded the shagreen case as inconvenient.

"His Excellency must return as he came," said I.

Hay's eyes sparkled.

"And do you carry it there, sir?" he asked, with surprise, as I restored it to my waistcoat-pocket.

"I shall take it to the bank," I said. "I do not like the responsibility."

"It is very unsafe," was the warning of this cautious fellow. "Why, sir! any of these swells, these pickpockets, might meet you, run against you,— so!" said Hay, suiting the action to the word, and, with the little sharp knife concealed in just such a ring as this I wear, give a light tap, and there's a slit in your vest sir, but no diamond!"— and instantly resuming his former respectful deportment, Hay handed me my gloves and stick, and smoothed my hat.

"Nonsense!" I replied, drawing on the gloves, "I should like to see the man who could be too quick for me. Any news from India, Hay?"

"None of consequence, sir. The indigo crop is said to have failed which advances the figure of that on hand, so that one or two fortunes will be made to-day. Your hat, sir?— your lunettes? Here they are, sir."

"Good morning, Hay."

"Good morning, sir."

I descended the stairs, buttoning my gloves, paused a moment at the door to look about, and proceeded down the street, which was not more than usually thronged. At the bank I paused to assure myself that the diamond was safe. My fingers caught in a singular slit. I started. As Hay had prophesied there was a fine longitudinal cut in my waistcoat, but the pocket was empty. My God! the thing was gone. I never can forget the blank nihility of all existence that dreadful moment when I stood fumbling for what was not. Calm as I sit here and tell of it, I vow to you a shiver courses through me at the very thought. I had circumvented Stahl only to destroy myself. The diamond was lost again. My mind flew like lightning over every chance, and a thousand started up like steel spikes to snatch the bolt. For a moment I was stunned, but, never being very subject to despair, on my recovery, which was almost at once, took every measure that could be devised. Who had touched me? Whom had I met? Through what streets had I come? In ten minutes the Prefect had the matter in hand. My injunctions were strict privacy. I sincerely hoped the mishap would not reach England; and if the diamond were not recovered before the Marquis of G. arrived,— why, there was the Seine. It is all very well to talk,— yet suicide is so French an affair, that an Englishman does not take to it naturally, and, except in November, the Seine is too cold and damp for comfort, but during that month I suppose it does not greatly differ in these respects from our own atmosphere.

A preternatural activity now possessed me. I slept none, ate little, worked immoderately. I spared no efforts, for everything was at stake. In the midst of all, G. arrived. Hay also exerted himself to the utmost; I promised him a hundred pounds, if I found it. He never told me that he said how it would be, never intruded the state of the market, never resented my irritating conduct, but watched me with narrow yet kind solicitude, and frequently offered valuable suggestions, which, however, as everything else did, led to nothing. I did not call on G., but in a week or so his card was brought up one morning to me. "Deny me," I groaned. It yet wanted a week of the day on which I had promised to deliver him the diamond Meanwhile the Baron Stahl had reached Paris, but he still remained in private,— few had seen him.

The police were forever on the wrong track. Today they stopped the old Comptesse du Quesne and her jewels, at the Barriere; to-morrow, with their long needles, they riddled a package of lace destined for the Duchess of X. herself; the Secret Service was doubled; and to crown all, a splendid new star of the testy Prince de Ligne was examined and proclaimed to be paste,— the Prince swearing vengeance, if he could discover the cause,— while half Paris must have been under arrest. My own hotel was ransacked thoroughly,— Hay begging that his traps might be included,— but nothing resulted, and I expected nothing, for, of course, I could swear that the stone was in my pocket when I

stepped into the street. I confess I never was nearer madness,— every word and gesture stung me like asps,— I walked on burning coals. Enduring all this torment, I must yet meet my daily comrades, eat ices at Tortoni's, stroll on the Boulevards, call on my acquaintance, with the same equanimity as before. I believe I was equal to it. Only by contrast with that blessed time when Ulster and diamonds were unknown, could I imagine my past happiness, my present wretchedness. Rather than suffer it again, I would be stretched on the rack till ever! bone in my skin were broken. I cursed Mr. Arthur Ulster every hour in the day; myself, as well; and even now the word diamond sends a cold blast to my heart. I often met my friend the marchand des armures. It was his turn to triumph; I fancied there must be a hang-dog kind of air about me, as about every sharp man who has been outwitted. It wanted finally but two days of that on which I was to deliver the diamond.

One midnight, armed with a dark lantern and a cloak, I was traversing the streets alone,— unsuccessful, as usual, just now solitary, and almost in despair. As I turned a corner, two men were but scarcely visible a step before me. It was a badly-lighted part of the town. Unseen and noiseless I followed. They spoke in low tones,— almost whispers; or rather, one spoke,— the other seemed to nod assent.

"On the day but one after to-morrow," I heard spoken in English. Great Heavens! was it possible? had I arrived at a clew? That was the day of days for me. "You have given it, you say, in this billet,— I wish to be exact, you see," continued the voice,— "to prevent detection, you gave it, ten minutes after it came into your hands, to the butler of Madame," (here the speaker stumbled on the rough pavement, and I lost the name,) "who," he continued, "will put it in the—" (a second stumble acted like a hiccough) "cellar."

"Wine-cellar," I thought; "and what then?"

"In the—" A third stumble was followed by a round German oath. How easy it is for me now to fill up the little blanks which that unhappy pavement caused!

"You share your receipts with this butler. On the day I obtain it," he added, and I now perceived his foreign accent, "I hand you one hundred thousand francs; afterward, monthly payments till you have received the stipulated sum. But how will this butler know me, in season to prevent a mistake? Hem!— he might give it to the other!"

My hearing had been trained to such a degree that I would have promised to catch any given dialogue of the spirits themselves, but the whisper that answered him eluded me. I caught nothing but a faint sibillation. "Your ring?" was the rejoinder. "He shall be instructed to recognize it? Very well. It is too large,— no, that will do, it fits the first finger. There is nothing more. I am under infinite obligations, sir; they shall be remembered. *Adieu*!"

The two parted; which should I pursue? In desperation I turned my lantern upon one, and illumined a face fresh with color, whose black eyes sparkled askance after the retreating figure, under straight black brows. In a moment more he was lost in a false cul-de-sac, and I found it impossible to trace the other.

I was scarcely better off than before; but it seemed to me that I had obtained something, and that now it was wisest to work this vein. "The butler of Madame— ." There were hundreds of thousands of Madames in town. I might call on all, and he as old as the Wandering Jew at the last call. The cellar. Wine-cellar, of course,— that came by a natural connection with butler,— but whose? There was one under my own abode; certainly I would explore it. Meanwhile, let us see the entertainments for Wednesday. The Prefect had a list of these. For some I found I had cards; I determined to allot a fraction of time to as many as possible; my friends in the Secret Service would divide the labor. Among others, Madame de St. Cyr gave a dinner, and, as she had been in the affair, I determined not to neglect her on this occasion, although having no definite idea of what had been, or plan of what should be done. I decided not to speak of this occurrence to Hay, since it might only bring him off some trail that he had struck.

Having been provided with keys, early on the following evening I entered the wine-cellar, and, concealed in an empty cask that would have held a dozen of me, waited for something to turn up. Really, when I think of myself, a diplomate, a courtier, a man-about-town, curled in a dusty, musty wine-barrel, I am moved with vexation and laughter. Nothing, however, turned up,— and at length I retired baffled. The next night came,— no news, no identification of my black-browed man, no success; but I felt certain that something must transpire in that cellar. I don't know why I had pitched upon that one in particular, but, at an earlier hour than on the previous night, I again donned the cask. A long time must have elapsed; dead silence filled the spacious vaults, except where now and then some Sillery cracked the air with a quick explosion, or some newer wine bubbled round the bung of its barrel with a faint effervescence. I had no intention of leaving this place till morning, but it suddenly appeared like the most woeful waste of time. The master of this tremendous affair should be abroad and active; who knew what his keen eyes might detect; what loss his absence might occasion in this nick of time? And here he was, shut up and locked in a wine-cellar! I began to be very nervous; I had already, with aid, searched every crevice of the cellar; and now I thought it would be some consolation to discover the thief, if I never regained the diamond. A distant clock tolled midnight. There was a faint noise,— a mouse?— no, it was too prolonged;— nor did it sound like the fiz of Champagne;— a great iron door was turning on its hinges; a man with a lantern was entering; another followed, and

another. They seated themselves. In a few moments, appearing one by one and at intervals, some thirty people were in the cellar. Were they all to share in the proceeds of the diamond? With what jaundiced eye we behold things! I myself saw all that was only through the lens of this diamond, of which not one of these men had ever heard. As the lantern threw its feeble glimmer on this group, and I surveyed them through my loophole, I thought I had never seen so wild and savage a picture, such enormous shadows, such bold outline, such a startling flash on the face of their leader, such light retreating up the threatening arches. More resolute brows, more determined words, more unshrinking hearts, I had not met. In fact, I found myself in the centre of a conspiracy, a society as vindictive as the Jacobins, as unknown and terrible as the Marianne of to-day. I was thunderstruck, too, at the countenances on which the light fell,— men the loyalest in estimation, ministers and senators, millionnaires who had no reason for discontent, dandies whose reason was supposed to be devoted to their tailors, poets and artists of generous aspiration and suspected tendencies, and one woman,— Delphine de St. Cyr. Their plans were brave, their determination lofty, their conclave serious and fine; yet as slowly they shut up their hopes and fears in the black masks, one man bent toward the lantern to adjust his. When he lifted his face before concealing it, I recognized him also. I had met him frequently at the Bureau of Police; he was, I believe, Secretary of the Secret Service.

I had no sympathy with these people. I had sufficient liberty myself, I was well enough satisfied with the world, I did not care to revolutionize France; but my heart rebelled at the mockery, as this traitor and spy, this creature of a system by which I gained my fame, showed his revolting face and veiled it again. And Delphine, what had she to do with them? One by one, as they entered, they withdrew, and I was left alone again. But all this was not my diamond.

Another hour elapsed. Again the door opened, and remained ajar. Some one entered, whom I could not see. There was a pause,— then a rustle,— the door creaked ever so little. "Art thou there?" lisped a shrill whisper,— a woman, as I could guess.

"My angel, it is I," was returned, a semitone lower. She approached, he advanced, and the consequence was a salute resonant as the smack with which a Dutch burggomaster may be supposed to set down his mug. I was prepared for anything. Ye gods! if it should be Delphine! But the base suspicion was birth-strangled as they spoke again. The conversation which now ensued between these lovers under difficulties was tender and affecting beyond expression. I had felt guilty enough when an unwilling auditor of the conspirators,— since, though one employs spies, one does not therefore act that part one's self, but on emergencies,— an unwillingness which would not, however, prevent my turning to advantage the information gained; but here, to listen to this rehearsal of

woes and blisses, this ah mon Fernand, this aria in an area, growing momently more fervent, was too much I overturned the cask, scrambled upon my feet, and fled from the cellar leaving the astounded lovers to follow, while, agreeably to my instincts and regardless of the diamond, I escaped the embarrassing predicament.

At length it grew to be noon of the appointed day. Nothing had transpired; all our labor was idle. I felt, nevertheless, more buoyant than usual,— whether because I was now to put my fate to the test, or that today was the one of which my black-browed man had spoken, and I therefore entertained a presentiment of good fortune, I cannot say. But when, in unexceptionable toilet, I stood on Mme. de St. Cyr's steps, my heart sunk. G. was doubtless already within, and I thought of the marchand des armures' exclamation, "Queen of Heaven, Monsieur! how shall I meet him!" I was plunged at once into the profoundest gloom. Why had I undertaken the business at all? This interference, this good-humor, this readiness to oblige,— it would ruin me yet! I forswore it, as Falstaff forswore honor. Why needed I to meddle in the melee? Why— But I was no catechumen. Questions were useless now. My emotions are not chronicled on my face, I flatter myself; and with my usual repose I saluted our hostess. Greeting G. without any allusion to the diamond, the absence of which allusion he received as a point of etiquette, I was conversing with Mrs. Leigh, when the Baron Stahl was announced. I turned to look at his Excellency. A glance electrified me. There was my dark-browed man of the midnight streets. It must, then, have been concerning the diamond that I had heard him speak. His countenance, his eager glittering eye, told that to-day was as eventful to him as to me. If he were here, I could well afford to be. As he addressed me in English, my certainty was confirmed; and the instant in which I observed the ring, gaudy and coarse, upon his finger, made confirmation doubly sure. I own I was surprised that anything could induce the Baron to wear such an ornament. Here he was actually risking his reputation as a man of taste, as an exquisite, a leader of haut ton, a gentleman, by the detestable vulgarity of this ring. But why do I speak so of the trinket? Do I not owe it a thrill of as fine joy as I ever knew? Faith! it was not unfamiliar to me. It had been a daily sight for years. In meeting the Baron Stahl I had found the diamond.

The Baron Stahl was then, the thief? Not at all. My valet, as of course you have been all along aware, was the thief.

My valet, moreover, was my instructor; he taught me not again to scour Cathay for what might be lying under my hand at home. Nor have I since been so acute as to overreach myself. Yet I can explain such intolerable stupidity only by remembering that when one has been in the habit of pointing his telescope at the stars, he is not apt to turn it upon pebbles at his feet.

The Marquis of G. took down Mme. de St. Cyr; Stahl preceded me, with Delphine. As we sat at table, G. was at the right, I at the left of our hostess Next G. sat Delphine; below her, the Baron; so that we were nearly vis-à-vis. I was now as fully convinced that Mme. de St. Cyr's cellar was the one, as the day before I had been that the other was; I longed to reach it. Hay had given the stone to a butler— doubtless this— the moment of its theft; but, not being aware of Mme. de St. Cyr's previous share in the adventure, had probably not afforded her another. And thus I concluded her to be ignorant of the game we were about to play; and I imagined, with the interest that one carries into a romance, the little preliminary scene between the Baron and Madame that must have already taken place, being charmed by the cheerfulness with which she endured the loss of the promised reward.

As the Baron entered the dining-room, I saw him withdraw his glove, and move the jewelled hand across his hair while passing the solemn butler, who gave it a quick recognition;— the next moment we were seated. There were only wines on the table, clustered around a central ornament,— a bunch of tall silver rushes and flagleaves, on whose airy tip danced fleurs-de-lis of frosted silver, a design of Delphine's,— the dishes being on sidetables, from which the guests were served as they signified their choice of the variety on their cards. Our number not being large, and the custom so informal, rendered it pleasant.

I had just finished my oysters and was pouring out a glass of Chablis, when another plate was set before the Baron.

"His Excellency has no salt," murmured the butler,— at the same time placing one beside him. A glance, at entrance, had taught me that most of the service was uniform; this dainty little *saliere* I had noticed on the buffet, solitary, and unlike the others. What a fool had I been! Those gaps in the Baron's remarks caused by the paving-stones, how easily were they to be supplied!

"Madame?"

Madame de St. Cyr.

"The cellar?"

A salt-cellar.

How quick the flash that enlightened me while I surveyed the *saliere*!

"It is exquisite! Am I never to sit at your table but some new device charms me?" I exclaimed. "Is it your design, Mademoiselle?" I said, turning to Delphine.

Delphine, who had been ice to all the Baron's advances, only curled her lip. "*Des babioles*!" she said.

"Yes, indeed!" cried Mme. de St. Cyr, extending her hand for it. "But none the less her taste. Is it not a fairy thing? A Cellini! Observe this curve, these lines! but one man could have drawn them!"— and she held it for our scrutiny. It was a tiny hand and arm of ivory, parting the foam of a wave and holding a golden shell, in which the salt seemed to have crusted itself as if in some secretest

ocean-hollow. I looked at the Baron a moment; his eyes were fastened upon the saliere, and all the color had forsaken his cheeks,— his face counted his years. The diamond was in that little shell. But how to obtain it? I had no novice to deal with; nothing but finesse would answer.

"Permit me to examine it?" I said. She passed it to her left hand for me to take. The butler made a step forward.

"Meanwhile, Madame," said the Baron, smiling, "I have no salt."

The instinct of hospitality prevailed;— she was about to return it. Might I do an awkward thing? Unhesitatingly. Reversing my glass, I gave my arm a wider sweep than necessary, and, as it met her hand with violence, the saliere fell. Before it touched the floor I caught it. There was still a pinch of salt left,— nothing more.

"A thousand pardons!" I said, and restored it to the Baron.

His Excellency beheld it with dismay; it was rare to see him bend over and scrutinize it with starting eyes.

"Do you find there what Count Arnaldos begs in the song," asked Delphine,— "the secret of the sea, Monsieur?"

He handed it to the butler, observing, "I find here no—"

"Salt, Monsieur?" replied the man, who did not doubt but all had gone right, and replenished it.

Had one told me in the morning, that no intricate manoeuvres, but a simple blunder, would effect this, I might have met him in the Bois de Boulogne.

"We will not quarrel," said my neighbor, lightly, with reference to the popular superstition.

"Rather propitiate the offended deities by a crumb tossed over the shoulder," added I.

"Over the left?" asked the Baron, to intimate his knowledge of another idiom, together with a reproof for my gauchene.

"*A gauche,— quelquefois c'est justement a droit*, " I replied.

"Salt in any pottage," said Madame, a little uneasily, "is like surprise in an individual; it brings out the flavor of every ingredient, so my cook tells me."

"It is a preventive of palsy," I remarked, as the slight trembling of my adversary's finger caught my eye.

"And I have noticed that a taste for it is peculiar to those who trace their blood," continued Madame.

"Let us, therefore, elect a deputation to those mines near Cracow," said Delphine.

"To our cousins, the slaves there?" laughed her mother.

"I must vote to lay your bill on the table, Mademoiselle," I rejoined.

"But with a *boule blanche*, Monsieur?"

"As the salt has been laid on the floor," said the Baron.

Meanwhile, as this light skirmishing proceeded, my sleeve and Mme. de St. Cyr's dress were slightly powdered, but I had not seen the diamond. The Baron, bolder than I, looked under the table, but made no discovery. I was on the point of dropping my napkin to accomplish a similar movement when my accommodating neighbor dropped hers. To restore it, I stooped. There it lay, large and glowing, the Sea of Splendor, the Moon of Milk, the Torment of my Life, on the carpet, within half an inch of a lady's slipper Mademoiselle de St. Cyr's foot had prevented the Baron from seeing it; now it moved and unconsciously covered it. All was as I wished. I hastily restored the napkin, and looked steadily at Delphine,— so steadily, that she perceived some meaning, as she had already suspected a game. By my sign she understood me, pressed her foot upon the stone and drew it nearer. In France we do not remain at table until unfit for a lady's society,— we rise with them. Delphine needed to drop neither napkin nor handkerchief; she composedly stooped and picked up the stone, so quickly at no one saw what it was.

"And the diamond?" said the Baron to the butler, rapidly, as he passed.

"It was in the *saliere*," whispered the astonished creature.

iv

IN THE DRAWING-ROOM I sought the Marquis.

"To-day I was to surrender you your property," I said; "it is here."

"Do you know," he replied, "I thought I must have been mistaken?"

"Any of our volatile friends here might have been," I resumed; "for us it is impossible. Concerning this, when you return to France, I will relate the incidents; at present, there are those who will not hesitate to take life to obtain its possession. A conveyance leaves in twenty minutes; and if I owned the diamond, it should not leave me behind. Moreover, who knows what a day may bring forth? To-morrow there may be an émeute. Let me restore the thing as you withdraw."

The Marquis, who is not, after all, the Lion of England, pausing a moment to transmit my words from his ear to his brain, did not afterward delay to make inquiries or adieux, but went to seek Mme. de St. Cyr and wish her good-night, on his departure from Paris. As I awaited his return, which I knew would not be immediate, Delphine left the Baron and joined me.

"You beckoned me?" she asked.

"No, I did not."

"Nevertheless, I come by your desire, I am sure."

"Mademoiselle," I said, "I am not in the custom of doing favors; I have forsworn them. But before you return me my jewel, I risk my head and render one last one, and to you."

"Do not, Monsieur, at such price," she responded, with a slight mocking motion of her hand.

"Delphine! those resolves, last night, in the cellar, were daring, the were noble, yet they were useless."

She had not started, but a slight tremor ran over her person and vanished while I spoke.

"They will be allowed to proceed no farther,— the axe is sharpened; for the last man who adjusted his mask was a spy,— was the Secretary of the Secret Service."

Delphine could not have grown paler than was usual with her of late. She flashed her eye upon me.

"He was, it may be, Monsieur himself," she said.

"I do not claim the honor of that post."

"But you were there, nevertheless,— a spy!"

"Hush, Delphine! It would be absurd to quarrel. I was there for the recovery of this stone, having heard that it was in a cellar,— when, stupidly enough, I had insisted should be a wine-cellar."

"It was, then—"

"In a salt-cellar,— a blunder which, as you do not speak English, you cannot comprehend. I never mix with treason, and did not wish to assist at your pastimes. I speak now, that you may escape."

"If Monsieur betrays his friends, the police, why should I expect a kinder fate?"

"When I use the police, they are my servants, not my friends. I simply warn you, that, before sunrise, you will be safer travelling than sleeping,— safer next week in Vienna than in Paris."

"Thank you! And the intelligence is the price of the diamond? If I had not chanced to pick it up, my throat," and she clasped it with her fingers, "had been no slenderer than the others?"

"Delphine, will you remember, should you have occasion to do so in Vienna, that it is just possible for an Englishman to have affections, and sentiments, and, in fact, sensations? that, with him, friendship can be inviolate, and to betray it an impossibility? And even were it not, I, Mademoiselle have not the pleasure to be classed by you as a friend."

"You err. I esteem Monsieur highly."

I was impressed by her coolness.

"Let me see if you comprehend the matter," I demanded.

"Perfectly. The arrest will be used to-night, the guillotine tomorrow."

"You will take immediate measures for flight?"

"No,— I do not see that life has value. I shall be the debtor of him who takes it."

"A large debt. Delphine, I exact a promise of you. I do not care to have endangered myself for nothing. It is not worth while to make your mother unhappy. Life is not yours to throw away. I appeal to your magnanimity."

" 'Affections, sentiments, sensations!' " she quoted. "Your own danger for the affection,— it is an affair of the heart! Mme. de St. Cyr's unhappiness,— there is the sentiment. You are angry, Monsieur,— that must be the sensation."

"Delphine, I am waiting."

"Ah, well. You have mentioned Vienna,— and why? Liberals are countenanced there?"

"Not in the least. But Madame l'Ambassadrice will be countenanced.'

"I do not know her."

"We are not apt to know ourselves."

"Monsieur, how idle are these cross-purposes!" she said, folding her fan.

"Delphine," I continued, taking the fan, "tell me frankly which of these two men you prefer,— the Marquis or his Excellency."

"The Marquis? He is antiphlogistic,— he is ice. Why should I freeze myself? I am frozen now,— I need fire!"

Her eyes burned as she spoke, and a faint red flushed her cheek.

"Mademoiselle, you demonstrate to me that life has yet a value to you."

"I find no fire," she said, as the flush fell away.

"The Baron?"

"I do not affect him."

"You will conquer your prejudice in Vienna."

"I do not comprehend you, Monsieur;— you speak in riddles, which I do not like."

"I will speak plainer. But first let me ask you for the diamond."

"The diamond? It is yours? How am I certified of it? I find it on the floor; you say it was in my mother's *saliere*; it is her affair, not mine. No, Monsieur, I do not see that the thing is yours."

Certainly there was nothing to be done but to relate the story, which I did, carefully omitting the Baron's name. At its conclusion, she placed the prize in my hand.

"Pardon, Monsieur." she said; "without doubt you should receive it. And this agent of the government,— one could turn him like hot iron in this vice,— who was he?"

"The Baron Stahl."

All this time G. had been waiting on thorns, and, leaving her now, I approached him, displayed for an instant the treasure on my palm, and slipped it into his. It was done. I bade farewell to this Eye of Morning and Heart of Day, this thing that had caused me such pain and perplexity and pleasure, with less envy and more joy than I thought myself capable of. The relief and buoyancy

that seized me, as his hand closed upon it, I shall not attempt to portray. An abdicated king was not freer.

The Marquis departed, and I, wandering round the salon, was next stranded upon the Baron. He was yet hardly sure of himself. We talked indifferently for a few moments, and then I ventured on the great loan. He was, as became him, not communicative, but scarcely thought it would be arranged. I then spoke of Delphine.

"She is superb!" said the Baron, staring at her boldly.

She stood opposite, and, in her white attire on the background of the blue curtain, appeared like an impersonation of Greek genius relieved upon the blue of an Athenian heaven. Her severe and classic outline, her pallor, her downcast lids, her absorbed look, only heightened the resemblance. Her reverie seemed to end abruptly, the same red stained her cheek again, her lips curved in a proud smile, she raised her glowing eyes and observed us regarding her. At too great distance to hear our words, she quietly repaid our glances in the strength of her new decision, and then, turning, began to entertain those next her with an unwonted spirit.

"She has needed," I replied to the Baron, "but one thing,— to be aroused, to be kindled. See, it is done! I have thought that a life of cabinets and policy might achieve this, for her talent is second not even to her beauty."

"It is unhappy that both should be wasted," said the Baron. "She, of course, will never marry."

"Why not?"

"For various reasons."

"One?"

"She is poor."

"Which will not signify to your Excellency. Another?"

"She is too beautiful. One would fall in love with her. And to love one's own wife— it is ridiculous!"

"Who should know?" I asked.

"All the world would suspect and laugh."

"Let those laugh that win."

"No,— she would never do as a wife; but then as— "

"But then in France we do not insult hospitality!"

The Baron transferred his gaze to me for a moment, then tapped his snuff-box, and approached the circle round Delphine.

It was odd that we, the arch enemies of the hour, could speak without the intervention of seconds; but I hoped that the Baron's conversation might be diverting,— the Baron hoped that mine might be didactic.

They were very gay with Delphine. He leaned on the back of a chair and listened. One spoke of the new gallery of the Tuileries, and the five pavilions,— a remark which led us to architecture.

"We all build our own houses," said Delphine, at last, "and then complain that they cramp us here, and the wind blows in there, while the fault is not in the order, but in us, who increase here and shrink there without reason."

"You speak in metaphors," said the Baron.

"Precisely. A truth is often more visible veiled than nude."

"We should soon exhaust the orders," I interposed; "for who builds like his neighbor?"

"Slight variations, Monsieur! Though we take such pains to conceal the style, it is not difficult to tell the order of architecture chosen by the builders in this room. My mother, for instance— you perceive that her pavilion would be the florid Gothic."

"Mademoiselle's is the Doric," I said.

"Has been," she murmured, with a quick glance.

"And mine, Mademoiselle?" asked the Baron, indifferently.

"Ah, Monsieur," she returned, looking serenely upon him, "when one has all the winning cards in hand and yet loses the stake, we allot him un pavillon chinois."— which was the polite way of dubbing him Court Fool.

The Baron's eyes fell. Vexation and alarm were visible on his contracted brow. He stood in meditation for some time. It must have been evident to him that Delphine knew of the recent occurrences,— that here in Paris she could denounce him as the agent of a felony, the participant of a theft. What might prevent it? Plainly but one thing: no woman would denounce her husband. He had scarcely contemplated this step on arrival.

The guests were again scattered in groups round the room. I examined an engraving on an adjacent table. Delphine reclined as lazily in a *fauteuil* as if her life did not hang in the balance. The Baron drew near.

"Mademoiselle," said he, "you allotted me just now a cap and bells. If two should wear it?— if I should invite another into my pavillon chinois?— if I should propose to complete an alliance, desired by my father, with the ancient family of St. Cyr?— if, in short, Mademoiselle, I should request you to become my wife?"

"*Eh, bien*, Monsieur,— and if you should?" I heard her coolly reply.

But it was no longer any business of mine. I rose and sought Mme. de St. Cyr, who, I thought, was slightly uneasy, perceiving some mystery to be afloat. After a few words, I retired.

Archimedes, as perhaps you have never heard, needed only a lever to move the world. Such a lever I had put into the hands of Delphine, with which she might move, not indeed the grand globe, with its multiplied attractions,

relations, and affinities, but the lesser world of circumstances, of friends and enemies, the circle of hopes, fears, ambitions. There is no woman, as I believe, but could have used it.

v

THE NEXT DAY was scarcely so quiet in the city as usual. The great loan had not been negotiated. Both the Baron Stahl and the English minister had left Paris,— and there was a coup d'état.

But the Baron did not travel alone. There had been a ceremony at midnight in the Church of St. Sulpice, and her excellency the Baroness Stahl, *née* de St. Cyr, accompanied him.

It is a good many years since. I have seen the diamond in the Duchess of X.'s coronet, once, when a young queen put on her royalty,— but I have never seen Delphine. The Marquis begged me to retain the chain, and I gave myself the pleasure of presenting it, through her mother, to the Baroness Stahl. I hear, that, whenever she desires to effect any cherished object which the Baron opposes, she has only to wear this chain, and effect it. It appears to possess a magical power, and its potent spell enslaves the Baron as the lamp and ring of Eastern tales enslaved the Afrites. The life she leads has aroused her. She is no longer the impassive Silence; she has found her fire. I hear of her as the charm of a brilliant court, as the soul of a nation of intrigue. Of her beauty one does not speak, but her talent is called prodigious. What impels me to ask the idle question, If it were well to save her life for this? Undoubtedly she fills a station which, in that empire, must be the summit of a woman's ambition. Delphine's Liberty was not a principle, but a dissatisfaction. The Baroness Stahl is vehement, is Imperialist, is successful. While she lives, it is on the top of the wave; when she dies— ah! what business has Death in such a world?

As I said, I have never seen Delphine since her marriage. The beautiful statuesque girl occupies a niche into which the blazing and magnificent intrigante cannot crowd. I do not wish to be disillusioned. She has read me a riddle,— Delphine is my Sphinx.

vi

AS FOR MR. HAY— I once said the Antipodes were tributary to me, not thinking that I should ever become tributary to the Antipodes. But such is the case; since, partly through my instrumentality, that enterprising individual has been located in their vicinity, where diamonds are not to be had for the asking, and the greatest rogue is not a Baron.

———————————

5: De Profundis

Robert Coutts Armour (as by Coutts Brisbane)

1874-1945

The Red Magazine, 15 Nov 1914

ABOUT THE JUNCTION YEARS of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, writers of popular fiction were seized by a prophetic fervour of destruction. I think the scientists pointed the way with interesting speculations about such matters as the heat-life of the sun; an eminent French astronomer amused his leisure with a romantic, dithyrambic story of the human race's end; various cheery people of varying authority decreed the speedy exhaustion of the world's coal-fields; and a host of sprightly authors made haste to entertain us with accounts of great cities overwhelmed, and our painful built-up civilisation obliterated by dire and diverse means. Man warred with Terra, Ocean sent forth her devouring monsters, nation hurtled against nation, the Yellow Peril loomed terribly, new diseases devastated the whole world, leaving only a few choice spirits to the task of re-peopling it— and whilst we enjoyed this feast of speculation, the forces prepared for our undoing were already marshalling. Whether any one of those ingenious scribes anticipated what came to pass I am unable to say, though, for irony's sake, I trust it was so, and that he has had ample, opportunity to revise his theories in the face of facts.

It may seem strange, but the calamity came without any warning, the few isolated incidents that might have served being misunderstood or disregarded. I myself was witness, after the event, of one such, in this wise.

I had been making holiday in Cornwall, tramping the coastline or occasionally diving inland, in an irresponsible fashion that would have shocked the laborious writer of itineraries. The weather was unusually fine and warm, so, having a large waterproof poncho, a bag of provisions, and a little kettle, I gipsied very happily 'til the eve of the inevitable day when I must return to London. Being by then wise in the selection of a camping ground, I got me at sundown to the sheltered side of a little wood, ate my supper, and, wrapped in my poncho, lay down to enjoy a pipe before going to sleep.

It was my last camp in England, perhaps the last I shall ever make there. At the present time, of course, such a proceeding would be stark lunacy even in the most desolate place. In front of me, looking inland, the ground rose with a gentle swell, dipped and rose again to the horizon quite bare of cover, there being no trees of any growth in that part of the West Country. They were all cut down long ago, I have been told, at the time when every Cornishman turned mole and burrowed after tin, and certainly they must have needed forests to prop the workings with which the country is honeycombed. In the field before

me was the shaft of one, ringed by a high stone wall and, with it for text, I speculated drowsily whether, in the far future, the wood underground would have rotted or turned to coal. Then an old horse came and looked over the hedge at me in a friendly way, and the tips of his ears twitching against the sky were my last waking memory.

I awoke once in the dark with a confused sound of hoofs and a long, wailing cry ringing in my cars, but all was quiet. I attributed the noise to a trick of dream, sniffed distastefully a faint, acrid odour drifting on the slow night breeze and, turning over, slept without stir 'til the sunlight crept into my eyes. Within half an hour I had sluiced myself at a runnel, eaten breakfast, and was ready to face the road, the rail, and the Big Smoke.

My direct route lay through the field in front and,climbing on the gate, I stood at gaze, seeing that close beside the walled shaft-mouth lay something which, I was absolutely certain, had not been there overnight— a large skeleton.

I noticed, too, that my friendly horse was nowhere in view, though the boundaries of the field were all in sight and, exceedingly puzzled, approached the bones. They were fresh, raw, though not a particle of meat adhered to them, and unmistakably equine. I went back to the gate, the only exit, examined the ground beyond it, which was soft enough to show a track, and made sure that the beast had not gone out that way.

The conclusion was obvious. Within a few hours a big, strong animal had been done to death, and clean picked! It was incredible, yet there was the skeleton, without a toothmark, still held together by its ligaments, and perfect as an anatomist could desire. I began to be a little afraid but, being of a fairly practical turn, set about searching after further facts, and ran against more incomprehensibility.

From the gory patch about the skeleton, to the wall around the shaft, ran two tracks, worn through the turf to bare earth, about four or five inches wide and as much apart, one of which continued in a red stain up the perpendicular face of the stones.

Now, I offer no excuse for my conduct in the face of the mystery. Certainly the wall was high, and had been effectively pointed no great while before, but I could easily have climbed it. Only— I didn't want to climb. Without weighing matters I concluded instantly that the power which could so deal with a horse might very easily treat me in like fashion, left the unhealthy precinct on tiptoe, and ran 'til I came to a cart-road. Decidedly the spirit of research was not in me that morning.

At the time I felt I was doing shamefully, but looking back I see that I acted with common-sense. Had I searched further I should have lost my life as vainly as one who throws himself to a school of sharks; yet my self-esteem barometer

went down and down, so I mentioned the phenomenon to no one, but got to town and to work once again, determined to forget an inexplicable incident.

In those days I had just entered on a series of experiments having for object the discovery of some volatile fuel to replace petrol, and my little laboratory contained so many samples of oils, tars, and essences that, despite ventilation, it usually smelt like the interior of a submarine. I suppose, strictly speaking, mine was a dangerous trade, and certainly the top floor of an old-fashioned office building in Fleet Street was scarcely a fitting place in which to distil inflammable liquids. But it happened that the den was my own, the property having belonged to my people for near a century and, with the near prospect of eviction when the ground lease expired, I didn't wish to squander money on other premises.

I had but few visitors and only one intimate friend, Henry Mayence, a short, broad, immensely strong man, devoted to motoring, and consequently keenly interested in my attempts to cheapen his pastime. He used to bring all kinds of absurdly unsuitable material, ranging from camphor to burgundy-pitch and palm oil, though apart from this foible he was entirely level-headed. I returned from Cornwall at the beginning of June; twelve days later— on Friday, the 13th, to be precise— I heard his familiar step on the landing, the heavy thump of something weighty banged on the floor, and opened to find him in the act of upending a large iron oil-drum which smelt vilely of crude petroleum.

"So you're back," he grunted. "That's a good job. Didn't want to lug this thing home again. Out of the way!"

He pushed past unceremoniously with the thing in his arms and, depositing it within with another crash, condescended to explain.

"Right stuff at last," he said. "Wales. They've struck it— regular lake. I've got an option. You try it. It's heavy, but—"

"But, confound you, I don't want a hogshead!" I objected. "It'll stink the place out. Phuff!" I had been at work all night, and so was irritable. "Why on earth couldn't you bring a little? A bottleful would have been enough."

He grinned placidly.

"Because this is going to be a big thing, sonny, and you'll need it all. Besides, what does another flavour matter among so many? Open the windows."

"And kill the sparrows? You'll jolly well have to take it away again! Hang it, man, I'll be run in for causing a nuisance!"

"All right," said he soothingly; "perhaps it is a bit too thick. Didn't notice it on the car. Horrid business, that of the policeman, Kingston way!"

"What business?" I asked. "I haven't been out yet."

"Devilish rummy! Found the poor beggar behind a hedge, uniform on— helmet, too. Beastly! And I may have spoken to him— been held up thereabouts more than once. Poor chap!"

"What are you gibbering about? Was he murdered?" I demanded irritably.

Mayence shivered.

"Ghastly, I tell you! Nothing but his clothes, only bones left inside 'em. Ugh!"

"What?" I shouted. "D'you mean to say— Why, down in Cornwall— "

And forthwith I told him briefly what I had seen.

"Same thing," he said, nodding emphatically. "A horse don't matter, but a man! And a lot of other people are missing, too. Wonder you didn't hear the boys yelling the specials outside."

"I did," said I. "But I'm so used to that, I didn't take notice. Hallo! There's another edition, or—"

We sprang together to the window opening streetwards and craned our necks.

Right opposite, building operations were in progress, and a great hole had been dug in the earth, from which, as we looked, the workmen came crowding and jostling, howling gigantically, in a frenzied hurry to reach the narrow door in the hoarding along the street front.

"Lord!" ejaculated Mayence. "What in thunder's up! Look at that chap!"

A man, who had, I suppose, been in the deepest part of the excavation, came clawing frantically up a ladder, reached the level, put his hands to his head with the gesture of one suddenly smitten to death, reeled, and fell backwards into the pit.

A cloud of dust flew up and hid everything for an instant; then something which looked exactly like a wave of treacle— a brownish-black, shiny, wet-looking, lapping tide— flooded up over the edge of the hole, and flowed out towards the men jammed in the doorway.

They must have felt its coming and redoubled their efforts. A section of the hoarding gave way, falling outwards on the front ranks of the swaying crowd that had collected instantaneously and, as they gave back, the fear-minded workmen charged forth, tripping, stumbling, and striking out fiercely at everything in their path, driven by blind, panic terror. Close on their heels through the gap, over the hoarding's top and through every crevice of the boards, came that amazing fluid mass.

Everybody shouted, abruptly everybody faced about, turning to fly, and I had an impression of the crowd as a heaving, whirling maelstrom, with pinky-red faces for bubbles and a tossing spray of straw hats adrift for foam. I saw a tall man— a Press photographer, I presume— struggle free and present his camera at the oncoming treacly tide, stagger, fall, and lie motionless.

Subconsciously I wondered if he had got his picture, and whether I should see it in the morrow's papers. The treacle swept on and over him— ay, and over many another. Men faltered and fell in rows, even as they fled. A tubby man, with flashing glasses that stayed miraculously firm on his nose, swarmed

halfway up a lamp-standard, lost his hold for no apparent reason, and fell, limp and lifeless.

The street within our view cleared, the din retreated a little, and I could hear Mayence.

"Alive!" he shouted "Alive! The stuff's alive, I tell you— alive!" He used language quite unprintable. "And deadly— look at that 'bus!"

It had been at a standstill, unable to move through the swift-gathered throng. Its top was crowded. The driver stretched a hand to put in the clutch, drew it back sharply, lifted it to his mouth, and sagged forward over his wheel.

"What is it? Great heavens, what is—"

Somebody sprang into the room behind us, and banged the door. It was Vidal, a quiet, little, oldish man who, in an office on the floor beneath, practised the nearly extinct art of wood-engraving for such scientific journals as needed clearly detailed pictures, instead of the cheaper dot and smudge variety. Usually he was staid and self-contained, but now, and little wonder, he was livid and shaking with terror.

"They're coming up!" he screamed. "Shut that window! We're done for! I saw 'em once before, but nothing like this!"

Mayence grabbed him by the shoulders and shook him roughly.

"What?" he shouted. "What the blazes is it?"

"Ants!" quavered Vidal. "Millions of trillions! They're stinging everyone to death; keep 'em out!"

It was well for us then that Mayence had piloted racing automobiles; a practice that breeds quick thinking. He didn't stop to question the truth of the statement, but shook his man a trifle harder.

"Will paraffin keep them off?" he demanded.

Vidal nodded.

"Perhaps," he said hoarsely.

"Lucky I brought a big 'un, then!" growled Mayence, and leapt at his oil-drum. "Rags, Tom, a brush, paper— anything! Bathe in it!"

In a twinkling he had the bung out and tipped a pool of thick, yellow, evil smelling, crude petroleum on the floor by the door, spreading it with his handkerchief over every crevice.

"Mother Partington, Atlantic Ocean!" he grunted, snatched a towel, and stuffed a soaked strip beneath the door. "Window, you cripples! Buck up!"

We worked like demons. As a motive-power there is nothing to excel fear; and yet though we wrought swiftly, smearing the sashes and every visible joint in our defences, the ants were already darkening the panes ere we had finished.

"Kill them! Quick!" shrieked Vidal suddenly, pointing. "There!"

From under the skirting-board a score of large ants, near an inch and a half long, came boldly at us, travelling rapidly, halted at the edge of the puddle in which we stood, and sped swiftly back again.

"Don't like it, by jingo!" Mayence shouted exultantly. "Magic circle, spread it out!"

It was done. Panting, soaked with oil and sweat, hardly able to breathe because of the stink, we stood up, saved; perhaps the sole surviving witnesses of that first outburst, since it would appear that parties of the ants invaded every building, slaying relentlessly every human being they encountered. Us they let alone after the first trial; and presently, when the panes cleared, being nearly suffocated, we ventured to open the window.

Speech became possible.

"Don't lean out!" Mayence warned me. "Some of the brutes might drop on you!"

Standing on a chair well withdrawn from the casement, I looked forth. Within my circumscribed view I could see the dead photographer and several of the others on the further side, the top of the 'bus with its lifeless load, and a taxicab wedged into a shop window, its engine still running, the driving wheels slithering and grinding on the pavement. At several open windows men hung or sprawled. The air reverberated with a vast noise; the voices of fearful thousands roaring from every point of the compass beat painfully on the ears; but silently, the cause of it, the river of ants, still flowed from the excavation, each yard of it an army, dividing into streams, which went their way west and east without pause.

"Jumping Jupiter!" exclaimed Mayence, mounting behind me. "It's unbelievable! It's— it's a hallucination."

"It isn't," said Vidal. "I saw something like it in Venezuela once, when I went with a collecting expedition. They kept on for a day and a night, and though they weren't so poisonous as these, everything had to get out of their way or perish. Perhaps they've come out in other places, too."

A duty we had neglected came to my mind, and I jumped from my chair and rushed to the phone.

"Exchange!" I yelled. "Are you there? Are you there?"

There was no answer, though I called again and again. My belated attempt at warning was useless.

"Death everywhere," murmured Vidal.

"Or else the gels have scooted," suggested Mayence. "Don't be too infernally gloomy."

"Perhaps it's the beginning of the end for the human race," persisted the little man.

"Rot!" cried Mayence. "It's horribly bad, of course, but that couldn't happen. A lot of damned insects!"

"And they'll soon be settled," said I. "Squirt acids or poisons on them, or—"

"Or set a dog at them," sneered Vidal. "D'you think they'd stand still and let you do it? Look at the pace they can go. And they've got brains, I'm certain. What if this has all been arranged? Why, I'll bet they're all over the town— other towns, too; perhaps other countries."

We cried out at this monstrous suggestion, yet— though, of course, we didn't know it at the time— he wasn't far out in his estimate of the abominations. He warmed to his dismal theme.

"Even if they're driven back underground for the moment, how are you going to keep them there. Nice job it'll be to make every house antproof. And walking about in armoured clothes, or soaked with anticide, will be pleasant, won't it?"

"But they die off or go to sleep in the winter, don't they?" I suggested.

"How d'you know this kind will? Anyhow, they've got lots of time before them. How many of us will live 'til the first frost? How about harvesting, and tending sheep and cattle? We'll all starve if we're not killed. It's a conquest, an arranged business, I tell you. Perhaps some of us will be kept as slaves. There are species who have others to wait on them—"

"Will you shut up?" roared Mayence. "We're in the devil's own pickle, without being driven daft by your maunderings! What d'you reckon we'd better do, Tom? Stay here 'til the siege is raised?"

"How about the river?" I asked hopefully. "The oil keeps the beasts off. If we soaked ourselves, we might get there all right and find a boat."

"Probably a few thousand others have found it already," he chuckled grimly; "and a few billions of our little friends appear to have gone in the same direction. It's risky every way."

We all stared gloomily at that ceaseless torrent of venomous life, pouring, pouring silently, swiftly, with an ordered purpose. Against uncountable myriads so devilishly endowed, what had man to oppose? I could think of no adequate defence.

"Perhaps you're right, Vidal," I said. "One hopes of course. But—"

"Have you got anything to eat or drink?" Mayence interrupted. "We must keep our pecker up."

"Biscuits, whisky, soda— that's all," said I, producing them. And we ate and drank unpleasantly, each mouthful being tainted with the all-pervading petroleum, then stared out of the window again.

"The noise is dying down, I think," said Vidal at length. "But what's that racket overhead?"

Mayence listened.

"Somebody breaking the law. An aeroplane coming— over there, see? By jove! It's the old training 'bus, the biplane at Hendon. What the dickens are they after?"

Moving quite slowly, the 'plane hove in sight, skimming dangerously near the housetops, one of the two men in her apparently searching the ground with field-glasses. Mayence snatched up the linen overall I wore when working, tied a sleeve to a walking stick, and thrust it outside, waving 'til the airman saw it, and, putting a big megaphone to his head, shouted something which was drowned by the rattle of the engine. Slowly the machine swung about over the pit, a small, dark object fell from it, and— "crash!" a mighty spout of dust flew up, concrete foundation walls and scaffold-poles crumbled and rocked, tinkling glass fell in showers. The man in the plane had dropped a bomb into the ants' portal.

With the explosion their columns broke, thinned, and vanished into doorways, the drains and crevices; in twenty seconds they were all under cover. The 'plane circled out of sight, returned, and this time we caught something of what the megaphone bawled to us: "...in a dozen places...going to shut 'em down...all right soon." We waved an answer, they shot away, and in a few minutes we heard the smack of another bomb, followed at intervals by others, each more distant.

"A dozen places!" exclaimed Vidal. "What did I say? It's an organised invasion. A fat lot of good those chaps have done. See!"

The side of the crater made by the explosion began to heave and crumble, a dark spot appeared and grew larger, and long before the sound of the last detonation came to us the ant river was flowing again, steadily as though it had never been so rudely interrupted.

Mayence mumbled disgustedly, and faced about. "Question is, what are we going to do? Stay and starve, or take the risk of going out?"

"They won't touch us," said I confidently.

"Don't be too sure. Some of them, maybe, will sacrifice themselves on the off-chance of getting a bite home. At all events, I'll go out first and reconnoitre." But at this Vidal and I protested, and in the end we drew lots. The short match fell to me, and I confess to feeling horribly uncomfortable, but I managed to conceal my feelings whilst I was smeared anew with the abominably smelling oil; my boots were soaked 'til they squelched at every step; face, hair, cap, and gloves, all were saturated, and Mayence finished me off by tying a dripping duster around my neck. "In case they drop on you from aloft," he explained. "Now you're all right. We'll get ready while you're gone."

I opened the door gingerly. At the edge of the landing was a group of ants, several score, big fellows, with their heads turned towards me; simultaneously, they darted forward, came almost to my feet— and retreated. Instinctively I squashed the hindmost. "All serene!" I cried. "They won't face it," and slithered

down the first flight to find another and larger vidette, which behaved exactly like the others. I had no more fear after that, but went on confidently as a medieval knight in armour of proof hewing his way through a mob of peasants.

On the first floor I peeped into the office of Wardell, an advertising agent, and saw what was left of him lying back in his chair, a half-open sample tin of insect killer on the floor beside him; evidently he had bethought him of this defence at the last moment. The ants were swarming all over him, and I turned away hastily, feeling very sick; it is a shocking thing to see a man you have known and swapped drinks with in process of disintegration. Yet the sight served to diminish the shock I received when I found the entry and the lower stairs completely choked with bodies. I went back and reported, and, since there was no other way, we at last let ourselves down by a rope from the window of Wardell's room, after lowering the precious oil-drum, now half empty, and set foot in a Fleet Street transmogrified to the semblance of a battlefield.

Perhaps a soldier hardened to slaughter could have supported the spectacle, but to us it was near overwhelming. Remember that the view from my office was circumscribed by projecting buildings on either side, and that the portion of street it commanded was abandoned at the first outrush, so that what we had seen before was as nothing compared with what confronted us.

Looking westward, the street was filled from side to side with a horrible barricade, vehicles of all sorts piled and wedged together in inextricable confusion, for a base; and over, under, between, shaken together and trembling to the throb of the engines still working beneath, were piled the dead.

From the accounts since collected it would seem that on this fatal day the ants emerged from the earth, not in a dozen, but in scores of places, from each of which they diverged on either hand, killing as they went, 'til they met the columns of their fellows, and so ringed Central London in a cordon of poison, whilst from other points within the circle other hordes spread devastatingly 'til hardly a nook or corner remained unvisited.

Of the millions of folks so surrounded, comparatively few escaped, and those, curiously enough, mainly by the underground railways, which were let alone for some time; but the majority of the people fled panic-stricken from one army only to encounter another, and most often met their fate struggling amidst maddened crowds.

Horror left us dumb for a little, then Mayence, hugging his oil-drum, turned towards Ludgate Circus, and we followed in silence. With us, on either hand, marched thousands of ants at a respectful distance, and so we came to Bridge Street, and the first survivor, a telephone linesman, slung in a travelling cradle from the cables crossing the road. Intent upon our steps, we were startled by his hoarse cry from aloft: "Hi mates!" he called.

"Can you let yourself down?" answered Mayence. "We've got stuff to keep them off. Come along."

The man became frantically busy with a coil of wire.

"Righto!" he yelled. "Just a minute."

There was a sudden commotion amongst our escort, a thin brown thread shot up the façade of the building directly below the poles supporting the telephone wires.

"They know!" exclaimed Vidal. "They're after him. Quick, man, or they'll get you yet."

Mayence stood ready with his oil, the linesman dropped the end of his cable almost to out feet, unbuckled the strap which held him in the cradle, wound his cap about the wire, gave one unearthly scream, and fell smashing to the pavement. I think he was dead before he reached the ground.

We trudged on towards the river without a word; pity, horror, terror, all capacity for emotion seemed numbed to exhaustion, and we moved mechanically. Blackfriars Bridge was choked by another dreadful barricade, the approaches to the stations were impassable. The river was dotted with people swimming or clinging to lifebuoys or fragments of wood, the barges anchored on the further side were hidden by men clustering like swarming bees, the outermost continually dragged down by others who struggled up from the water; the "President," the old Naval Volunteer training ship, lay low in the water, weighed down by the numbers aboard her, and dozens clung to her cables fore and aft. I saw one man maintaining possession of a packing-case, which barely supported him, with bloody knife; a dinghy drifted by, laden with women and one man, who threatened any who approached it with a revolver. As they neared the bridge the arch under which they must pass grew black, and though we shouted, the warning was unheard, or unheeded, the insect death rained down, the boat capsized, and we saw no more.

Nearly half an hour we stood there, hypnotised, the petroleum escaping from our saturated clothes and gathering in little pools around our feet, whilst the ants clustered thick in a semicircle behind and darted continually to and fro along the parapet in front, angry perhaps because we had so long escaped them. Then a river steamer without a living soul aboard, though her deck was piled, came in sight, her paddles revolving slowly, swinging uncertainly from side to side of the river, 'til she brought up with a crash on the piles of a wharf and began to settle down.

With the noise we awoke to a realisation of a new peril; London town was on fire. Heavy smoke clouds were drawing across the sun, rolling south-eastward before a rising breeze.

"Nobody to stop it," said I. "But at least some of those infernal things'll get roasted."

"They'll go underground 'til it's over," Vidal said.

"We'll go up with the first spark," said Mayence. "Can you swim?"

He shook his head.

"Not a stroke."

"And Tom is equal to about a hundred yards. We'll have to make a float of some kind and keep under water going through the bridges; we'll get below these for a start, anyhow. Come on."

With our abominable guard still in attendance we turned our backs on the river, and by great good fortune found the roadway underneath the railway viaduct passable, though we had to climb over many vehicles. The smoke grew even thicker, and we could scarce see our way, but it appeared noxious to the ants, who thinned away and had quite disappeared ere luck brought us to the end of a short street and a little wharf.

"Here we are," said Mayence. "And there are planks and rope. We'll make a raft of sorts. Hurry!"

Somehow, in no very workmanlike fashion to be sure, since we groped in pungent semi-darkness, we got our raft together and launched. It was high time; we were half suffocated, and the flames, spreading unchecked with frightful rapidity, roared near at hand as, sitting awash, we started on our voyage, Mayence, sitting aft, paddling with a short board 'til the mid stream caught us, and we were swept swiftly forward, unable to see more than a yard or two ahead.

Soon a dark mass loomed above us, the raft swerved, we shot through a bridge— Southwark— and never an ant materialised. Either we passed unseen or they had gone before the smother.

"Three more to pass, and we're all right," grunted Mayence.

"Look out! Shove off!" A barge drifting beam-on lay in our path. Vidal howled, thrust out a leg pushing with all his might. We bumped once, and went clear without receiving boarders. I needn't describe what we glimpsed in passing, nor what we presently saw as we circled in the swirl of the Cannon Street railway bridge; suffice it to say that many had sought refuge upon its floating fenders— in vain.

Below was a red flare of flaming warehouses belching showers of sparks, yet none reached us, and we whirled blindly on in the black, smothering smoke blanket, passed beneath London Bridge without seeing it, and narrowly missed running full tilt into an anchored boat, perilously laden with folks, who yelled in chorus as we rasped across their cable; two men with oars out tugged dementedly, another fool struck wildly with a boathook, smote his iron deep into one of our planks and nearly capsized the lot.

"Let go, you idiot!" roared Mayence, whilst the water licked their gunwale, and, fortunately for them, he obeyed, and we parted company, losing sight of them instantly.

Vidal levered the hook clear and crouched ready to fend off from what might come next. With ebb and current together the stream was a race, and we should have fared badly had we encountered anything moored; but our amazing good fortune held, and though we caught sight of many craft, and heard voices all about us, we kept clear of everything 'til, about the neighbourhood of Deptford, the smoke thinned and we could see our fellow-men once more.

Either margin of the river was lined with people standing in the water, knee-deep, waist-deep, up to the neck; beyond these a floating fringe, then boats and rafts, all loaded nearly to sinking; and the voice of their misery was a continuous giant groan, a deep, plaintive note of despair, such as I hope never to hear again. Of the people in boats around, none heeded us, except to curse when we fouled them; but after I had picked up the blade of a broken oar, we kept a better course, and had no more collisions.

"We must get as far down as we can before the tide turns," Mayence explained; and we paddled our best 'til in the broad reach a little below Greenwich, we met a flotilla of torpedo boats. Half dead with fatigue, blistered all over by the oil which had saved our lives at the expense of our skins, we were hauled aboard the first, and stowed in the narrow quarters below, already crowded with refugees, whilst the boats steamed into the smoky pall to rescue all they might, and when they were loaded, dropped down river and decanted us into the cruisers, battleships, and liners anchored about Tilbury.

All night the work went on, and all night and for many days thereafter London blazed unchecked. Of a forlorn hope of bluejackets who went ashore with the intention of blowing up buildings to stop its progress, only two returned, and by the end of a week a great part of the Empire city lay in ruins.

On the night of our rescue, our cruiser set out in company with a fleet of all kinds of vessels, and in the early morning we were landed at Yarmouth, which for the moment was out of the danger zone, and thence we went by train to Glasgow, where I had some friends. The journey took over two days, so you may guess the congestion and confusion that reigned everywhere. I believe that the Norfolk Broads, the Fen country, and many sheltered bays and estuaries grew populous, thousands of people returning to the primitive style of lake dwellings, and building themselves huts upon piles or rafts.

But the most part believed only in flight, and the roads were black with fugitive multitudes who could find no place on the overburdened railroads; if the ants had followed up their first onslaught with the speed of which they were capable, I think it probable that the whole island would have been depopulated.

Perhaps the burning of London disconcerted them, or they had the strategical sense to reduce the country in their rear before going further; at all events, they made no move northward for over a week, but during that time overran the country to the south of a line between the Thames and the Severn estuary, methodically slaughtering flocks, herds, and those unfortunates who had not escaped over the Channel or fortified themselves in some such fashion as we had done.

Then they flooded northward, but by that the country had been cleared before them, and at the Avon-Welland line they were brought to a full stop for a while. Every bridge was defended, and along the banks and in the gap about Naseby, where once a very different battle had been fought, hundreds of fire-engines pumping blazing petroleum went into action, and thousands of men fought right gallantly with hand-pumps and squirts. Surely it was the strangest battle that the world had seen, bloodless but deadly, so potent being the poison, that to be stung meant death before cautery or antidote could be used. For days it continued, the ants tunnelling beneath the rivers' beds at many points, emerging oftentimes amongst thickets or coverts far in the rear of the firing line, and there, ringed about by the reserves, to be driven to earth again.

Across the country from sea to sea was stretched a broad band of fire-scoured earth, miles wide, and by this frontier the invasion is for the moment stayed, at the price of constant, unremitting vigilance, though none knows what the future has in store. Even the most optimistic of our experts, Professor Guy Durham, is gloomy.

"Our real knowledge of the earth's crust is small," he remarks in his report "and a poor mile the limit of our shafts. What fissures, crevices, caverns, lie beneath us we know not at all, but it may very well be that, in the four thousand miles from surface to centre, many such occur. London, it is surmised, lies in part above a great subterranean lake, and it requires but a small effort to imagine such regions inhabited."

He goes on to details of our enemy's anatomy: *F. Horribilis*, as it has been dubbed, is in many respects entirely different from and vastly superior to its sun-loving brother, having a marvellously complex brain, excellent smelling apparatus, and, a somewhat unusual endowment for a subterranean creature, well developed eyes. In fact, the thing is altogether a super-ant, and he comes to a conclusion not hard to credit under the circumstances.

"I have no hesitation in announcing my conviction that *Horribilis* is an intellectual, a rational creature, able to plan, to reason, and, as we have so terribly experienced, to act in combination. I am of opinion that their aggression is a deliberate attack upon human supremacy, intolerable though such a suggestion may be to our self-satisfaction; but, taking into consideration their means of offence, their proved skill as miners, and the immense fecundity of

such allied species as we know, I am forced to the forlorn conclusion that mankind may, at no very distant date, be compelled to struggle hard for very existence. And, lest we grow over-confident in our present defences, I am bound to point out that, if analogy holds good, our feeble barriers of fire and water may presently be passed, if not underground, then by the path of the air. Both the male and female of the ant, at one period of their lives, are winged!"

6: The Vitagraphoscope

O. Henry

1862-1910

In: *Cabbages and Kings*, 1904

An "Anchuria" story

VAUDEVILLE is intrinsically episodic and discontinuous. Its audiences do not demand dénoûements. Sufficient unto each "turn" is the evil thereof. No one cares how many romances the singing comédienne may have had if she can capably sustain the limelight and a high note or two. The audiences reck not if the performing dogs get to the pound the moment they have jumped through their last hoop. They do not desire bulletins about the possible injuries received by the comic bicyclist who retires head-first from the stage in a crash of (property) china-ware. Neither do they consider that their seat coupons entitle them to be instructed whether or no there is a sentiment between the lady solo banjoist and the Irish monologist.

Therefore let us have no lifting of the curtain upon a tableau of the united lovers, backgrounded by defeated villainy and derogated by the comic, osculating maid and butler, thrown in as a sop to the Cerberi of the fifty-cent seats.

But our programme ends with a brief "turn" or two; and then to the exits. Whoever sits the show out may find, if he will, the slender thread that binds together, though ever so slightly, the story that, perhaps, only the Walrus will understand.

Extracts from a letter from the first vice-president of the Republic Insurance Company, of New York City, to Frank Goodwin, of Coralio, Republic of Anchuria.

My Dear Mr. Goodwin:—

Your communication per Messrs. Howland and Fourchet, of New Orleans, has reached us. Also their draft on N. Y. for $100,000, the amount abstracted from the funds of this company by the late J. Churchill Wahrfield, its former president.... The officers and directors unite in requesting me to express to you their sincere esteem and thanks for your prompt and much appreciated return of the entire missing sum within two weeks from the time of its disappearance.... Can assure you that the matter will not be allowed to receive the least publicity.... Regret exceedingly the distressing death of Mr. Wahrfield by his own hand, but... Congratulations on your marriage to Miss Wahrfield... many charms, winning manners, noble and womanly nature and envied position in the best metropolitan society...

Cordially yours,

Lucius E. Applegate,

First Vice-President

the Republic Insurance Company.

The Vitagraphoscope
(Moving Pictures)
The Last Sausage

SCENE—*An Artist's Studio.* The artist, a young man of prepossessing appearance, sits in a dejected attitude, amid a litter of sketches, with his head resting upon his hand. An oil stove stands on a pine box in the centre of the studio. The artist rises, tightens his waist belt to another hole, and lights the stove. He goes to a tin bread box, half-hidden by a screen, takes out a solitary link of sausage, turns the box upside-down to show that there is no more, and chucks the sausage into a frying-pan, which he sets upon the stove. The flame of the stove goes out, showing that there is no more oil. The artist, in evident despair, seizes the sausage, in a sudden access of rage, and hurls it violently from him. At the same time a door opens, and a man who enters receives the sausage forcibly against his nose. He seems to cry out; and is observed to make a dance step or two, vigorously. The newcomer is a ruddy-faced, active, keen-looking man, apparently of Irish ancestry. Next he is observed to laugh immoderately; he kicks over the stove; he claps the artist (who is vainly striving to grasp his hand) vehemently upon the back. Then he goes through a pantomime which to the sufficiently intelligent spectator reveals that he has acquired large sums of money by trading pot-metal hatchets and razors to the Indians of the Cordillera Mountains for gold dust. He draws a roll of money as large as a small loaf of bread from his pocket, and waves it above his head, while at the same time he makes pantomime of drinking from a glass. The artist hurriedly secures his hat, and the two leave the studio together.

The Writing on the Sands

SCENE—*The Beach at Nice.* A woman, beautiful, still young, exquisitely clothed, complacent, poised, reclines near the water, idly scrawling letters in the sand with the staff of her silken parasol. The beauty of her face is audacious; her languid pose is one that you feel to be impermanent—you wait, expectant, for her to spring or glide or crawl, like a panther that has unaccountably become stock-still. She idly scrawls in the sand; and the word that she always writes is "Isabel." A man sits a few yards away. You can see that they are companions, even if no longer comrades. His face is dark and smooth, and almost inscrutable— but not quite. The two speak little together. The man also scratches on the sand with his cane. And the word that he writes is "Anchuria." And then he looks out where the Mediterranean and the sky intermingle, with death in his gaze.

The Wilderness and Thou

SCENE—*The Borders of a Gentleman's Estate in a Tropical Land.* An old Indian, with a mahogany-coloured face, is trimming the grass on a grave by a mangrove swamp. Presently he rises to his feet and walks slowly toward a grove that is shaded by the gathering, brief twilight. In the edge of the grove stand a man who is stalwart, with a kind and courteous air, and a woman of a serene and clear-cut loveliness. When the old Indian comes up to them the man drops money in his hand. The grave-tender, with the stolid pride of his race, takes it as his due, and goes his way. The two in the edge of the grove turn back along the dim pathway, and walk close, close— for, after all, what is the world at its best but a little round field of the moving pictures with two walking together in it?

Curtain

_____

7: A Little Dinner at Timmins's

William Thackeray

1811-1863

Punch, 29 July 1948

MR AND MRS FITZROY TIMMINS live in Lilliput Street, that neat little street which runs at right angles with the Park and Brobdingnag Gardens. It is a very genteel neighbourhood, and I need not say they are of a good family.

Especially Mrs Timmins, as her mamma is always telling Mr T. They are Suffolk people, and distantly related to the Right Honourable the Earl of Bungay.

Besides his house in Lilliput Street, Mr Timmins has Chambers in Fig-tree Court, Temple, and goes the Northern Circuit.

The other day, when there was a slight difference about the payment of fees between the great Parliamentary Counsel and the Solicitors, Stoke and Pogers, of Great George Street, sent the papers of the Lough Foyle and Lough Corrib Junction Railway to Mr Fitzroy Timmins, who was so elated that he instantly purchased a couple of looking-glasses for his drawing-rooms (the front room is 16 by 12, and the back, a tight but elegant apartment, 10 ft 6 by 8 ft 4), a coral for the baby, two new dresses for Mrs Timmins, and a little rosewood desk, at the Pantechnicon, for which Rosa had long been sighing, with crumpled legs, emerald-green and gold morocco top, and drawers all over.

Mrs Timmins is a very pretty poetess (her 'Lines to a Faded Tulip', and her 'Plaint of Plinlimmon', appeared in one of last year's Keepsakes), and Fitzroy, as he impressed a kiss on the snowy forehead of his bride, pointed out to her, in one of the innumerable pockets of the desk, an elegant ruby-tipped pen, and six charming little gilt blank books, marked 'My Books', which Mrs Fitzroy might fill, he said, (he is an Oxford man, and very polite) 'with the delightful productions of her Muse'. Besides these books, there was pink paper, paper with crimson edges, lace paper, all stamped with R. F. T. (Rosa Fitzroy Timmins), and the hand and battle-axe, the crest of the Timminses (and borne at Ascalon by Roaldus de Timmins, a crusader, who is now buried in the Temple Church, next to Serjeant Snooks), and yellow, pink, light-blue, and other scented sealing-waxes, at the service of Rosa when she chose to correspond with her friends.

Rosa, you may be sure, jumped with joy at the sight of this sweet present; called her Charles (his first name is Samuel, but they have sunk that) the best of men! embraced him a great number of times, to the edification of her buttony little page, who stood at the landing; and as soon as he was gone to Chambers, took the new pen and a sweet sheet of paper, and began to compose a poem.

'What shall it be about?' was naturally her first thought. 'What should be a young mother's first inspiration?' Her child lay on the sofa asleep, before her; and she began in her neatest hand—

LINES

ON MY SON, BUNGAY DE BRACY GASHLEIGH TYMMYNS, AGED TEN MONTHS.

Tuesday.

'How beautiful! how beautiful thou seemest,
My boy, my precious one, my rosy babe!
Kind angels hover round thee, as thou dreamest:
Soft lashes hide thy beauteous azure eye which gleamest.'

'Gleamest? thine eye which gleamest? Is that grammar?' thought Rosa, who had puzzled her little brains for some time with this absurd question, when the baby woke; then the cook came up to ask about dinner; then Mrs Fundy slipped over from No. 27, (they are opposite neighbours, and made an acquaintance through Mrs Fundy's macaw): and a thousand things happened. Finally there was no rhyme to babe except Tippo Saib (against whom Major Gashleigh, Rosa's grandfather, had distinguished himself), and so she gave up the little poem about her De Bracy.

Nevertheless, when Fitzroy returned from Chambers to take a walk with his wife in the Park, as he peeped through the rich tapestry hanging which divided the two drawing-rooms, he found his dear girl still seated at the desk, and writing, writing away with her ruby pen as fast as it could scribble.

'What a genius that child has!' he said; 'why, she is a second Mrs Norton!' and advanced smiling to peep over her shoulder and see what pretty thing Rosa was composing.

It was not poetry, though, that she was writing, and Fitz read as follows:—

LILLIPUT STREET, Tuesday, 22nd May.

Mr and Mrs Fitzroy Tymmyns request the pleasure of Sir Thomas and Lady Kicklebury's company at dinner on Wednesday, at 7½ o'clock.

'My dear!' exclaimed the barrister, pulling a long face.

'Law, Fitzroy!' cried the beloved of his bosom, 'how you do startle one!'

'Give a dinner party with our means!' said he.

'Ain't you making a fortune, you miser?' Rosa said. 'Fifteen guineas a day is four thousand five hundred a year; I've calculated it.' And, so saying, she rose and taking hold of his whiskers, (which are as fine as those of any man of his circuit,) she put her mouth close up against his and did something to his long face, which quite changed the expression of it: and which the little page heard outside the door.

'Our dining-room won't hold ten,' he said.

'We'll only ask twenty,' my love; 'ten are sure to refuse in this season, when everybody is giving parties. Look, here is the list.'

'Earl and Countess of Bungay, and Lady Barbara Saint Mary's.'

'You are dying to get a Lord into the house,' Timmins said (*he* has not altered his name in Fig-tree Court yet, and therefore I am not so affected as to call him *Tymmyns*). 'Law, my dear, they are our cousins, and must be asked,' Rosa said.

'Let us put down my sister and Tom Crowder, then.'

'Blanche Crowder is really so *very* fat, Fitzroy,' his wife said, 'and our rooms are so *very* small.'

Fitz laughed. 'You little rogue,' he said, 'Lady Bungay weighs two of Blanche, even when she's not in the f—'

'Fiddlesticks!' Rose cried out. 'Doctor Crowder really cannot be admitted; he makes such a noise eating his soup, that it is really quite disagreeable;' and she imitated the gurgling noise performed by the doctor while inhausting his soup, in such a funny way, that Fitz saw inviting him was out of the question.

'Besides, we musn't have too many relations,' Rosa went on. 'Mamma, of course, is coming. She doesn't like to be asked in the evening; and she'll bring her silver bread-basket, and her candlesticks, which are very rich and handsome.'

'And you complain of Blanche for being too stout!' groaned out Timmins.

'Well, well, don't be in a pet,' said little Rosa. 'The girls won't come to dinner; but will bring their music afterwards.' And she went on with the list.

'Sir Thomas and Lady Kicklebury, 2. No saying no: we *must* ask them, Charles. They are rich people, and any room in their house in Brobdingnag Gardens would swallow up *our* humble cot. But to people in *our* position in *society*, they will be glad enough to come. The city people are glad to mix with the old families.'

'Very good,' said Fitz, with a sad face of assent— and Mrs Timmins went on reading her list.

'Mr and Mrs Topham Sawyer, Belgravine Place.'

'Mrs Sawyer hasn't asked you all the season. She gives herself the airs of an empress; and when—'

'One's member, you know, my dear, one must have,' Rosa replied, with much dignity; as if the presence of the representative of her native place would be a protection to her dinner; and a note was written and transported by the page early next morning to the mansion of the Sawyers, in Belgravine Place.

The Topham Sawyers had just come down to breakfast, Mrs T. in her large dust-coloured morning dress and Madonna front (she looks rather scraggy of a morning, but I promise you her ringlets and figure will stun you of an evening); and having read the note, the following dialogue passed:—

Mrs Topham Sawyer. 'Well, upon my word, I don't know where things will end. Mr Sawyer, the Timminses have asked us to dinner.'

Mr Topham Sawyer. 'Ask us to dinner! What d— impudence!'

Mrs Topham Sawyer. 'The most dangerous and insolent revolutionary principles are abroad, Mr Sawyer; and I shall write and hint as much to these persons.'

Mr Topham Sawyer. 'No, d— it, Joanna, they are my constituents, and we must go. Write a civil note, and say we will come to their party.' (*He resumes the perusal of the 'Times,' and Mrs Topham Sawyer writes*)—

MY DEAR ROSA,

We shall have *great pleasure* in joining your little party. I do not reply in the third person, as *we are old friends*, you know, and *country neighbours*. I hope your mamma is well: present my *kindest remembrances* to her, and I hope we shall see much MORE of each other in the summer, when we go down to the Sawpits (for going abroad is out of the question in these *dreadful times*). With a hundred kisses to your dear little *pet*,

Believe me your attached

J. T. S.

She said *Pet*, because she did not know whether Rosa's child was a girl or boy: and Mrs Timmins was very much pleased with the kind and gracious nature of the reply to her invitation.

THE NEXT PERSONS whom little Mrs Timmins was bent upon asking, were Mr and Mrs John Rowdy, of the firm of Stumpy, Rowdy, and Co., of Brobdingnag Gardens, of the Prairie, Putney, and of Lombard Street, City.

Mrs Timmins and Mrs Rowdy had been brought up at the same school together, and there was always a little rivalry between them, from the day when they contended for the French prize at school, to last week, when each had a stall at the Fancy Fair for the benefit of the Daughters of Decayed Muffin-men; and when Mrs Timmins danced against Mrs Rowdy in the Scythe Mazurka at the Polish Ball, headed by Mrs Hugh Slasher. Rowdy took twenty-three pounds more than Timmins in the Muffin transaction (for she had possession of a kettle-holder worked by the hands of R–y–lty, which brought crowds to her stall); but in the Mazourk Rosa conquered; she has the prettiest little foot possible (which in a red boot and silver heel looked so lovely that even the Chinese ambassador remarked it), whereas Mrs Rowdy's foot is no trifle, as Lord Cornbury acknowledged when it came down on his lordship's boot tip as they danced together amongst the Scythes.

'These people are ruining themselves,' said Mrs John Rowdy to her husband, on receiving the pink note. It was carried round by that rogue of a buttony page in the evening, and he walked to Brobdingnag Gardens and in the Park afterwards, with a young lady who is kitchen-maid at 27, and who is not more than fourteen years older than little Buttons.

'Those people are ruining themselves,' said Mrs John to her husband. 'Rosa says she has asked the Bungays.'

'Bungays, indeed! Timmins was always a tuft-hunter,' said Rowdy, who had been at college with the barrister, and who, for his own part, has no more objection to a lord than you or I have; and adding, 'Hang him, what business has *he* to be giving parties?' allowed Mrs Rowdy, nevertheless, to accept Rosa's invitation.

'When I go to business to-morrow, I will just have a look at Mr Fitz's account,' Mr Rowdy thought, 'and if it is overdrawn, as it usually is, why' … The announcement of Mrs Rowdy's brougham here put an end to this agreeable train of thought, and the banker and his lady stepped into it to join a snug little family party of two-and-twenty, given by Mr and Mrs Secondchop, at their great house on the other side of the Park.

'Rowdys 2, Bungays 3, ourselves and mamma 3, 2 Sawyers,' calculated little Rosa.

'General Gulpin,' Rosa continued, 'eats a great deal, and is very stupid, but he looks well at table, with his star and ribbon; let us put *him* down!' and she noted down 'Sir Thomas and Lady Gulpin, 2. Lord Castlenoodle, 1.'

'You will make your party abominably genteel and stupid,' groaned Timmins. 'Why don't you ask some of our old friends? Old Mrs Portman has asked us twenty times, I am sure, within the last two years.'

'And the last time we went there, there was pea-soup for dinner!' Mrs Timmins said, with a look of ineffable scorn.

'Nobody can have been kinder than the Hodges have always been to us; and some sort of return we might make, I think.'

'Return, indeed! A pretty sound it is on the staircase to hear Mr and Mrs Odge and Miss Odges, pronounced by Billiter, who always leaves his h's out. No, no; see attornies at your chambers, my dear— but what could the poor creatures do in *our* society?' And so, one by one, Timmins's old friends were tried and eliminated by Mrs Timmins, just as if she had been an Irish attorney-general, and they so many Catholics on Mr Mitchel's jury.

Mrs Fitzroy insisted that the party should be of her very best company. Funnyman, the great wit, was asked, because of his jokes; and Mrs Butt, on whom he practises; and Potter, who is asked because everybody else asks him; and Mr Ranville Ranville of the Foreign Office, who might give some news of the Spanish squabble; and Botherby, who has suddenly sprung up into note because he is intimate with the French Revolution, and visits Ledru-Rollin and Lamartine. And these, with a couple more who are *amis de la maison*, made up the twenty, whom Mrs Timmins thought she might safely invite to her little dinner.

But the deuce of it was, that when the answers to the invitations came back, everybody accepted! Here was a pretty quandary. How they were to get twenty

into their dining-room, was a calculation which poor Timmins could not solve at all; and he paced up and down the little room in dismay.

'Pooh!' said Rosa with a laugh; 'your sister Blanche looked very well in one of my dresses, last year; and you know how stout she is. We will find some means to accommodate them all, depend upon it.'

Mrs John Rowdy's note to dear Rosa, accepting the latter's invitation, was a very gracious and kind one: and Mrs Fitz showed it to her husband when he came back from chambers. But there was another note which had arrived for him by this time from Mr Rowdy— or rather from the firm: and to the effect that Mr F. Timmins had overdrawn his account £28 18*s*. 6*d*., and was requested to pay that sum to his obedient servants, Stumpy, Rowdy, and Co.

And Timmins did not like to tell his wife that the contending parties in the Lough Neagh and Lough Corrib Railroad had come to a settlement, and that the fifteen guineas a day had consequently determined. 'I have had seven days of it, though,' he thought; 'and that will be enough to pay for the desk, the dinner, and the glasses, and make all right with Stumpy and Rowdy.'

THE CARDS FOR DINner having been issued, it became the duty of Mrs Timmins to make further arrangements respecting the invitations to the tea-party which was to follow the more substantial meal.

These arrangements are difficult, as any lady knows who is in the habit of entertaining her friends. There are—

People who are offended if you ask them to tea whilst others have been asked to dinner—

People who are offended if you ask them to tea at all; and cry out furiously, 'Good Heavens! Jane, my love, why do these Timminses suppose that I am to leave my dinner-table to attend their —— *soirée?*' (the dear reader my fill up the —— to any strength, according to his liking)— or, 'Upon my word, William, my dear, it is too much to ask us to pay twelve shillings for a brougham, and to spend I don't know how much in gloves, just to make our curtsies in Mrs Timmins's little drawing-room.' Mrs Moser made the latter remark about the Timmins affair, while the former was uttered by Mr Grumpley, barrister-at-law, to his lady, in Gloucester Place.

That there are people who are offended if you don't ask them at all, is a point which I suppose nobody will question. Timmins's earliest friend in life was Simmins, whose wife and family have taken a cottage at Mortlake for the season.

'We can't ask them to come out of the country,' Rosa said to her Fitzroy— (between ourselves, she was delighted that Mrs Simmins was out of the way, and was as jealous of her as every well-regulated woman should be of her husband's female friends)— 'we can't ask them to come so far for the evening.'

'Why no, certainly,' said Fitzroy, who has himself no very great opinion of a tea-party; and so the Simminses were cut out of the list.

And what was the consequence? The consequence was, that Simmins and Timmins cut when they meet at Westminster; that Mrs Simmins sent back all the books which she had borrowed from Rosa, with a withering note of thanks; that Rosa goes about saying that Mrs Simmins squints; that Mrs S., on her side, declares that Rosa is crooked, and behaved shamefully to Captain Hicks, in marrying Fitzroy over him, though she was forced to do it by her mother, and prefers the captain to her husband to this day. If, in a word, these two men could be made to fight, I believe their wives would not be displeased; and the reason of all this misery, rage, and dissension, lies in a poor little twopenny dinner-party in Lilliput Street.

Well, the guests, both for before and after meat, having been asked— old Mrs Gashleigh, Rosa's mother— (and, by consequence, Fitzroy's *dear* mother-in-law, though I promise you that 'dear' is particularly sarcastic)— Mrs Gashleigh of course was sent for, and came with Miss Eliza Gashleigh who plays on the guitar, and Emily, who limps a little, but plays sweetly on the concertina. They live close by— trust them for that. Your mother-in-law is always within hearing, thank our stars for the attention of the dear women. The Gashleighs, I say, live close by, and came early on the morning after Rosa's notes had been issued for the dinner.

When Fitzroy, who was in his little study, which opens into his little dining-room— one of those absurd little rooms which ought to be called a gentleman's pantry, and is scarcely bigger than a shower-bath, or a state cabin in a ship— when Fitzroy heard his mother-in-law's knock, and her well-known scuffling and chattering in the passage, in which she squeezed up young Buttons, the page, while she put questions to him regarding baby, and the cook's health, and whether she had taken what Mrs Gashleigh had sent over night, and the housemaid's health, and whether Mr Timmins had gone to chambers or not? and when, after this preliminary chatter, Buttons flung open the door, announcing— 'Mrs Gashleigh and the young ladies,' Fitzroy laid down his 'Times' newspaper with an expression that had best not be printed in a journal which young people read, and took his hat and walked away.

Mrs Gashleigh has never liked him since he left off calling her mamma, and kissing her. But he said he could not stand it any longer— he was hanged if he would. So he went away to Chambers, leaving the field clear to Rosa, mamma, and the two dear girls.

– Or to one of them, rather; for before leaving the house, he thought he would have a look at little Fitzroy up-stairs in the nursery, and he found the child in the hands of his maternal aunt Eliza, who was holding him and pinching him

as if he had been her guitar, I suppose; so that the little fellow bawled pitifully— and his father finally quitted the premises.

No sooner was he gone, and although the party was still a fortnight off, yet the women pounced upon his little Study, and began to put it in order. Some of his papers they pushed up over the bookcase, some they put behind the Encyclopædia, some they crammed into the drawers, where Mrs Gashleigh found three cigars, which she pocketed, and some letters, over which she cast her eye; and by Fitz's return they had the room as neat as possible, and the best glass and dessert-service mustered on the study-table.

It was a very neat and handsome service, as you may be sure Mrs Gashleigh thought, whose rich uncle had purchased it for the young couple, at Spode and Copeland's: but it was only for twelve persons.

It was agreed that it would be, in all respects, cheaper and better to purchase a dozen more dessert plates; and with 'my silver basket in the centre,' Mrs G. said (she is always bragging about that confounded bread-basket), 'we need not have any extra china dishes, and the table will look very pretty.'

On making a roll-call of the glass, it was calculated that at least a dozen or so tumblers, four or five dozen wines, eight water-bottles, and a proper quantity of ice-plates, were requisite; and that, as they would always be useful, it would be best to purchase the articles immediately. Fitz tumbled over the basket containing them, which stood in the hall, as he came in from Chambers, and over the boy who had brought them— and the little bill.

The women had had a long debate, and something like a quarrel, it must be owned, over the bill of fare. Mrs Gashleigh, who had lived a great part of her life in Devonshire, and kept house in great state there, was famous for making some dishes, without which, she thought, no dinner could be perfect. When she proposed her mock-turtle, and stewed pigeons, and gooseberry-cream, Rosa turned up her nose— a pretty little nose it was, by the way, and with a natural turn in that direction.

'Mock-turtle in June, mamma!' said she.

'It was good enough for your grandfather, Rosa,' the mamma replied: 'it was good enough for the Lord High Admiral, when he was at Plymouth; it was good enough for the first men in the county, and relished by Lord Fortyskewer and Lord Rolls; Sir Lawrence Porker ate twice of it after Exeter Races; and I think it might be good enough for—'

'I will *not* have it, mamma!' said Rosa, with a stamp of her foot— and Mrs Gashleigh knew what resolution there was in that; once, when she had tried to physic the baby, there had been a similar fight between them.

So Mrs Gashleigh made out a *carte*, in which the soup was left with a dash— a melancholy vacuum; and in which the pigeons were certainly thrust in

amongst the *entrées*; but Rosa determined they never should make an *entrée* at all into *her* dinner-party, but that she would have the dinner her own way.

When Fitz returned, then, and after he had paid the little bill of £6 14*s*. 6*d*. for the glass, Rosa flew to him with her sweetest smiles, and the baby in her arms. And after she had made him remark how the child grew every day more and more like him, and after she had treated him to a number of compliments and caresses, which it were positively fulsome to exhibit in public, and after she had soothed him into good humour by her artless tenderness, she began to speak to him about some little points which she had at heart.

She pointed out with a sigh how shabby the old curtains looked since the dear new glasses which her darling Fitz had given her had been put up in the drawing-room. Muslin curtains cost nothing, and she must and would have them.

The muslin curtains were accorded. She and Fitz went and bought them at Shoolbred's, when you may be sure she treated herself likewise to a neat, sweet, pretty half-mourning (for the Court, you know, is in mourning)— a neat sweet *barège*, or calimanco, or bombazine, or tiffany, or some such thing; but Madame Camille of Regent Street, made it up, and Rosa looked like an angel in it on the night of her little dinner.

'And my sweet,' she continued, after the curtains had been given in, 'mamma and I have been talking about the dinner. She wants to make it very expensive, which I cannot allow. I have been thinking of a delightful and economical plan, and you, my sweetest Fitz, must put it into execution.'

'I have cooked a mutton-chop when I was in chambers,' Fitz said with a laugh. 'Am I to put on a cap and an apron?'

'No; but you are to go to the Megatherium Club (where, you wretch, you are always going without my leave), and you are to beg Monsieur Mirobolant, your famous cook, to send you one of his best aides-de-camp, as I know he will, and with his aid we can dress the dinner and the confectionery at home for *almost nothing*, and we can show those purse-proud Topham Sawyers and Rowdys that the *humble cottage* can furnish forth an elegant entertainment as well as the gilded halls of wealth.'

Fitz agreed to speak to Monsieur Mirobolant. If Rosa had had a fancy for the cook of the prime minister, I believe the deluded creature of a husband would have asked Lord John for the loan of him.

FITZROY TIMMINS, whose taste for wine is remarkable for so young a man, is a member of the committee of the Megatherium Club, and the great Mirobolant, good-natured as all great men are, was only too happy to oblige him. A young friend and *protégé* of his, of considerable merit, M. Cavalcadour, happened to be disengaged through the lamented death of Lord Hauncher, with

whom young Cavalcadour had made his *débût* as an artist. He had nothing to refuse to his master, Mirobolant, and would impress himself to be useful to a *gourmé* so distinguished as Monsieur Timmins. Fitz went away as pleased as Punch with this encomium of the great Mirobolant, and was one of those who voted against the decreasing of Mirobolant's salary, when the measure was proposed by Mr Parings, Colonel Close, and the Screw party in the committee of the club.

Faithful to the promise of his great master, the youthful Cavalcadour called in Lilliput Street the next day. A rich crimson velvet waistcoat, with buttons of blue glass and gold, a variegated blue satin stock, over which a graceful mosaic chain hung in glittering folds, a white hat worn on one side of his long curling ringlets, redolent with the most delightful hair oil— one of those white hats which looks as if it had been just skinned— and a pair of gloves not exactly of the colour of *beurre frais*, but of *beurre* that has been up the chimney, with a natty cane with a gilt knob, completed the upper part, at any rate, of the costume of the young fellow whom the page introduced to Mrs Timmins.

Her mamma and she had been just having a dispute about the gooseberry-cream when Cavalcadour arrived. His presence silenced Mrs Gashleigh; and Rosa, in carrying on a conversation with him in the French language, which she had acquired perfectly in an elegant finishing establishment in Kensington Square, had a great advantage over her mother, who could only pursue the dialogue with very much difficulty, eyeing one or other interlocutor with an alarmed and suspicious look, and gasping out 'We' whenever she thought a proper opportunity arose for the use of that affirmative.

'I have two leetl menus weez me,' said Cavalcadour to Mrs Gashleigh.

'Minews— yes, O indeed,' answered the lady.

'Two little cartes.'

'O two carts! O we,' she said— 'coming, I suppose;' and she looked out of the window to see if they were there.

Cavalcadour smiled; he produced from a pocket-book a pink paper and a blue paper, on which he had written two bills of fare, the last two which he had composed for the lamented Hauncher, and he handed these over to Mrs Fitzroy.

The poor little woman was dreadfully puzzled with these documents, (she has them in her possession still,) and began to read from the pink one as follows:—

DINER POUR 16 PERSONNES.
Potage (clair) à la Rigodon.
Do. à la Prince de Tombuctou.
Deux Poissons.

Saumon de Severne,	Rougets Gratinés
à la Boadicée.	à la Cléopâtre.

Deux Relevés.
Le Chapeau-à-trois-cornes farci à la Robespierre.
Le Tire-botte à l'Odalisque.
Six Entrées.
Sauté de Hannetons à l'Epinglière.
Cotelettes à la Megatherium.
Bourrasque de Veau à la Palsambleu.
Laitances de Carpe en goguette à la Reine Pomaré.
Turban de Volaille à l'Archévêque de Cantorbéry.

And so on with the *entremets*, and *hors d'œuvre*, and the *rotis*, and the *relevés*.

'Madame will see that the dinners are quite simple,' said M. Cavalcadour.

'O quite!' said Rosa, dreadfully puzzled.

'Which would madame like?'

'Which would we like, mamma?' Rosa asked; adding, as if after a little thought, 'I think, sir, we should prefer the blue one.' At which Mrs Gashleigh nodded as knowingly as she could; though pink or blue, I defy anybody to know what these cooks mean by their jargon.

'If you please, madam, we will go down below and examine the scene of operations,' Monsieur Cavalcadour said; and so he was marshalled down the stairs to the kitchen, which he didn't like to name, and appeared before the cook in all his splendour.

He cast a rapid glance round the premises, and a smile of something like contempt lighted up his features. 'Will you bring pen and ink, if you please, and I will write down a few of the articles which will be necessary for us? We shall require, if you please, eight more stew-pans, a couple of braising pans, eight sauté pans, six bain-marie pans, a freezing-pot with accessories, and a few more articles of which I will inscribe the names'; and Mr Cavalcadour did so, dashing down, with the rapidity of genius, a tremendous list of ironmongery goods, which he handed over to Mrs Timmins. She and her mamma were quite frightened by the awful catalogue.

'I will call three days hence and superintend the progress of matters; and we will make the stock for the soup the day before the dinner.'

'Don't you think, sir,' here interposed Mrs Gashleigh, 'that one soup— a fine rich mock-turtle, such as I have seen in the best houses in the West of England, and such as the late Lord Fortyskewer—'

'You will get what is wanted for the soups, if you please,' Mr Cavalcadour continued, not heeding this interruption, and as bold as a captain on his own quarter-deck; 'for the stock of clear soup, you will get a leg of beef, a leg of veal, and a ham.'

'We munseer,' said the cook, dropping a terrified curtsey. 'A leg of beef, a leg of veal, and a ham.'

'You can't serve a leg of veal at a party,' said Mrs Gashleigh; 'and a leg of beef is not a company dish.'

'Madam, they are to make the stock of the clear soup,' Mr Cavalcadour said.

'*What?*' cried Mrs Gashleigh; and the cook repeated his former expression.

'Never, whilst *I* am in this house,' cried out Mrs Gashleigh, indignantly; 'never in a Christian *English* household; never shall such sinful waste be permitted by *me*. If you wish me to dine, Rosa, you must get a dinner less *expensive*. The Right Honourable Lord Fortyskewer could dine, sir, without these wicked luxuries, and I presume my daughter's guests can.'

'Madame is perfectly at liberty to decide,' said M. Cavalcadour. 'I came to oblige madame and my good friend Mirobolant, not myself.'

'Thank you, sir, I think it *will* be too expensive,' Rosa stammered in a great flutter; 'but I am very much obliged to you.'

'*Il n'y a point d'obligation, madame*,' said Monsieur Alcide Camile Cavalcadour in his most superb manner; and, making a splendid bow to the lady of the house, was respectfully conducted to the upper regions by little Buttons, leaving Rosa frightened, the cook amazed and silent, and Mrs Gashleigh boiling with indignation against the dresser.

Up to that moment, Mrs Blowser, the cook, who had come out of Devonshire with Mrs Gashleigh (of course that lady garrisoned her daughter's house with servants, and expected them to give her information of everything which took place there); up to that moment, I say, the cook had been quite contented with that subterraneous station which she occupied in life, and had a pride in keeping her kitchen neat, bright, and clean. It was, in her opinion, the comfortablest room in the house (we all thought so when we came down of a night to smoke there); and the handsomest kitchen in Lilliput Street.

But after the visit of Cavalcadour, the cook became quite discontented and uneasy in her mind. She talked in a melancholy manner over the area railings to the cooks at twenty-three and twenty-five. She stepped over the way, and conferred with the cook there. She made inquiries at the baker's and at other places about the kitchens in the great houses in Brobdingnag Gardens, and how many spits, bangmarry pans, and stoo pans they had. She thought she could not do with an occasional help, but must have a kitchen-maid. And she was often discovered by a gentleman of the police force, who was, I believe, her cousin, and occasionally visited her when Mrs Gashleigh was not in the house or spying it:— she was discovered, seated with *Mrs Rundell* in her lap, its leaves bespattered with her tears. 'My pease be gone, Pelisse,' she said, 'zins I zaw that ther Franchman': and it was all the faithful fellow could do to console her.

'—the dinner,' said Timmins, in a rage at last: 'having it cooked in the house is out of the question: the bother of it: and the row your mother makes are enough to drive one mad. It won't happen again, I can promise you, Rosa— order it at Fubsby's at one. You can have everything from Fubsby's— from footmen to saltspoons. Let's go and order it at Fubsby's.' 'Darling, if you don't mind the expense, and it will be any relief to you, let us do as you wish,' Rosa said; and she put on her bonnet, and they went off to the grand cook and confectioner of the Brobdingnag quarter.

ON THE ARM of her Fitzroy, Rosa went off to Fubsby's, that magnificent shop at the corner of Parliament Place and Alycompayne Square,— a shop into which the rogue had often cast a glance of approbation as he passed; for there are not only the most wonderful and delicious cakes and confections in the window, but at the counter there are almost sure to be three or four of the prettiest women in the whole of this world, with little darling caps of the last French make, with beautiful wavy hair, and the neatest possible waists and aprons.

Yes, there they sit; and, others, perhaps, besides Fitz have cast a sheep's eye through those enormous plate-glass window panes. I suppose it is the fact of perpetually living amongst such a quantity of good things that makes those young ladies so beautiful. They come into the place, let us say, like ordinary people, and gradually grow handsomer and handsomer, until they grow out into the perfect angels you see. It can't be otherwise: if you and I, my dear fellow, were to have a course of that place, we should become beautiful too. They live in an atmosphere of the most delicious pine-apples, blancmanges, creams, (some whipt, and some so good that of course they don't want whipping,) jellies, tipsy-cakes, cherry-brandy— one hundred thousand sweet and lovely things. Look at the preserved fruits, look at the golden ginger, the outspreading ananas, the darling little rogues of China oranges, ranged in the gleaming crystal cylinders. *Mon Dieu!* Look at the strawberries in the leaves. Each of them is as large nearly as a lady's reticule, and looks as if it had been brought up in a nursery to itself. One of those strawberries is a meal for those young ladies behind the counter; they nibble off a little from the side, and if they are very hungry, which can scarcely ever happen, they are allowed to go to the crystal canisters and take out a rout-cake or macaroon. In the evening they sit and tell each other little riddles out of the bon-bons; and when they wish to amuse themselves, they read the most delightful remarks, in the French language, about Love, and Cupid, and Beauty, before they place them inside the crackers. They always are writing down good things into Mr Fubsby's ledgers. It must be a perfect feast to read them. Talk of the Garden of Eden! I believe it was nothing to Mr Fubsby's house; and I have no doubt that after those young ladies have been there a certain time, they get to such a pitch of loveliness at last, that they

become complete angels, with wings sprouting out of their lovely shoulders, when (after giving just a preparatory balance or two) they fly up to the counter and perch there for a minute, hop down again, and affectionately kiss the other young ladies, and say 'Good bye, dears, we shall meet again *la haut*,' and then with a whirr of their deliciously scented wings, away they fly for good, whisking over the trees of Brobdingnag Square, and up into the sky, as the policeman touches his hat.

It is up there that they invent the legends for the crackers, and the wonderful riddles and remarks on the bonbons. No mortal, I am sure, could write them.

I never saw a man in such a state as Fitzroy Timmins in the presence of those ravishing houris. Mrs Fitz having explained that they required a dinner for twenty persons, the chief young lady asked what Mr and Mrs Fitz would like, and named a thousand things, each better than the other, to all of which Fitz instantly said yes. The wretch was in such a state of infatuation that I believe if that lady had proposed to him a fricaseed elephant, or a boa-constrictor in jelly, he would have said, 'Oh yes, certainly; put it down.'

That Peri wrote down in her album a list of things which it would make your mouth water to listen to. But she took it all quite calmly. Heaven bless you! *They* don't care about things that are no delicacies to them! But whatever she chose to write down, Fitzroy let her.

After the dinner and dessert were ordered (at Fubsby's they furnish everything; dinner and dessert, plate and china, servants in your own livery, and if you please, guests of title too), the married couple retreated from that shop of wonders; Rosa delighted that the trouble of the dinner was all off their hands, but she was afraid it would be rather expensive.

'Nothing can be too expensive which pleases *you*, dear,' Fitz said.

'By the way, one of those young women was rather good-looking,' Rosa remarked; 'the one in the cap with the blue ribbons.' (And she cast about the shape of the cap in her mind, and determined to have exactly such another.)

'Think so? I didn't observe,' said the miserable hypocrite by her side; and when he had seen Rosa home, he went back, like an infamous fiend, to order something else which he had forgotten, he said, at Fubsby's. Get out of that Paradise, you cowardly, creeping, vile serpent, you!

Until the day of the dinner, the infatuated fop was *always* going to Fubsby's. *He was remarked there*. He used to go before he went to chambers in the morning, and sometimes on his return from the Temple: but the morning was the time which he preferred; and one day, when he went on one of his eternal pretexts, and was chattering and flirting at the counter, a lady who had been reading yesterday's paper and eating a half-penny bun for an hour in the back

shop (if that paradise may be called a shop)— a lady stepped forward, laid down the 'Morning Herald', and confronted him.

That lady was Mrs Gashleigh. From that day the miserable Fitzroy was in her power; and she resumed a sway over his house, to shake off which had been the object of his life, and the result of many battles. And for a mere freak— (for, on going into Fubsby's a week afterwards he found the Peris drinking tea out of blue cups, and eating stale bread and butter, when his absurd passion instantly vanished)— I say, for a mere freak, the most intolerable burden of his life was put on his shoulders again— his mother-in-law.

On the day before the little dinner took place— and I promise you we shall come to it in the very next chapter— a tall and elegant middle-aged gentleman, who might have passed for an earl, but that there was a slight incompleteness about his hands and feet, the former being uncommonly red, and the latter large and irregular, was introduced to Mrs Timmins by the page, who announced him as Mr Truncheon.

'I'm Truncheon, ma'am,' he said, with a low bow.

'Indeed!' said Rosa.

'About the dinner, m'm, from Fubsby's, m'm. As you have no butler, m'm, I presume you will wish me to act as sich. I shall bring two persons as haids to-morrow; both answers to the name of John. I'd best, if you please, inspect the premisis, and will think you to allow your young man to show me the pantry and kitching.'

Truncheon spoke in a low voice, and with the deepest, and most respectful melancholy. There is not much expression in his eyes, but from what there is, you would fancy that he was oppressed by a secret sorrow. Rosa trembled as she surveyed this gentleman's size, his splendid appearance, and gravity. 'I am sure,' she said, 'I never shall dare to ask him to hand a glass of water.' Even Mrs Gashleigh, when she came on the morning of the actual dinner-party, to superintend matters, was cowed, and retreated from the kitchen before the calm majesty of Truncheon.

And yet that great man was, like all the truly great— affable.

He put aside his coat and waistcoat (both of evening cut, and looking prematurely splendid as he walked the streets in noonday), and did not disdain to rub the glasses and polish the decanters, and to show young Buttons the proper mode of preparing these articles for a dinner. And while he operated, the maids, and Buttons, and cook, when she could— and what had she but the vegetables to boil?— crowded round him, and listened with wonder as he talked of the great families as he had lived with. That man, as they saw him there before them, had been cab-boy to Lord Tantallan, valet to the Earl of Bareacres, and groom of the chambers to the Duchess Dowager of Fitzbattleaxe. O, it was delightful to hear Mr Truncheon!

ON THE GREAT, momentous, stupendous day of the dinner, my beloved female reader may imagine that Fitzroy Timmins was sent about his business at an early hour in the morning, while the women began to make preparations to receive their guests. 'There will be no need of your going to Fubsby's,' Mrs Gashleigh said to him, with a look that drove him out of doors. 'Every thing that we require has been ordered *there!* You will please to be back here at 6 o'clock, and not sooner: and I presume you will acquiesce in my arrangements about the *wine*.'

'O yes, mamma,' said the prostrate son-in-law.

'In so large a party— a party beyond some folks' *means*— expensive *wines* are *absurd*. The light sherry at 26*s*., the champagne at 42*s*.; and you are not to go beyond 36*s*. for the claret and port after dinner. Mind, coffee will be served; and you come upstairs after two rounds of the claret.'

'Of course, of course,' acquiesced the wretch: and hurried out of the house to his chambers, and to discharge the commissions with which the womankind had intrusted him.

As for Mrs Gashleigh, you might have heard her bawling over the house the whole day long. That admirable woman was everywhere; in the kitchen until the arrival of Truncheon, before whom she would not retreat without a battle; on the stairs; in Fitzroy's dressing-room; and in Fitzroy minor's nursery, to whom she gave a dose of her own composition, while the nurse was sent out on a pretext to make purchases of garnish for the dishes to be served for the little dinner. Garnish for the dishes! As if the folks at Fubsby's could not garnish dishes better than Gashleigh, with her stupid old-world devices of laurel leaves, parsley, and cut turnips! Why, there was not a dish served that day that was not covered over with skewers, on which troufles, crayfish mushrooms, and forced-meat were impaled. When old Gashleigh went down with her barbarian bunches of holly and greens to stick about the meats, even the cook saw their incongruity, and, at Truncheon's orders, flung the whole shrubbery into the dust-house, where, while poking about the premises, you may be sure Mrs G. saw it.

Every candle which was to be burned that night (including the tallow candle, which she said was a good enough bed-light for Fitzroy) she stuck into the candlesticks with her own hands, giving her own high-shouldered plated candlesticks of the year 1798 the place of honour. She upset all poor Rosa's floral arrangements, turning the nosegays from one vase into the other without any pity, and was never tired of beating, and pushing, and patting, and *wapping* the curtain and sofa draperies into shape in the little drawing-room.

In Fitz's own apartments she revelled with peculiar pleasure. It has been described how she had sacked his Study and pushed away his papers, some of

which, including three cigars, and the commencement of an article for the 'Law Magazine', 'Lives of the Sheriff's Officers', he has never been able to find to this day. Mamma now went into the little room in the back regions, which is Fitz's dressing-room, (and was destined to be a cloak-room,) and here she rummaged to her heart's delight.

In an incredibly short space of time she examined all his outlying pockets, drawers, and letters; she inspected his socks and handkerchiefs in the top drawers; and on the dressing-table, his razors, shaving-strop, and hair-oil. She carried off his silver-topped scent-bottle out of his dressing-case, and a half-dozen of his favourite pills (which Fitz possesses in common with every well-regulated man), and probably administered them to her own family. His boots, glossy pumps, and slippers, she pushed into the shower-bath, where the poor fellow stepped into them the next morning, in the midst of a pool in which they were lying. The baby was found sucking his boot-hooks the next day in the nursery; and as for the bottle of varnish for his shoes, (which he generally paints upon the trees himself, having a pretty taste in that way,) it could never be found to the present hour; but it was remarked that the young Master Gashleighs, when they came home for the holidays, always wore lacquered highlows; and the reader may draw his conclusions from *that* fact.

In the course of the day all the servants gave Mrs Timmins warning.

The cook said she coodn't abear it no longer, aving Mrs G. always about her kitching, with her fingers in all the saucepans. Mrs G. had got her the place, but she preferred one as Mrs G. didn't get for her.

The nurse said she was come to nuss Master Fitzroy, and knew her duty; his grandmamma wasn't his nuss, and was always aggrawating her,— Missus must shoot herself elsewhere.

The housemaid gave utterance to the same sentiments in language more violent.

Little Buttons bounced up to his mistress, said he was butler of the family, Mrs G. was always poking about his pantry, and dam if he'd stand it.

At every moment Rosa grew more and more bewildered. The baby howled a great deal during the day. His large china Christening-bowl was cracked by Mrs Gashleigh altering the flowers in it, and pretending to be very cool, whilst her hands shook with rage.

'Pray go on, mamma,' Rosa said with tears in her eyes. 'Should you like to break the chandelier?'

'Ungrateful, unnatural child!' bellowed the other; 'only that I know you couldn't do without me, I'd leave the house this minute.'

'As you wish,' said Rosa; but Mrs G. *didn't* wish: and in this juncture Truncheon arrived.

That officer surveyed the dining-room, laid the cloth there with admirable precision and neatness; ranged the plate on the side-board with graceful accuracy, but objected to that old thing in the centre, as he called Mrs Gashleigh's silver basket, as cumbrous and useless for the table, where they would want all the room they could get.

Order was not restored to the house, nor, indeed, any decent progress made, until this great man came: but where there was a revolt before, and a general disposition to strike work and to yell out deflance against Mrs Gashleigh, who was sitting bewildered and furious in the drawing-room— where there was before commotion, at the appearance of the master-spirit, all was peace and unanimity: the cook went back to her pans, the housemaid busied herself with the china and glass, cleaning some articles and breaking others, Buttons sprang up and down the stairs, obedient to the orders of his chief, and all things went well and in their season.

At six, the man with the wine came from Binney and Latham's. At a quarter-past six, Timmins himself arrived.

At half-past six, he might have been heard shouting out for his varnished boots— but we know where *those* had been hidden— and for his dressing things; but Mrs Gashleigh had put them away.

As in his vain inquiries for these articles he stood shouting, 'Nurse! Buttons! Rosa, my dear!' and the most fearful execrations up and down the stairs, Mr Truncheon came out on him.

'Igscuse me, sir,' says he, 'but it's impawsable. We can't dine twenty at that table— not if you set 'em out awinder, we can't.'

'What's to be done?' asked Fitzroy, in an agony; 'they've all said they'd come.'

'Can't do it,' said the other; 'with two top and bottom— and your table is as narrow as a bench— we can't hold more than heighteen, and then each person's helbows will be into his neighbour's cheer.'

'Rosa! Mrs Gashleigh!' cried out Timmins, 'come down and speak to this gentl— this—'

'Truncheon, sir,' said the man.

The women descended from the drawing-room. 'Look and see, ladies,' he said, inducting them into the dinning-room; 'there's the room, there's the table laid for heighteen, and I defy you to squeege in more.'

'One person in a party always fails,' said Mrs Gashleigh, getting alarmed.

'That's nineteen,' Mr Truncheon remarked; 'we must knock another hoff, mam'; and he looked her hard in the face.

Mrs Gashleigh was very red and nervous, and paced, or rather squeezed round the table (it was as much as she could do)— the chairs could not be put

any closer than they were. It was impossible, unless the *convive* sat as a centre-piece in the middle, to put another guest at that table.

'Look at that lady movin round, sir. You see now the difficklty; if my men wasn't thinner, they couldn't hoperate at all,' Mr Truncheon observed, who seemed to have a spite to Mrs Gashleigh.

'What is to be done?' she said, with purple accents.

'My dearest mamma,' Rosa cried out, 'you must stop at home— how sorry I am!' And she shot one glance at Fitzroy, who shot another at the great Truncheon, who held down his eyes.

'We could manage with heighteen,' he said, mildly.

Mrs Gashleigh gave a hideous laugh.

She went away. At eight o'clock she was pacing at the corner of the street, and actually saw the company arrive. First came the Topham Sawyers in their light blue carriage, with the white hammer-cloth, and blue and white ribbons— their footmen drove the house down with the knocking.

Then followed the ponderous and snuff-coloured vehicle, with faded gilded wheels and brass earl's coronets all over it, the conveyance of the House of Bungay. The Countess of Bungay and daughter stepped out of the carriage. The fourteenth Earl of Bungay couldn't come.

Sir Thomas and Lady Gulpin's fly made its appearance, from which issued the general with his star, and Lady Gulpin in yellow satin. The Rowdy's brougham followed next; after which Mrs Butt's handsome equipage drove up.

The two friends of the house, young gentlemen from the Temple, now arrived in cab No. 9996. We tossed up, in fact, which should pay the fare.

Mr Ranville Ranville walked, and was dusting his boots as the Templars drove up. Lord Castlenoddy came out of a twopenny omnibus. Funnyman, the wag, came last, whirling up rapidly in a Hansom, just as Mrs Gashleigh, with rage in her heart, was counting that two people had failed, and that there were only seventeen after all.

Mr Truncheon passed our names to Mr Billiter, who bawled them out on the stairs. Rosa was smiling in a pink dress, and looking as fresh as an angel, and received her company with that grace which has always characterised her.

The moment of the dinner arrived, old Lady Bungay scuffled off on the arm of Fitzroy, while the rear was brought up by Rosa and Lord Castlemouldy, of Ballyshanvanvoght Castle, Co. Tipperary. Some fellows who had the luck, took down ladies to dinner. I was not sorry to be out of the way of Mrs Rowdy with her dandyfied airs, or of that high and mighty county princess, Mrs Topham Sawyer.

OF COURSE it does not become the present writer, who has partaken of the best entertainment which his friends could supply, to make fun of their

(somewhat ostentatious, as it must be confessed) hospitality. If they gave a dinner beyond their means, it is no business of mine. I hate a man who goes and eats a friend's meat, and then blabs the secrets of the mahogany. Such a man deserves never to be asked to dinner again; and, though at the close of a London season that seems no great loss, and you sicken of a white-bait as you would of a whale— yet we must always remember that there's another season coming, and hold our tongues for the present.

As for describing, then, the mere victuals on Timmins's table, that would be absurd. Everybody— (I mean of the genteel world, of course, of which I make no doubt the reader is a polite ornament)— everybody has the same everything in London. You see the same coats, the same dinners, the same boiled fowls and mutton, the same cutlets, fish, and cucumbers, the same lumps of Wenham-lake ice, &c. The waiters, with white neck-cloths, are as like each other everywhere as the peas which they hand round with the ducks of the second course. Can't any one invent anything new?

The only difference between Timmins's dinner and his neighbour's was, that he had hired, as we have said, the greater part of the plate, and that his cowardly conscience magnified faults and disasters of which no one else probably took heed.

But Rosa thought, from the supercilious air with which Mrs Topham Sawyer was eyeing the plate and other arrangements, that she was remarking the difference of the ciphers on the forks and spoons— (which had, in fact, been borrowed from every one of Fitzroy's friends— I know, for instance, that he had my six, among others, and only returned five, along with a battered, old, black-pronged, plated abomination, which I have no doubt belongs to Mrs Gashleigh, whom I hereby request to send back mine in exchange)— their guilty consciences, I say, made them fancy that every one was spying out their domestic deficiencies; whereas, it is probable that nobody present thought of their failings at all. People never do; they never see holes in their neighbours' coats— they are too indolent, simple, and charitable.

Some things, however, one could not help remarking; for instance, though Fitz is my closest friend, yet could I avoid seeing and being amused by his perplexity and his dismal efforts to be facetious? His eye wandered all round the little room with quick uneasy glances, very different from those frank and jovial looks with which he is accustomed to welcome you to a leg of mutton; and Rosa, from the other end of the table, and over the flowers, *entrée* dishes, and wine-coolers, telegraphed him with signals of corresponding alarm. Poor devils! why did they ever go beyond that leg of mutton?

Funnyman was not brilliant in conversation, scarcely opening his mouth, except for the purposes of feasting. The fact is our friend Tom Dawson was at

table, who knew all his stories, and in his presence the greatest wag is always silent and uneasy.

Fitz has a very pretty wit of his own, and a good reputation on Circuit; but he is timid before great people. And indeed the presence of that awful Lady Bungay on his right hand, was enough to damp him. She was in Court-mourning (for the late Prince of Schlippen-schloppen). She had on a large black funereal turban and appurtenances, and a vast breast-plate of twinkling, twiddling, black bugles. No wonder a man could not be gay in talking to *her*.

Mrs Rowdy and Mrs Topham Sawyer love each other as women do who have the same receiving nights, and ask the same society; they were only separated by Ranville Ranville, who tries to be well with both: and they talked at each other across him.

Topham and Rowdy growled out a conversation about Rum, Ireland, and the Navigation Laws, quit unfit for print. Sawyer never speaks three words without mentioning the House and the Speaker.

The Irish Peer said nothing (which was a comfort); but he ate and drank of everything which came in his way; and cut his usual absurd figure in dyed whiskers and a yellow under-waistcoat.

General Gulpin sported his star, and looked fat and florid, but melancholy. His wife ordered away his dinner, just like honest Sancho's physician at Barataria.

Botherby's stories about Lamartine are as old as the hills, since the barricades of last month; and he could not get in a word or cut the slightest figure. And as for Tom Dawson, he was carrying on an undertoned small talk with Lady Barbara St Mary's, so that there was not much conversation worth record going on *within* the dining-room.

Outside, it was different. Those houses in Lilliput Street are so uncommonly compact, that you can hear everything which takes place all over the tenement; and so,

In the awful pauses of the banquet, and the hall-door being furthermore open, we had the benefit of hearing

The cook, and the occasional cook, below stairs, exchanging rapid phrases regarding the dinner;

The smash of the soup-tureen, and swift descent of the kitchen-maid and soup-ladle down the stairs to the lower regions. This accident created a laugh, and rather amused Fitzroy and the company, and caused Funnyman to say, bowing to Rosa, that she was mistress of herself, though China fall. But she did not heed him, for at that moment another noise commenced, namely, that of

The baby in the upper rooms, who commenced a series of piercing yells, which, though stopped by the sudden clapping to of the nursery-door, were only

more dreadful to the mother when suppressed. She would have given a guinea to go upstairs and have done with the whole entertainment.

A thundering knock came at the door very early after the dessert, and the poor soul took a speedy opportunity of summoning the ladies to depart, though you may be sure it was only old Mrs Gashleigh, who had come with her daughters— of course the first person to come. I saw her red gown whisking up the stairs, which were covered with plates and dishes, over which she trampled.

Instead of having any quiet after the retreat of the ladies, the house was kept in a rattle, and the glasses jingled on the table as the flymen and coachmen plied the knocker, and the *soirée* came in. From my place I could see everything; the guests as they arrived (I remarked very few carriages, mostly cabs and flies), and a little crowd of blackguard boys and children, who were formed round the door, and gave ironical cheers to the folks as they stepped out of their vehicles.

As for the evening party, if a crowd in the dog-days is pleasant, poor Mrs Timmins certainly had a successful *soirée*. You could hardly move on the stair. Mrs Sternhold broke in the banisters, and nearly fell through. There was such a noise and chatter you could not hear the singing of the Miss Gashleighs, which was no great loss. Lady Bungay could hardly get to her carriage, being entangled with Colonel Wedgewood in the passage. An absurd attempt was made to get up a dance of some kind, but before Mrs Crowder had got round the room, the hanging-lamp in the dining-room below was stove in, and fell with a crash on the table, now prepared for refreshment.

Why, in fact, did the Timminses give that party at all? It was quite beyond their means. They have offended a score of their old friends, and pleased none of their acquaintances. So angry were many who were not asked, that poor Rosa says she must now give a couple more parties and take in those not previously invited. And I know for a fact that Fubsby's bill is not yet paid; nor Binney and Latham's, the wine-merchants; that the breakage and hire of glass and china cost ever so much money; that every true friend of Timmins has cried out against his absurd extravagance, and that now, when every one is going out of town Fitz has hardly money to pay his Circuit, much more to take Rosa to a watering-place, as he wished and promised.

As for Mrs Gashleigh, the only feasible plan of economy which she can suggest, is that she should come and live with her daughter and son-in-law, and that they should keep house together. If he agrees to this, she has a little sum at the banker's, with which she would not mind easing his present difficulties; and the poor wretch is so utterly bewildered and crest-fallen that it is very likely he will become her victim.

The Topham Sawyers, when they go down into the country, will represent Fitz as a ruined man and reckless prodigal; his uncle, the attorney, from whom he has expectations, will most likely withdraw his business, and adopt some

other member of his family— Blanche Crowder for instance, whose husband, the doctor, has had high words with poor Fitzroy already, of course at the women's instigation— and all these accumulated miseries fall upon the unfortunate wretch because he was good-natured, and his wife would have a Little Dinner.

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8: The Cinema Murder

E. Phillips Oppenheim

1866-1946

Maclean's, 1 May 1933

An ex-Scotland Yard detective, now a "consulting detective", appeared in a magazine series later collected as "The Ex-Detective", 1933

ABERRATIONS from the strict business of watching and listening on the part of a tense cinema audience are seldom expressed more definitely than by muffled gigglings and whispers. The scream therefore which suddenly split the tobacco-hung air, a scream of agony from a human being apparently stricken with mortal pain or fear, was paralysing in its effect, a thunderbolt startling and harrowing. Among the several thousands of closely wedged together person who comprised the audience of the Pagoda Palace Cinema, there was not one who could escape the sound, who did not feel the thrill. Cynthia threw her arm around her husband's neck.

"Malcolm!" she cried in terror. "What is it?"

He held her reassuringly to him. Like most of the audience, he had sprung to his feet and was facing a corner in the back row of the stalls, a short distance removed from where they were. Electric torches were flashing like fireflies in the gloom, dark shapes of men were visible, gathering together in a cluster around one particular spot. The screen was suddenly blank, The picture had ceased to operate. Then the lights flared up and every one stood on their stall or chair, whatever they could find, to look in one direction. Perhaps no one saw more in those few seconds than Malcolm Gossett, whose profession had taught him to take in swiftly the impressions and externals of an unexpected happening.

"What is it, Malcolm?" his wife cried again, clinging desperately to him.

"I think that a man has been hurt," he explained. "He has either been hurt or he has been taken ill."

"No one who was taken ill could cry out like that," she gasped, shivering. "It sounded like a man being killed."

"I'm afraid that may be so," Malcolm Gossett agreed. "You see, they am taking him away."

The whole thing was admirably handled. A limp, inert form, completely covered by a sheet, was carried out on a stretcher by two of the attendants, escorted by a policeman. Others of the Force, who seemed to have arrived miraculously from nowhere in particular, had made a little cordon around the spot from which the trouble had come. One young man who tried to take his

leave was gently detained. The manager of the Picture Palace, which was One of the largest and most splendid in London, came hurrying down to the sergeant.

"What is this, Officer?" he exclaimed breathlessly. "For heaven's sake, don't detain the performance longer than you can help."

The sergeant was a trifle unsympathetic.

"There has been a murder committed here, Mr. Hamshaw," he announced. "The lights must remain up until I have the names and addresses of the two persons on either side of that vacant place and the young man seated exactly behind."

"Do you mean that the man whom they have carried out is really dead?" the other demanded incredulously.

"He is as dead as you or anyone else would be, with six inches of cold steel in the top of your back. Excuse me, if you please. I will send you word when you can go on with the performance."

The sergeant completed his task. The two men on either side of the vacant place and the man seated immediately behind accepted the sergeant's invitation to retire into an anteroom with him. A few other precautions were taken and the whole affair was finished. The lights went down, the showing of the picture recommenced. Among the few persons, however, who had had enough for the evening were Malcolm Gossett, the consulting detective, and his wife. They took a taxicab home, and Cynthia, at any rate, gave a cry of relief as she sank into an easy-chair in their comfortable study.

"Oh, what a joy to get away from that awful place," she exclaimed. "Malcolm, I shall never forget that cry as long as I live."

"It was pretty bad," Gossett admitted, as he mixed himself a whisky and soda. "Can I bring you anything, Cynthia?"

"A glass of port," she begged. "The decanter is in the sideboard there."

They settled down for a comfortable half an hour.

Cynthia before long was sitting on the arm of her husband's chair.

"Tell me why you are so thoughtful, Malcolm," She asked. "Are you trying to think out a theory?"

"Not exactly," he replied. "I was trying to memorise the faces of those three men whom the sergeant took out to question."

"They seemed very harmless-looking people," Cynthia remarked.

"They were none of them known criminals," Gossett observed.

"Which do you think did it?" Cynthia asked. "They all looked terrified to death."

"I mustn't risk my reputation by guessing so early in the proceedings," her husband answered, smiling. "There's one thing you must remember—the man who had the best chance of doing it unobserved was the man seated immediately behind him. There was no one else on his row within a couple of

places. Further than that, why did he choose that particular seat? As a rule, a man with a whole row to choose from takes either the outside one or the one nearest the middle."

"I don't think it was he," Cynthia declared firmly. "He had such a nice expression and although he looked frightened—well, who wouldn't be?—he didn't look as though he'd done anything wrong."

"Well, inspiration is a great thing," Malcolm Gossett observed. "I've learned to trust in it more than I used to. But tell me, was there nothing odd that you noticed about that young man? You seem to have made a careful study of him."

"Odd? In what way?"

"Well, his appearance or dress or anything."

"There was one thing," Cynthia acknowledged. "He was wearing gloves."

Gossett patted her on the back.

"Good for you, little lady," he declared. "Those gloves may hang him."

The murder in the Pagoda Palace Cinema captivated the imagination of the whole country. This was no ugly crime in a low-down neighbourhood, committed by some miscreant who fled into the darkness. It had in it every essential of horror and drama. Whoever the guilty person may have been, whoever was responsible for that awful death cry which many of the audience swore they would never forget to their dying day, must have remained stolidly in his place. Deliberately he must have driven the knife home in that one vital spot with almost superhuman skill and ferocity and then, without movement or any attempt to escape, have joined in the general throb of consternation. The more people read about it, the more inhuman and impossible the thing seemed to become. The dead man was easily identified by his immediate neighbours. His name was Julian Brest, his age fifty-four. He was a retired diamond merchant of comfortable means, living in a bachelor flat on the heights of Hampstead. He belonged to two quite respectable clubs and also a golf club within easy distance of London.

His neighbour on the right, Samuel Johnson, had been for years his partner in the business which he had taken over at the murdered man's retirement. They were Saturday partners at golf, dined together once a week, and Julian Brest had been a frequent visitor at the other's villa in Golders Green. There was not the slightest evidence of any ill feeling of any sort between them.

A man who sat on the left was apparently a stranger to the other three. He rejoiced in the somewhat singular name of Carnforth Dent. He had a watchmaker's and jeweller's shop in the City, and from everything which could be learnt seemed to be a most unremarkable person. He was a married man, living happily with his wife and two children in a block of flats just over Hammersmith Bridge. He declared that he had never spoken to the dead man and had taken no particular interest in him.

The name of the young man in the seat behind, who had won Cynthia Gossett's sympathy, was Edward Sims. He was a manufacturing chemist with a small but prosperous business, single, and lived in rooms by himself in Kensington. Asked why he had chosen the somewhat indifferent seat behind the dead man, he explained that he suffered at times from claustrophobia, and he chose that particular seat because there were two empty ones on either side. There is no evidence that he had ever known or spoken to the dead man.

These, with Johnson's wife, who was seated on his other side, were the four people who were in the immediate vicinity of Julian Brest when his death cry had brought that awful note of tragedy into the crowded house. It seemed difficult enough for anyone of them, but almost impossible for anyone else, to have delivered that death blow unnoticed. On the other hand, the exigencies of the film demanded that it should be shown in as near complete darkness as possible, and the corner where the tragedy happened, being underneath the balcony, was perhaps the darkest spot in the whole auditorium, for which reason, although popular with flirtatious young couples, it was not as a rule in great demand with the staider section of the public.

In the case, however, as the manager pointed out, of a film so hugely popular as the one then being shown, people were glad to get places anywhere. By some means or other, by accident or design, these five people, two of whom professed themselves entirely unacquainted with the other three, had come together in the only spot where such a tragedy could have passed unseen. One of the five had died in agony. From the other four the Press, the man in the street and the whole world in general demanded a victim.

FIVE DAYS after the coroner's inquest, at which the only possible verdict had been returned, Mr. Edward Sims was shown into Gossett's office. The latter glanced at the card, which his office boy had brought him, with curiosity. He studied the young man who followed it with even greater interest.

"Mr. Edward Sims," he repeated. "Won't you sit down, Mr. Sims, and tell me what I can do for you?"

"The young man accepted the client's chair. In the daylight he appeared to greater advantage than under the garish lights of the cinema. His clothes were well cut and showed off his athletic figure to advantage. He wore the tie of a well-known public school, his bearing was frank and he endured Gossett's rather close scrutiny without embarrassment.

"I ought, perhaps," he explained, "to have brought you a card from Sir George Littledale. It was he who suggested my coming to see you. You can ring him up, if you like."

"I'm quite willing to take your word for it," Gossett replied. "Go ahead and tell me what is the trouble."

"The trouble is," the young man went on, "that I am one of the three persons who are suspected of having murdered Julian Brest at the cinema the other night. You heard about it, of course."

"I don't suppose there is a man, woman or child in London who hasn't. However, reading over the evidence, I see that you deny having seen or heard of the murdered man before in your life, that you drifted into the place you sat in entirely by accident, and that you are, to cut the matter short, absolutely innocent of the crime."

"That was my evidence."

"And you told the whole truth, of course," Gossett remarked, with the air of one speaking almost carelessly.

The young man remained silent. He was looking down at a particular spot on the carpet and twisting his bowler hat round in his hands.

"I don't suppose you've attempted to realise the situation, Mr. Gossett, as it must present itself to one or two of us," he said at last. "If we leave out the woman—you probably noticed the evidence which declared that it would have been impossible for her to have driven that blow home—there were just three of us who might have killed the man. His partner, the other young man whose name I've forgotten, or myself. Naturally, if the police can scrape together a single thread of motive on the part of any one of us three, that one would he done for."

"It would certainly be a very awkward position," Gossett assented.

"For some reason or other," Edward Sims continued, "they seem to be trying to work it up against me. I can't move without being shadowed. All sorts of questions are being continually asked about my past. I am quite certain that my rooms have been searched twice in my absence."

"If your story," Gossett pointed out quietly, "is absolutely and entirely true, there is nothing they can discover. The police have their faults, but they would never go so far as to try and inculpate a perfectly innocent person."

"Perhaps not," the other assented, "but there is unfortunately—Before I go any further, Mr. Gossett, I must ask you a question."

"Go ahead."

"I went to Sir George Littledale to ask him several questions about criminal law and, to tell you the truth, to ask him if he would defend me, if by any chance I should be charged with this horrible thing."

The young man paused to wipe the perspiration from his forehead. He had become more nervous.

"I must ask you this, Mr. Gossett. Supposing I were to confide in you a certain fact which might be considered almost as evidence against me in this case, should you feel yourself called upon to pass it on to the police?"

"Certainly not," was the emphatic rejoinder. "I work not for the criminal, but for the possibly innocent man who is accused of being a criminal. Of course, if you told me you were guilty, I cannot say what would happen, but so long as you declare yourself innocent, no confidence which you might make will be broken. I work outside the police and more often against them than with them."

The young man drew a breath of relief.

"Very well then," he confided, "I am going to tell you this. The knife which was found in the dead man's back is mine."

Gossett for once in his life was entirely startled.

"My God!" he exclaimed. "That's rather a terrible confession, Mr. Sims."

"It isn't a confession, it's a statement," the other man declared. "I've got it off my chest to one person at last, thank heavens. That knife was, or rather is, mine. I brought it in the Caledonian market four years ago. When I changed rooms a year ago—I moved from Bayswater to Kensington—the knife disappeared. I've never seen it since until that night. I examined it again at the coroner's Court. There is no doubt whatever about it. It is my knife. It is a Spanish design and a portion of the filigree work just above the hilt is missing on one side; also the knob at the top of the handle is slightly bent. It is my knife, Mr. Gossett."

"Is there anyone likely to be able to identify it?" Gossett asked gravely.

"I can't tell," Edward Sims answered wearily. "It was hanging up in my rooms for at least two years. The police have got it up against me so badly that they might try some of my acquaintances or friends, to see if they could identify it. There are several who could, I am sure."

"I suppose you realise how serious a business it would be for you if they did?"

"It looks horrible, I know, but I didn't do it," the young man declared. "I never heard of Julian Brest. I didn't care whether he lived or died...I've come to you for advice, Mr. Gossett. What should you do if you were me? I have three intimate friends who used to visit me frequently. Should you go to them and tell them the whole story and beg them not to identify the knife, if they're asked, or should you leave it to chance? That's what I want to know. I can't make up my mind. Which should you do?"

He wiped his forehead again. Face to face with his self-propounded problem, he seemed terrified.

"First of all, let me ask you something else," Gossett said "Why did you keep your gloves on all the time that night at the cinema? You have them on now, I see. There's no reason why you should take them off here, but it isn't often one keeps on a pair of thick doeskin gloves inside the cinema."

"The young man exposed his bared hands. There were dark-red stains on both.

"Sintric acid," he confided. "I broke a bottle in my laboratory. That's why I was wearing gloves that night."

Gossett made no immediate remark. There was a sudden light of horror in the young man's eyes. He rose to his feet, trembling.

"You think—" he began. "You think—"

"I thought it was so that you should leave no finger prints on anything you touched," Gossett admitted. "So, I daresay, did the police. That is, no doubt, one reason why they have suspected you."

Edward Sims seemed as though he were on the point of completely losing his self-control. He made a great effort, however, and replaced the gloves. He looked half fearfully across at Gossett.

"I believe," he muttered, "that you think I'm guilty."

"Whatever I think won't do you any harm," was the quiet reply. "I have seen too much of this sort of thing to be led away by entirely circumstantial evidence. I shall keep an open mind, I promise you. With regard to your first question, I should do nothing. Don't seek out any of your friends who might identify that knife. I don't think you're called upon to claim possession of it, unless you're asked the question point-blank. If things get worse, your only chance is to tell, the truth."

"You'll help me if the worst comes?"

"Certainly I will," Gossett promised. "I should like the address of the rooms from which you moved in Bayswater and the address of the man who moved you."

The young man took a piece of paper and scribbled down the names.

"You have told me that you knew nothing of Julian Brest, the murdered man," Gossett continued.

"I never saw or heard of him before in my life."

"Does the same apply to his three companions?"

"Absolutely. They were just members of the audience to me. I was very tired and I took little notice of them."

"You realise, I suppose," Gossett pointed out, "that it seems almost incredible that anyone should have been able to commit that murder, practically under your nose, without your having seen anything."

"I know," was the dreary assent. "That's another of the horrors, of course. The truth seems so bald and stupid. I was tired out with work. The atmosphere was stuffy and heavy; I'd gone off into a doze twice before at the beginning of the film, and I was dozing liken I was awakened by that awful cry."

Gossett nodded sympathetically.

"I'm like that myself sometimes," he admitted. "It's reasonable enough. The only trouble is that this time it becomes linked up with those other two horrible

coincidences. You have no objection to my making a few enquiries, I hope? I expect the police are doing the same thing."

The young man shivered.

"If you think it necessary," he agreed. "You are not like the police, though. I should be a fool if I came here and told you lies."

"Glad you realise that," Malcolm Gossett said, touching the bell. "What time will you come in tomorrow?"

"Any hour, any day," was the prompt reply. "I'm no good for work. I can do nothing. I sit and shiver every time the bell of my door rings. I daren't even answer the telephone."

"Remember this," Gossett said, as he nodded his farewell. "Under our present system, an innocent man is very seldom, if ever, punished. Keep on telling yourself that. Innocent men are never hung."

The young man turned away with a groan.

"I'll try," he promised, as he made his uncertain way towards the door. "That last word, though, has made cowards of better men than I."

Malcolm Gossett, on his return to his very comfortable study, threw himself into an easy-chair with a little groan. Cynthia, in a very pretty afternoon toilette, busied herself at the sideboard, making him an *apéritif*. He sipped it gratefully.

"You look very smart," he remarked, smiling. "More bridge?"

"At Mrs. Selwyn's," she told him. "They're the new people who took Number Seven. And Malcolm, do you know who was there?"

"No idea."

"The woman who sat in front of us the other night at the cinema, when that horrible thing happened."

"The Mrs. Samuel Johnson?"

"That's her name. Yes. It seems she's a very old friend of Mrs. Selwyn's."

"She didn't talk about the murder, I suppose?"

Cynthia shivered.

"She couldn't talk of anything else. I did wish sometimes that she'd leave off. Are you still interested in it, Malcolm?"

"Couldn't help myself very well, could I? I should think you were too."

She looked at him with earnestly enquiring eyes. His face had become like a mask. Only his eyes held her, and they seemed at the same time compelling yet empty of expression.

"When I said 'interested,'" she went on, "I meant, as you would say, professionally. Have you been consulted by anyone?"

He shook his head gently.

"Better for you not to ask me that sort of question, dear," he warned her. "Detectives in the eyes of the law have no wives, you know."

"I asked you," she told him, "because from something she said, I believed Mr. Samuel Johnson, her husband, might be coming to see you."

"What about?" Gossett asked, without moving a muscle.

"This case— the murder."

Gossett finished the contents of his wineglass and set it down empty.

"What on earth could he have to do with it? He and his partner seem to have been on excellent terms."

"Nothing, I suppose, directly," Cynthia replied. "But you see every one seems agreed upon one thing— the murder must have been committed by either the man who sat in the seat behind, or the man who sat on he other side of Julian Brest, or by Mr. Johnson. As Mrs. Johnson kept on saying, the only thing the police have to look for is some sort of a motive. That's why Mr. Johnson is worried."

"Better not tell me any more," Gossett advised.

"But Mrs. Johnson didn't make any secret of it," Cynthia went on. "It isn't anything very dreadful, after all. It was just a business arrangement made between Mr. Johnson and Mr. Brest, to guard against capital being drawn out, if you know what that means. They each insured their lives in favour of the other for ten thousand pounds. That means that now Mr. Brest is dead, Mr. Johnson will draw ten thousand pounds."

The telephone bell out in the hall rang. Cynthia went to answer it. When she returned, she was looking thoroughly scared.

"Malcolm," she cried, "thank God it was only you. That was Mrs. Samuel Johnson. She rang up to tell me that her husband was simply crazy with her because she admitted she had told us about the insurance, and whatever happens, she implores that we don't tell another soul. She has rung up the others and they've promised. Of course, I told her we wouldn't."

Gossett tapped a cigarette upon the arm of his chair and lit it.

"I should think that Mrs. Samuel Johnson must be one of the biggest fools in the world," he observed.

Cynthia laughed as she threw her arm around his neck.

"Aren't you glad I'm not like that, dear?" she whispered. "I never repeat things!"

MAJOR MOODY, the Sub-Commissioner, and Chief Inspector Arbuthnot were together, when Gossett was ushered into the former's room at Scotland Yard. They greeted him cordially, installed him in an easy, chair and offered him cigarettes. Arbuthnot remained lounging against the table. Moody leaned back in his place and regarded his visitor with a smile.

"Gossett," he asked, "who murdered Julian Brest?"

"I wish to God I knew," Gossett answered seriously enough.

"But I gather that you were within a few yards of the whole show," Moody observed.

"So I was. But you know how dark they get these modern cinemas nowadays, and he was in the darkest corner of it."

"Yes, I appreciate that. Arbuthnot and I and a few of the others have been down there on the reconstruction. We had two dummies in your seats too. Must have been almost impossible to have seen anything definitely. Queer business, though."

"Very queer."

"Are you working upon it?"

"In an indefinite sort of way," Gossett admitted. "You know very well how I conduct my business, Major. If a man comes to me whom I have sound reasons for believing guilty, I don't talk with him. If it's an open matter and he makes no confession, then he becomes my client, and after that I'm dumb."

"Quite sound," the Sub-Commissioner murmured. "Would it be a fair question to ask you if one of the three possibilities in the Julian Brest murder case has become your client?"

"One of them has approached me," Gossett acknowledged. "I have not yet adopted him us a client. I am making a few enquiries as much to satisfy myself as on his behalf."

"It's a queer business altogether," the Sub-Commissioner reflected. "We are rather hoping that the guilty person will get nerves and confess. If he doesn't, the one thing you used to fight against no strenuously may come to pass. A man may be convicted and hung on circumstantial evidence alone."

"I sincerely hope not."

The Sub-Commissioner shrugged his shoulders.

"But an eyewitness to this murder," he pointed out, "would be an impossibility."

"Granted," Gossett acknowledged. "But what about the natural corollary to circumstantial evidence— motive?"

"Just the point I was coming to," Major Moody observed. "We've got a line out, Gossett, but we're not getting on with this case as well as I had anticipated. I hope you're going to look upon it as a compliment, but we really sent for you to see if you could help us. Have you any idea as to who the guilty person is?"

"I think so, Major. I should like to hear a little more about the life insurance before I make up my mind absolutely."

"You have no certain conviction then?"

"None. You see, if I had certain convictions about anyone, I shouldn't be talking to them."

"You're no use to us to-day then, Gossett," the Sub-Commissioner said good-naturedly but with a curt little nod of dismissal.

Gossett picked up his hat.

"I'd interfere to save an innocent man, if I was convinced that he was innocent, or I'd give you all information I had about a guilty man, if I believed that he were guilty," he declared, as he took his leave. "As it is, I don't think I am of any use to you for the moment."

"THERE'S A MAN in the waiting room," the office boy announced, on Gossett's return. "Been waiting for you some time. Name of Dent. There's something else to it but I couldn't catch it all, and he hasn't got a card."

"Carnforth Dent?"

"That's right."

"Show him in as soon as I've taken my coat off," Gossett directed.

Mr. Carnforth Dent was not an attractive unit of humanity. He was small and slight, with a mass of grey-brown hair and a thin moustache. He wore steel-rimmed spectacles of an ancient design and his black clothes had seen better days. The most attractive things about him, Gossett decided, as he waved his visitor to a seat and took mental stock of him, were his hands, with their long muscular fingers, nervous but prehensile.

"What can I do for you, Mr. Dent?" Gossett asked curiously.

"Do you know who I am?" the man enquired.

"I think so. I was within a few places of you the other night at the Pagoda Cinema."

"Well, I'm glad I haven't got to explain all about that, anyway," the other went on, in an unexpectedly deep voice. "They tell me you're a kind of detective, but nothing to do with Scotland Yard or the law. Hop much do you charge for a bit of advice?"

"Nothing at all to you," Gossett answered. "I'm too interested in the case."

"Nothing is the price that suits me all right," Mr. Dent declared, "because that's just what I'm earning since that beastly night."

"How is that?"

"Nobody won't come in my shop," Dent confided. "There's boys looking through the window all day, trying to catch a glimpse of me. I stand in the doorway and I can hear them talking. 'That's him,' they keep muttering, 'what sat next the bloke that got the knife in his back.' Then one of them will say— 'I guess he done it all right' And another one— 'He's the only bloke that could have reached him proper.' And then they go and fetch their friends to come and stare. It's enough to drive a man crazy."

"It's very bad luck," Gossett acknowledged. "Let's have the matter clear to start with, to prevent any misunderstanding. I suppose you didn't kill him, did you?"

There was a brief silence. The man's face seemed to have become somehow or other convulsed, twisted a little on one side. He was a very ugly person.

"That's a new game, that is," he remarked, "asking a question all in a moment like that. A Scotland Yard game, eh? Did I kill him? I didn't come here to answer questions."

"All right," Gossett said good-humouredly. "No offence. What do you want to know?"

"I wanted to know this," the watchmaker explained, leaning a trifle forward. "I have been reading the papers about this case. They seem to have made up their minds that one of us three must have done it— either me, or the young man wearing gloves that sat behind, or the elderly chap who was his partner and sat next to him. One of us three, all the newspapers say in their smug way. The only thing to do is to find the motive. Now here's my question, and if you'll answer it free, I'll be obliged to you. Supposing I'd come across that chap Brest some time in my life and things hadn't gone well with us— supposing, for instance, he'd sent me to prison, whether it was justly it unjustly, so that I had a grudge against him; supposing the police found out that— what about me?"

"If the police knew as much as you've just told me," Gossett confided, "you would be placed under immediate observation and every effort would be made to obtain some circumstantial evidence, such as the knife, or threat, or something of that sort. If they succeeded in getting hold of a thing, you would certainly be arrested and tried for murder."

Mr. Carnforth Dent's expression was not a pleasant one. He sat in his chair, brooding.

"What made me go into that blasted cinema I can't imagine," he muttered. "Then to find myself next to him, of all men in the world! Is there any reward for finding the cove that stuck that knife between his shoulders?"

"Not that I know of," Gossett answered.

The visitor rose slowly to his feet.

"I'll be going," he announced.

"I'll give you another word of advice free, if you like," Gossett said. "Stick where you are and get on with your job. If you bolt, you'll never get clear. The police will have you, and then, if there has been anything between you and Julian Brest in the past, they'll dig it up. They're probably watching you now— and the others."

The man picked up his hat viciously.

"Seems to me," he muttered, "I've got to stay at home and starve or clear out and hang. I don't think much of your advice, Guv'nor."

"It didn't cost you much," was the cool reply.

SUB-COMMISSIONER Moody looked up from the file of papers which his secretary had just laid before him.

"Hello, you're soon back again, Gossett," he remarked to his subordinate. "Is it the Julian Brest affair again?"

Gossett nodded.

"If ever during my lifetime," he said, sinking into the chair which Moody had indicated, "I come across another case like this one, I think I will break stones on the road sooner than go on with my job."

Moody laid down his cigarette and stared at his visitor in astonishment.

"What's the matter with you?" he asked. "You look as though you had seen a ghost."

Gossett laughed hardly.

"I have seen three ghosts," he answered. "All the ghosts of men who were hanged for a crime they didn't commit. Don't look at me as though I were drunk, sir," he went on, his tone becoming a little more natural. "There never was a case like this before and never will be again. There's a man murdered, with his partner by the side of him, and two other men within a yard or so, apparently strangers. How much you know, Major, of course isn't my business. I haven't even heard what information the Department has, but I'm going to tell you this because I know you're a human being, and this might be one of the worst pitfalls of your life. There is circumstantial evidence backed with motive sufficient to make out a clear case against two of these men and, I believe, the third, only I simply refused to listen to his story. I couldn't bear any more of it. I'm telling you the truth, Major. Only one man killed— Julian Brest— but nine juries out of ten would bring in a verdict of guilty against two of them and perhaps three."

"You don't need to worry, Gossett," the Sub-Commissioner said kindly. "We're not blood fiends here. We want the guilty man, of course, but there's no framing-up done, as you know very well, in this country. We don't put a man on his trial for murder unless—"

The telephone bell rang. Major Moody broke off his sentence and took off the receiver. He listened for a moment imperturbably, then he spoke.

"Show her up," he directed.

He laid down the receiver and looked across at Gossett.

"I'm beginning to agree with you that there is something uncanny about this case, Gossett," he said. "Here's the woman now— Mrs.— what's her name?— Mrs. Samuel Johnson, asking for an interview. I'm not very keen about it. We can't put her in the box against her husband."

He swung round to where his secretary was seated in the shadows.

"Move behind the screen," he directed, "and take down what this woman has to say. Don't go, Gossett. Sit in the Inspector's chair there. You're one of the staff for the moment."

Gossett did as he was bidden. The door was opened. A strong waft of perfume heralded the arrival of Mrs. Samuel Johnson. The Sub-Commissioner rose to his feet.

"Good afternoon, Madam," he said. "Will you take this chair and tell me what I can have the pleasure of doing for you?"

Mrs. Samuel Johnson wore expensive furs and a fashionable hat. She had used cosmetics freely but she was still, of her type, a handsome woman. She was, perhaps, a little out of breath from climbing the stairs, however, for she was a moment or two collecting herself.

"So this is Scotland Yard," she remarked, looking round her.

"A very unimportant part of it, Madam," was the courteous reply.

"And you're one of the head policemen," she went on.

"I am the Sub-Commissioner."

"The same thing, I suppose," she continued. "Well, you know who I am— Mrs. Samuel Johnson. I am the woman who sat next but one to Julian Brest that horrible night at the Pagoda Cinema. I have come to tell you who killed him."

There was a brief silence. Gossett found himself gripping the sides of his chair. Major Moody leaned forward.

"Madam," he enjoined, "I hope you will be careful before you speak. This is a very serious matter."

"I am not a fool," she answered scornfully. "I have been hysterical for several days, but I am calm enough now. You can send for one of your doctors presently, if you like, to tell you whether I am sane or not. First of all," she went on, opening her bag and drawing out a letter, "read that. Read it aloud, so that the other man can hear."

Major Moody adjusted his eyeglass and spread out a square sheet of paper. The printed address at the top was Brest & Johnson, Number 17a, Hatton Gardens. He read very slowly and turned his head slightly to where the secretary was seated.

My dear old Susie,

There has been enough of this nonsense. You must please understand that this time I am definitely in earnest. I am leaving Samuel the business and I am going back to South Africa next week. You will have plenty to live on, and once and for all I cannot spare another penny. We have had some good times together but I'm through. You and Samuel will be all right. The business is still worth something, and if anything happens to me, there is the ten thousand pounds life insurance which will come your way. I am proposing to Samuel that we dine at the Trocadero to-night for the last time and go to a cinema afterwards— the three of us. I'll send you a line sometimes, old girl, and I hope we shall part pals.

Julian.

The Sub-Commissioner finished the letter and looked up. She met his enquiring eyes.

"Yes," she said, "that's the way a man gets rid of his sweetheart after eight years. Now you want to knew who killed Julian Brest. I did."

The Sub-Commissioner regarded her doubtfully.

"But my dear Madam," he protested, "what you tell me is practically an impossibility."

She laughed scornfully.

"Why?"

"In the first place," he pointed out, "you were not even sitting next to him. In the second place, it would take a surgeon to know the exact spot in which to push that knife. In the third place, it would have taken a man's strength to have driven it home like that."

"You're not such clever folk up here as I fancied," she scoffed. "Listen now, and I'll answer you. In the first place, it may have occurred to you that my husband is a slim man. I ask you," she went on, "to look at the length of that arm."

She slipped off her fur coat, disclosing her really magnificent though too ample figure, imperfectly concealed by a tight-fitting cloth dress. She extended her arm with a smile.

"I had this around his neck all the evening," she went on, "that's nothing for a cinema, as I dare say you know. I could have had it round Julian's too without exerting myself. That should answer your first objection. In the second place, before I was married, I was a qualified nurse at one of the best hospitals in London, and I know as much about anatomy as any surgeon. In the third place, give me a knife and I'll drive it as far as you like into your own desk, or give me your arm— there, just like that, I could break it if I wanted to."

Major Moody drew away from the reach of her fingers with a stifled cry of pain.

"But the knife?" he enquired.

"I bought it at a second-hand shop in Bayswater," she told him. "It had been left behind in some apartments there. I took it out with me that night deliberately and I did what I meant to do. It was easier than I had dreamed of. The man behind with the gloves on was asleep. No one else could see."

"I am to take it seriously," he asked, with a new note of gravity in his tone, "as your confession of the murder of Julian Brest?"

"What do you suppose I'm here for?" she demanded.

"No one has suspected you," he pointed out. "Why have you come here with this confession?"

"To stop my poor old husband from going mad," she replied scornfully. "It's just dawned upon him that the deed was done with the knife that dozens of

people have seen in our house, and that Julian Brest's life was insured in our favour for ten thousand pounds, and that it was he who was sitting next him at the Cinema! He's off his head. He's too crazy event to realise that it was I who did it. Let him live. I haven't been such a good wife to him. This will put matters straight."

The Sub-Commissioner stretched out his hand towards the little row of bells which stood upon his table.

"I suppose you realise, Madam," he said, "that I shall have to place you under arrest, that you will have to spend the night in the cells here, and come before the magistrate in the morning?"

"Not on your life," the woman scoffed. "You can touch another of those bells for one of your doctors, if you like. I saw to that before I came out. Another half an hour I may be good for. I'm not sure I'll last as long— Now I've finished."

Her head fell back. Both men noticed at the same time the ghastly pallor beneath her rouge. She was unconscious before the doctor arrived, and dead before he could complete his examination. From behind the screen came the click of the machine, as the secretary began to type out the confession.

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9: The She-Wolf

"Saki"

H. H. Munro, 1870-1916

Metropolitan Magazine August 1912, as by H. H. Munro

Collected in: *Beasts and Super-Beasts*, 1914

"Saki" (Hector Hugh Munro, 1870-1916) was a journalist and foreign correspondent, author of non-fiction books and most famously his acerbic, satiric and sometimes macabre short stories under the name "Saki". He enlisted in the British army in 1914, age 43, and died in action in 1916. Clovis Sangrial was one of his recurring characters.

LEONARD BILSITER was one of those people who have failed to find this world attractive or interesting, and who have sought compensation in an "unseen world" of their own experience or imagination— or invention. Children do that sort of thing successfully, but children are content to convince themselves, and do not vulgarise their beliefs by trying to convince other people. Leonard Bilsiter's beliefs were for "the few," that is to say, anyone who would listen to him.

His dabblings in the unseen might not have carried him beyond the customary platitudes of the drawing-room visionary if accident had not reinforced his stock-in-trade of mystical lore. In company with a friend, who was interested in a Ural mining concern, he had made a trip across Eastern Europe at a moment when the great Russian railway strike was developing from a threat to a reality; its outbreak caught him on the return journey, somewhere on the further side of Perm, and it was while waiting for a couple of days at a wayside station in a state of suspended locomotion that he made the acquaintance of a dealer in harness and metalware, who profitably whiled away the tedium of the long halt by initiating his English travelling companion in a fragmentary system of folk-lore that he had picked up from Trans-Baikal traders and natives. Leonard returned to his home circle garrulous about his Russian strike experiences, but oppressively reticent about certain dark mysteries, which he alluded to under the resounding title of Siberian Magic. The reticence wore off in a week or two under the influence of an entire lack of general curiosity, and Leonard began to make more detailed allusions to the enormous powers which this new esoteric force, to use his own description of it, conferred on the initiated few who knew how to wield it. His aunt, Cecilia Hoops, who loved sensation perhaps rather better than she loved the truth, gave him as clamorous an advertisement as anyone could wish for by retailing an account of how he had turned a vegetable marrow into a wood pigeon before her very eyes. As a manifestation of the possession of supernatural powers, the story was discounted in some quarters by the respect accorded to Mrs. Hoops' powers of imagination.

However divided opinion might be on the question of Leonard's status as a wonderworker or a charlatan, he certainly arrived at Mary Hampton's house-party with a reputation for pre-eminence in one or other of those professions, and he was not disposed to shun such publicity as might fall to his share. Esoteric forces and unusual powers figured largely in whatever conversation he or his aunt had a share in, and his own performances, past and potential, were the subject of mysterious hints and dark avowals.

"I wish you would turn me into a wolf, Mr. Bilsiter," said his hostess at luncheon the day after his arrival.

"My dear Mary," said Colonel Hampton, "I never knew you had a craving in that direction."

"A she-wolf, of course," continued Mrs. Hampton; "it would be too confusing to change one's sex as well as one's species at a moment's notice."

"I don't think one should jest on these subjects," said Leonard.

"I'm not jesting, I'm quite serious, I assure you. Only don't do it to-day; we have only eight available bridge players, and it would break up one of our tables. To-morrow we shall be a larger party. To-morrow night, after dinner—"

"In our present imperfect understanding of these hidden forces I think one should approach them with humbleness rather than mockery," observed Leonard, with such severity that the subject was forthwith dropped.

Clovis Sangrail had sat unusually silent during the discussion on the possibilities of Siberian Magic; after lunch he side-tracked Lord Pabham into the comparative seclusion of the billiard-room and delivered himself of a searching question.

"Have you such a thing as a she-wolf in your collection of wild animals? A she-wolf of moderately good temper?"

Lord Pabham considered. "There is Louisa," he said, "a rather fine specimen of the timber-wolf. I got her two years ago in exchange for some Arctic foxes. Most of my animals get to be fairly tame before they've been with me very long; I think I can say Louisa has an angelic temper, as she-wolves go. Why do you ask?"

"I was wondering whether you would lend her to me for to-morrow night," said Clovis, with the careless solicitude of one who borrows a collar stud or a tennis racquet.

"To-morrow night?"

"Yes, wolves are nocturnal animals, so the late hours won't hurt her," said Clovis, with the air of one who has taken everything into consideration; "one of your men could bring her over from Pabham Park after dusk, and with a little help he ought to be able to smuggle her into the conservatory at the same moment that Mary Hampton makes an unobtrusive exit."

Lord Pabham stared at Clovis for a moment in pardonable bewilderment; then his face broke into a wrinkled network of laughter.

"Oh, that's your game, is it? You are going to do a little Siberian Magic on your own account. And is Mrs. Hampton willing to be a fellow-conspirator?"

"Mary is pledged to see me through with it, if you will guarantee Louisa's temper."

"I'll answer for Louisa," said Lord Pabham.

By the following day the house-party had swollen to larger proportions, and Bilsiter's instinct for self-advertisement expanded duly under the stimulant of an increased audience. At dinner that evening he held forth at length on the subject of unseen forces and untested powers, and his flow of impressive eloquence continued unabated while coffee was being served in the drawing-room preparatory to a general migration to the card-room.

His aunt ensured a respectful hearing for his utterances, but her sensation-loving soul hankered after something more dramatic than mere vocal demonstration.

"Won't you do something to convince them of your powers, Leonard?" she pleaded; "change something into another shape. He can, you know, if he only chooses to," she informed the company.

"Oh, do," said Mavis Pellington earnestly, and her request was echoed by nearly everyone present. Even those who were not open to conviction were perfectly willing to be entertained by an exhibition of amateur conjuring.

Leonard felt that something tangible was expected of him.

"Has anyone present," he asked, "got a three-penny bit or some small object of no particular value—?"

"You're surely not going to make coins disappear, or something primitive of that sort?" said Clovis contemptuously.

"I think it very unkind of you not to carry out my suggestion of turning me into a wolf," said Mary Hampton, as she crossed over to the conservatory to give her macaws their usual tribute from the dessert dishes.

"I have already warned you of the danger of treating these powers in a mocking spirit," said Leonard solemnly.

"I don't believe you can do it," laughed Mary provocatively from the conservatory; "I dare you to do it if you can. I defy you to turn me into a wolf."

As she said this she was lost to view behind a clump of azaleas.

"Mrs. Hampton—" began Leonard with increased solemnity, but he got no further. A breath of chill air seemed to rush across the room, and at the same time the macaws broke forth into ear-splitting screams.

"What on earth is the matter with those confounded birds, Mary?" exclaimed Colonel Hampton; at the same moment an even more piercing scream from Mavis Pellington stampeded the entire company from their seats.

In various attitudes of helpless horror or instinctive defence they confronted the evil-looking grey beast that was peering at them from amid a setting of fern and azalea.

Mrs. Hoops was the first to recover from the general chaos of fright and bewilderment.

"Leonard!" she screamed shrilly to her nephew, "turn it back into Mrs. Hampton at once! It may fly at us at any moment. Turn it back!"

"I— I don't know how to," faltered Leonard, who looked more scared and horrified than anyone.

"What!" shouted Colonel Hampton, "you've taken the abominable liberty of turning my wife into a wolf, and now you stand there calmly and say you can't turn her back again!"

To do strict justice to Leonard, calmness was not a distinguishing feature of his attitude at the moment.

"I assure you I didn't turn Mrs. Hampton into a wolf; nothing was farther from my intentions," he protested.

"Then where is she, and how came that animal into the conservatory?" demanded the Colonel.

"Of course we must accept your assurance that you didn't turn Mrs. Hampton into a wolf," said Clovis politely, "but you will agree that appearances are against you."

"Are we to have all these recriminations with that beast standing there ready to tear us to pieces?" wailed Mavis indignantly.

"Lord Pabham, you know a good deal about wild beasts—" suggested Colonel Hampton.

"The wild beasts that I have been accustomed to," said Lord Pabham, "have come with proper credentials from well-known dealers, or have been bred in my own menagerie. I've never before been confronted with an animal that walks unconcernedly out of an azalea bush, leaving a charming and popular hostess unaccounted for. As far as one can judge from outward characteristics," he continued, "it has the appearance of a well-grown female of the North American timber-wolf, a variety of the common species canis lupus."

"Oh, never mind its Latin name," screamed Mavis, as the beast came a step or two further into the room; "can't you entice it away with food, and shut it up where it can't do any harm?"

"If it is really Mrs. Hampton, who has just had a very good dinner, I don't suppose food will appeal to it very strongly," said Clovis.

"Leonard," beseeched Mrs. Hoops tearfully, "even if this is none of your doing can't you use your great powers to turn this dreadful beast into something harmless before it bites us all— a rabbit or something?"

"I don't suppose Colonel Hampton would care to have his wife turned into a succession of fancy animals as though we were playing a round game with her," interposed Clovis.

"I absolutely forbid it," thundered the Colonel.

"Most wolves that I've had anything to do with have been inordinately fond of sugar," said Lord Pabham; "if you like I'll try the effect on this one."

He took a piece of sugar from the saucer of his coffee cup and flung it to the expectant Louisa, who snapped it in mid-air. There was a sigh of relief from the company; a wolf that ate sugar when it might at the least have been employed in tearing macaws to pieces had already shed some of its terrors. The sigh deepened to a gasp of thanks-giving when Lord Pabham decoyed the animal out of the room by a pretended largesse of further sugar. There was an instant rush to the vacated conservatory. There was no trace of Mrs. Hampton except the plate containing the macaws' supper.

"The door is locked on the inside!" exclaimed Clovis, who had deftly turned the key as he affected to test it.

Everyone turned towards Bilsiter.

"If you haven't turned my wife into a wolf," said Colonel Hampton, "will you kindly explain where she has disappeared to, since she obviously could not have gone through a locked door? I will not press you for an explanation of how a North American timber-wolf suddenly appeared in the conservatory, but I think I have some right to inquire what has become of Mrs. Hampton."

Bilsiter's reiterated disclaimer was met with a general murmur of impatient disbelief.

"I refuse to stay another hour under this roof," declared Mavis Pellington.

"If our hostess has really vanished out of human form," said Mrs. Hoops, "none of the ladies of the party can very well remain. I absolutely decline to be chaperoned by a wolf!"

"It's a she-wolf," said Clovis soothingly.

The correct etiquette to be observed under the unusual circumstances received no further elucidation. The sudden entry of Mary Hampton deprived the discussion of its immediate interest.

"Some one has mesmerised me," she exclaimed crossly; "I found myself in the game larder, of all places, being fed with sugar by Lord Pabham. I hate being mesmerised, and the doctor has forbidden me to touch sugar."

The situation was explained to her, as far as it permitted of anything that could be called explanation.

"Then you really did turn me into a wolf, Mr. Bilsiter?" she exclaimed excitedly.

But Leonard had burned the boat in which he might now have embarked on a sea of glory. He could only shake his head feebly.

"It was I who took that liberty," said Clovis; "you see, I happen to have lived for a couple of years in North-Eastern Russia, and I have more than a tourist's acquaintance with the magic craft of that region. One does not care to speak about these strange powers, but once in a way, when one hears a lot of nonsense being talked about them, one is tempted to show what Siberian magic can accomplish in the hands of someone who really understands it. I yielded to that temptation. May I have some brandy? the effort has left me rather faint."

If Leonard Bilsiter could at that moment have transformed Clovis into a cockroach and then have stepped on him he would gladly have performed both operations.

10: The Pest Year of 1905

Ernest Favenc

1845-1908

Evening News (Sydney) 2 April 1898

This story was reprinted as "What the Rats Brought," in Britain in *Phil May's Illustrated Annual, Winter 1904-05,* the events re-dated from 1904-5 to 1919

IT WAS during the prolonged drought of 1904-1905, just about Christmas time of the former year, that the steamer *Niagara* fell in with an apparently abandoned barquentine about fifty miles from Sydney. It was calm, fine weather, so, failing to get any response to their hail, the chief officer boarded her. He returned with the report that she was perfectly seaworthy and in good order, but that they could find no one on board, living or dead. The captain went on board, and, being so close to port, he was thinking of putting some hands on her to bring her into Port Jackson, when a perusal of the log book in the captain's cabin made him hesitate.

From the entries it seemed that the crew had sickened and died, of some kind of malignant fever, the only survivors being three men, a passenger, one sailor, and the cook. The last entry, which was nearly three weeks old, stated that these three hade provisioned a boat and intended leaving the vessel and making for Australia as the only chance of saving their lives, as they felt sure that the vessel was infested with plague.

The value of the barquentine and cargo being considerable, and the weather settled, the captain determined to tow her into port. He put three volunteers on board to steer her, took her in tow, and brought her into Port Jackson, and anchored off the Quarantine Ground. On reporting the matter to the medical officer he was ordered to remain at anchor until it was decided what course to take.

The season was very hot and unhealthy, and when the story spread it occasioned a slight scare amongst the citizens. Both vessels were quarantined, and the barquentine thoroughly examined. When it was found from the log that the deserted craft had sailed from an Indian port, where the plague that had so long devastated Southern Asia was then raging furiously, the consternation grew into a panic. It was determined to take the vessel to sea. and burn her— nothing else would pacify the public. The claim of the owners and the salvage claim for compensation were rated, and the *Niagara* towed the derelict out to sea and set fire to her, and then returned to undergo a term of quarantine.

Nothing further occurred, and in due course the *Niagara* was released, and people forgot the fright they had entertained. The drought reigned unbroken, and the heat continued to range higher than ever. Then, when the winter had

passed, and a dry spring betokened the coming of another summer of drought and heat, a mortal sickness made its appearance in some of the low-lying suburbs of Sydney. When it had grown to an alarming extent, grim stories got to be bruited about, and a tale that one of the sailors of the *Niagara* had told was repeated.

He was on watch the night before the vessel was to be destroyed, the two ships, lying anchored pretty close together. It was about 2 o'clock when his attention was drawn to a peculiar noise on board the plague ship. He listened intently, and recognised the squealing of rats, and a low, pattering noise as though all the rats on the ship were gathering together. And so they were. By the light of the moon his quick eyes detected something moving on the cable. The rats were leaving the ship. Down the cable they went in what seemed to be an endless procession, into the water, and straight ashore they swam. They passed under the bow of the *Niagara*, and the sailor declared it seemed nearly half an hour before the last straggler swam past. He lost sight of them in the shadow of the shore, but he heard the curious subdued murmur they made for some time. The sailor little thought as he watched this strange exodus from the doomed ship that he had witnessed an invasion of Australia portending greater disaster than the entrance of a hostile fleet through the Heads. The horror of the tale was augmented by the fact that the suburbs afflicted were now haunted by numberless rats.

People began to fly from the neighborhood, and soon some of the most populous ones were empty and deserted. This spread the evil, and before long plague was universal in the city, and the authorities and their medical advisers at their wits' end to cope with and check me scourge.

The following account is from the diary of one who passed unscathed through the Affliction. Strange to, say, none of the crew of the *Niagara* were attacked, nor was the boat with the three survivors ever heard of.

'—THE WEATHER is still unchanged. It seems as though a cloud would never appear in the sky again. Day after day the thermometer rises during the afternoon to 115 deg in the shade, with unvarying regularity. No wind comes, save puffs of hot air, which penetrate everywhere. The harbor is lifeless, and the water seems stagnant and rotting. And now, dead bodies are floating in what were once the clear, sparkling waters of Port Jackson. Most of these are the corpses of unfortunates, stricken with plague madness, when in their delirium, plunge into the water, which has a fatal fascination for them. They float untouched, for it is reported, and I believe with truth, that the very sharks have deserted these tainted shores. The sanitary cordon once drawn around the city has long since been abandoned. The plague now rages throughout the whole continent. The very birds of the air seem to carry the infection far and wide. All

steamers have stopped running, for they dare not leave port, in case of being disabled at sea by their crews sickening and dying. All the ports of the world are closed against Australian vessels. Ghastly stories are told of ships floating around our coasts, drifting hither and thither, manned only by the dead. Our sole communication with the outer world is by cable, and that is uncertain, for some of the land operators have been found dead at the instruments.

THE DEAD are now beginning to lie about the streets, for the fatigue parties are overworked, and the cremation furnaces are not yet available. Yesterday I was in George-street, and saw three bodies lying in the Post Office Colonnade. Dogs were sniffing at them, and the horrible rats that now infest every place ran boldly about. There is now no traffic but the death carts, and the silence of the once noisy street is awful. The only places open for business are the hotel bars, for many hold that alcohol is a safeguard against the plague, and drink to excess, only to die of heat apoplexy. People who meet look curiously at each other to see if either bears the plague blotch on their face.

Religious mania is now common. The Salvation Army parade the streets praying and singing. The other day I saw, when kneeling in a circle, that two of them never rose again. They remained kneeling, smitten to death by the plague. The captain, as he called himself, raised a cry of 'Halleluiah! More souls for Jesus!' and then the whole crew, in their gaudy equipments, went marching down the echoing street, the big drum banging, its loudest. As the noise of their hysterical concert faded round a corner a death cart rambled up and the two victims were unceremoniously pitched into it; one of the men remarking, ' 'Tain't rotten ones, this time, better luck!' Such was the requiem passed on departed spirits by those whose occupation had long since made them callous to suffering and death.

All the medical profession stuck nobly to their posts, though death was busy amongst their ranks. And volunteers among the nurses, male and female, were never wanting, as places had to be filled. But what could medical science do against a disease that recognised no conventional rules, and raged in the open country the same as in the crowded towns? Experts from Europe and America came over and sacrificed their lives, and still no check could be found. All now agreed that the only chance in an atmospheric disturbance that would break up the drought and dispel the stagnant atmosphere that brooded like a nightmare over the continent. Bu the meteorologists could give no hope. All that they could say was that a cycle of rainless years had set in, and that at some former time Australia had passed through the same experience. A strange comet, too, of unprecedented size, had made its appearance in the southern hemisphere, and astronomers were at loss to account for the visitor. And the fiery portent flamed in the midnight sky, further adding to the terrors of the superstitious.

It was during one night, when walking late through the stricken city, I met with the following adventure. My work at the hospitals had been hard, but I felt no fatigue. The despair brooding over everyone had shadowed me with its influence. Think what it was to be shut up in a pest city without a chance of escape, either by sea or land. I wandered through the streets, Campbell's lines running in my head, 'And ships were drifting with the dead to shores where all was dumb.' Suddenly a door opened, and a young woman staggered out, and reeling, almost fell against me. I supported her, and she seemed to somewhat recover from the frightful horror that had apparently seized her. She stared at me, then said, 'Oh! I can stand it no longer. The rats came first, and now hideous things have come through the window, and are watching his breath go out. Are you a doctor?'

'I am not a doctor,' I answered; 'but I am one of those who attend to the dying. It is all we can do.'

'Will you come with me? My husband is dying, and I dare not go back alone, and I dare not leave him to die alone. He has raved of fearful things.'

The street lamps were unlighted, but by the glare of the threatening comet that lit up the heavens I could, see her face, and the mortal terror in it. I was just reassuring her when someone approaching stopped close to us.

'Ha, ha!' laughed the stranger, who was frenzied with drink. 'Another soul going to be damned. Let me see him. I'll cheer him on his way,' and he waved a bottle of whisky. I turned to remonstrate with the fellow, when I saw a change come over his face that transformed it from the frenzy of intoxication into comparative sobriety.

'Your name, woman; your husband's name?' he gasped. As if compelled to answer she replied, 'Sandover, Herbert Sandover!'

'Can I come, too,' said the man, addressing me in an altered tone. 'I know Herbert, knew him of old. But his wife doesn't remember me.'

'Keep quiet and don't disturb the dying,' I said, and giving my arm to the woman went into the house. We ascended the stairs and entered a bedroom; the rats scampered, squeaking, before us. On the bed lay a man, plague-stricken, and raving in delirium. No wonder. On the rail at the head of the bed and on the rail at the foot sat two huge bats. Not the harmless Australian variety that lives in the twilight limestone caves; nor the fruit-eating flying fox; but a larger kind still, the hideous flesh-feeding vampire of New Guinea and Borneo. For since Australia became a pest house the flying carnivora of the Archipelago had invaded the continent.

There sat these demon-like creatures with their vulpine heads and huge leathery wings, with which they were slowly fanning the air. And the dying man lay and raved at them. Disturbed by our entrance the obscene things flapped

slowly out of the open window, and the sick man turned to us with a hideous laugh, which was echoed by the strange man who had joined us.

'Herbert Sandover,' he said, 'you know me, Bill Kempton, the man you robbed and ruined. I'm just in time to see you die. I came to Australia after you to twist your thievish neck, but plague has done it. Grin man, grin, it's pleasant to meet an old friend.'

I tried to stop him, but vainly, and from the look on the dying man's face I could see that it was a case of recognition in reality. The woman had sunk upon her knees and buried her head in her hands. Kempton still continued his mad taunting. Taking a tumbler from the table he poured some whisky into it and drank it.

'This is the stuff to keep the plague away,' he shouted; 'but you, Sandover, never drank. Oh, no! too clever for that. Spoil your nerve for cheating. But I'll live, you cur, and see you tumbled into the death cart.'

So he raved at the dying man, and one of the great vampires came back and perched on the window-sill. Raising himself in bed by a last effort, Sandover fixed his eyes on the thing, and screamed that it should not come for him before his time. As if incensed by his gestures, the vampire suddenly sprang fiercely at him, uttering a whistling snarl of rage. Fixing its talons in him and burying its teeth in his neck, it commenced worrying the poor wretch, and buffeting him with its wings.

Calling to Kempton, I rushed forward to try and beat it off, but its mate suddenly appeared. Quite powerless to aid, I picked up the woman, who had fainted, and carried her out of the room. Kempton, now quite mad, continued fighting the vampires, but at last, torn and bleeding, he followed us into the street. I was endeavoring to restore the woman, and he only stopped to assure me that the devils were eating Sandover, and then reeled off.

When the woman came to her senses I left her by her own request to wait till the death cart came round. I called there the next morning, but I never saw her again. Amidst such sights and scenes as these the summer passed on, burning and relentless. The cattle and sheep were dying in hundreds and thousands, and it looked as though Australia would soon be a lifeless waste, ever to remain so.

ONE MORNING it was posted up that news had come from Eucla that the barometer there gave notice of an atmospheric disturbance approaching from, the south-west That was all, and no more could be elicited. The line-men at tine next station started to ascertain the cause of the silence, and, after a few days they wired to say that they had found the men on the station all dead. But the self-registering instruments had continued their work, and the storm was daily expected at Cape Leeuwin.

The days preceding our deliverance from the pest were some of the worst experienced; as though the approaching storm drove before it all the foul brooding vapors that had so long oppressed us, and they had assembled to make a last stand on the east coast. One morning I felt a change, a cool change, in the air.

Going into the street, I saw, to my surprise, many people there, gathered to gather in groups, and gazing upwards at a strange eight. The vampires were leaving the city. Ceaseless columns of them were flying eastward, and men watched them with relieved faces, as though a dream of maddening horror was passing away. Then came a sound, such as must have been heard in the quaint old city of legendary lore when the pied piper sounded has magic flute. The pest rats were flying. Forth they came, unheeding the people who stood about; and eastward they commenced their march.

ALL that day it continued, and some reported that they plunged into the sea, and disappeared. At any rate, they vanished utterly, and with them other loathsome vermin that had been fattening on the dead and the living dead. Everyone seemed to see new life ahead. Men spoke cheerily to each other of adopting means for clearing and cleansing the city, but that work was taken out of our hands. That night the cyclonic system that had raged across the continent burst upon us. All the long dormant forces of the air seemed to have met in conflict. For three days its fury was appalling. The violent rain and constant thunder and lightning added to the tumult. No one stirred out during those three days of tempest and destruction. Nature in her own mighty way had set to work to purge the country of the plague. It was while this storm was at its fiercest that the post office tower and the town hall tower were destroyed, and hurled in ruins to the ground. No one, as far as I know, witnessed the catastrophe.

The morning of the fourth day broke calm, clear, and beautiful. At midnight the tempest had lulled, and when daylight came the sun rose in a sky lightly flecked with roseate morning clouds. Accompanied by a friend, I started out to see the ruined city, and those who were left alive in it. The streets still ran with flood water, but the higher levels had pretty well drained off, and, once they were gained, our progress was easy. Martin Place was choked with the ruins of the tower, and many other buildings had succumbed; while not a single verandah was left standing in any street.

We went to the harbor. The tide was receding, carrying with it the turbid waters that rushed into it from all points; carrying with it, too, wreckage and human bodies. A strong current was setting seaward through the Heads, and bore out to the Pacific all the rotting remnants of the past visitation.

The deserted, ships in the harbor had been torn from, their moorings and either sunk or blown ashore. Wreck and desolation were visible everywhere, but the air was pure, cool, and grateful; and our hearts, roes in spite of the difficulties that lay before us, for the looming horror of the plague had been lifted.

OF WHAT followed your histories tell you. How the overwhelming disaster knit the colonies together in a closer federation than legislators ever forged. How from that hour has sprung a new, purged and purified Australian race. All this, to the record of the Australian nation; mine are but some reminiscences of a time of horror unparalleled which no man anticipated would have visited Australia.

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11: A Horseman In The Sky

Ambrose Bierce

1842-1914?

San Francisco Examiner April 14 1889

ONE SUNNY AFTERNOON in the autumn of the year 1861 a soldier lay in a clump of laurel by the side of a road in western Virginia. He lay at full length upon his stomach, his feet resting upon the toes, his head upon the left forearm. His extended right hand loosely grasped his rifle. But for the somewhat methodical disposition of his limbs and a slight rhythmic movement of the cartridge-box at the back of his belt he might have been thought to be dead. He was asleep at his post of duty. But if detected he would be dead shortly afterward, death being the just and legal penalty of his crime.

The clump of laurel in which the criminal lay was in the angle of a road which after ascending southward a steep acclivity to that point turned sharply to the west, running along the summit for perhaps one hundred yards. There it turned southward again and went zigzagging downward through the forest. At the salient of that second angle was a large flat rock, jutting out northward, overlooking the deep valley from which the road ascended. The rock capped a high cliff; a stone dropped from its outer edge would have fallen sheer downward one thousand feet to the tops of the pines. The angle where the soldier lay was on another spur of the same cliff. Had he been awake he would have commanded a view, not only of the short arm of the road and the jutting rock, but of the entire profile of the cliff below it. It might well have made him giddy to look.

The country was wooded everywhere except at the bottom of the valley to the northward, where there was a small natural meadow, through which flowed a stream scarcely visible from the valley's rim. This open ground looked hardly larger than an ordinary door-yard, but was really several acres in extent. Its green was more vivid than that of the inclosing forest. Away beyond it rose a line of giant cliffs similar to those upon which we are supposed to stand in our survey of the savage scene, and through which the road had somehow made its climb to the summit. The configuration of the valley, indeed, was such that from this point of observation it seemed entirely shut in, and one could but have wondered how the road which found a way out of it had found a way into it, and whence came and whither went the waters of the stream that parted the meadow more than a thousand feet below.

No country is so wild and difficult but men will make it a theatre of war; concealed in the forest at the bottom of that military rat-trap, in which half a hundred men in possession of the exits might have starved an army to submission, lay five regiments of Federal infantry. They had marched all the previous day and night and were resting. At nightfall they would take to the road again, climb to the place where their unfaithful sentinel now slept, and descending the other slope of the ridge fall upon a camp of the enemy at about midnight. Their hope was to surprise it, for the road led to the rear of it. In case of failure, their position would be perilous in the extreme; and fail they surely would should accident or vigilance apprise the enemy of the movement.

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THE SLEEPING sentinel in the clump of laurel was a young Virginian named Carter Druse. He was the son of wealthy parents, an only child, and had known such ease and cultivation and high living as wealth and taste were able to command in the mountain country of western Virginia. His home was but a few miles from where he now lay. One morning he had risen from the breakfast-table and said, quietly but gravely: "Father, a Union regiment has arrived at Grafton. I am going to join it."

The father lifted his leonine head, looked at the son a moment in silence, and replied: "Well, go, sir, and whatever may occur do what you conceive to be your duty. Virginia, to which you are a traitor, must get on without you. Should we both live to the end of the war, we will speak further of the matter. Your mother, as the physician has informed you, is in a most critical condition; at the best she cannot be with us longer than a few weeks, but that time is precious. It would be better not to disturb her."

So Carter Druse, bowing reverently to his father, who returned the salute with a stately courtesy that masked a breaking heart, left the home of his childhood to go soldiering. By conscience and courage, by deeds of devotion and daring, he soon commended himself to his fellows and his officers; and it was to these qualities and to some knowledge of the country that he owed his selection for his present perilous duty at the extreme outpost. Nevertheless, fatigue had been stronger than resolution and he had fallen asleep. What good or bad angel came in a dream to rouse him from his state of crime, who shall say? Without a movement, without a sound, in the profound silence and the languor of the late afternoon, some invisible messenger of fate touched with unsealing finger the eyes of his consciousness— whispered into the ear of his spirit the mysterious awakening word which no human lips ever have spoken, no human memory ever has recalled. He quietly raised his forehead from his arm and looked

between the masking stems of the laurels, instinctively closing his right hand about the stock of his rifle.

His first feeling was a keen artistic delight. On a colossal pedestal, the cliff,— motionless at the extreme edge of the capping rock and sharply outlined against the sky,— was an equestrian statue of impressive dignity. The figure of the man sat the figure of the horse, straight and soldierly, but with the repose of a Grecian god carved in the marble which limits the suggestion of activity. The gray costume harmonized with its aërial background; the metal of accoutrement and caparison was softened and subdued by the shadow; the animal's skin had no points of high light. A carbine strikingly foreshortened lay across the pommel of the saddle, kept in place by the right hand grasping it at the "grip"; the left hand, holding the bridle rein, was invisible. In silhouette against the sky the profile of the horse was cut with the sharpness of a cameo; it looked across the heights of air to the confronting cliffs beyond. The face of the rider, turned slightly away, showed only an outline of temple and beard; he was looking downward to the bottom of the valley. Magnified by its lift against the sky and by the soldier's testifying sense of the formidableness of a near enemy the group appeared of heroic, almost colossal, size.

For an instant Druse had a strange, half-defined feeling that he had slept to the end of the war and was looking upon a noble work of art reared upon that eminence to commemorate the deeds of an heroic past of which he had been an inglorious part. The feeling was dispelled by a slight movement of the group: the horse, without moving its feet, had drawn its body slightly backward from the verge; the man remained immobile as before. Broad awake and keenly alive to the significance of the situation, Druse now brought the butt of his rifle against his cheek by cautiously pushing the barrel forward through the bushes, cocked the piece, and glancing through the sights covered a vital spot of the horseman's breast. A touch upon the trigger and all would have been well with Carter Druse. At that instant the horseman turned his head and looked in the direction of his concealed foeman— seemed to look into his very face, into his eyes, into his brave, compassionate heart.

Is it then so terrible to kill an enemy in war— an enemy who has surprised a secret vital to the safety of one's self and comrades— an enemy more formidable for his knowledge than all his army for its numbers? Carter Druse grew pale; he shook in every limb, turned faint, and saw the statuesque group before him as black figures, rising, falling, moving unsteadily in arcs of circles in a fiery sky. His hand fell away from his weapon, his head slowly dropped until his face rested on the leaves in which he lay. This courageous gentleman and hardy soldier was near swooning from intensity of emotion.

It was not for long; in another moment his face was raised from earth, his hands resumed their places on the rifle, his forefinger sought the trigger; mind,

heart, and eyes were clear, conscience and reason sound. He could not hope to capture that enemy; to alarm him would but send him dashing to his camp with his fatal news. The duty of the soldier was plain: the man must be shot dead from ambush— without warning, without a moment's spiritual preparation, with never so much as an unspoken prayer, he must be sent to his account. But no— there is a hope; he may have discovered nothing— perhaps he is but admiring the sublimity of the landscape. If permitted, he may turn and ride carelessly away in the direction whence he came. Surely it will be possible to judge at the instant of his withdrawing whether he knows. It may well be that his fixity of attention— Druse turned his head and looked through the deeps of air downward, as from the surface to the bottom of a translucent sea. He saw creeping across the green meadow a sinuous line of figures of men and horses— some foolish commander was permitting the soldiers of his escort to water their beasts in the open, in plain view from a dozen summits!

Druse withdrew his eyes from the valley and fixed them again upon the group of man and horse in the sky, and again it was through the sights of his rifle. But this time his aim was at the horse. In his memory, as if they were a divine mandate, rang the words of his father at their parting: "Whatever may occur, do what you conceive to be your duty." He was calm now. His teeth were firmly but not rigidly closed; his nerves were as tranquil as a sleeping babe's— not a tremor affected any muscle of his body; his breathing, until suspended in the act of taking aim, was regular and slow. Duty had conquered; the spirit had said to the body: "Peace, be still." He fired.

iii

AN OFFICER of the Federal force, who in a spirit of adventure or in quest of knowledge had left the hidden *bivouac* in the valley, and with aimless feet had made his way to the lower edge of a small open space near the foot of the cliff, was considering what he had to gain by pushing his exploration further. At a distance of a quarter-mile before him, but apparently at a stone's throw, rose from its fringe of pines the gigantic face of rock, towering to so great a height above him that it made him giddy to look up to where its edge cut a sharp, rugged line against the sky. It presented a clean, vertical profile against a background of blue sky to a point half the way down, and of distant hills, hardly less blue, thence to the tops of the trees at its base. Lifting his eyes to the dizzy altitude of its summit the officer saw an astonishing sight— a man on horseback riding down into the valley through the air!

Straight upright sat the rider, in military fashion, with a firm seat in the saddle, a strong clutch upon the rein to hold his charger from too impetuous a plunge. From his bare head his long hair streamed upward, waving like a plume.

His hands were concealed in the cloud of the horse's lifted mane. The animal's body was as level as if every hoof-stroke encountered the resistant earth. Its motions were those of a wild gallop, but even as the officer looked they ceased, with all the legs thrown sharply forward as in the act of alighting from a leap. But this was a flight!

Filled with amazement and terror by this apparition of a horseman in the sky— half believing himself the chosen scribe of some new Apocalypse, the officer was overcome by the intensity of his emotions; his legs failed him and he fell. Almost at the same instant he heard a crashing sound in the trees— a sound that died without an echo— and all was still.

The officer rose to his feet, trembling. The familiar sensation of an abraded shin recalled his dazed faculties. Pulling himself together he ran rapidly obliquely away from the cliff to a point distant from its foot; thereabout he expected to find his man; and thereabout he naturally failed. In the fleeting instant of his vision his imagination had been so wrought upon by the apparent grace and ease and intention of the marvelous performance that it did not occur to him that the line of march of aërial cavalry is directly downward, and that he could find the objects of his search at the very foot of the cliff. A half-hour later he returned to camp.

This officer was a wise man; he knew better than to tell an incredible truth. He said nothing of what he had seen. But when the commander asked him if in his scout he had learned anything of advantage to the expedition he answered:

"Yes, sir; there is no road leading down into this valley from the southward."

The commander, knowing better, smiled.

iv

AFTER FIRING HIS SHOT, Private Carter Druse reloaded his rifle and resumed his watch. Ten minutes had hardly passed when a Federal sergeant crept cautiously to him on hands and knees. Druse neither turned his head nor looked at him, but lay without motion or sign of recognition.

"Did you fire?" the sergeant whispered.

"Yes."

"At what?"

"A horse. It was standing on yonder rock— pretty far out. You see it is no longer there. It went over the cliff."

The man's face was white, but he showed no other sign of emotion. Having answered, he turned away his eyes and said no more. The sergeant did not understand.

"See here, Druse," he said, after a moment's silence, "it's no use making a mystery. I order you to report. Was there anybody on the horse?"

"Yes."
"Well?"
"My father."
The sergeant rose to his feet and walked away.
"Good God!" he said.

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12: A Little Masquerade

Gilbert Parker

Sir Horatio Gilbert George Parker, Bt., 1862-1932
In: *Cumner's Son, and Other South Seas Folk*, 1904

Canadian born author who travelled extensively in the South Seas from a base in Australia, 1886-1892, and thence moved to the UK. From 1900-1918 he was a member of parliament in the UK. He was a prolific novelist and numerous silent movies were made from his stories.

"OH, NOTHING MATTERS," she said, with a soft, ironical smile, as she tossed a bit of sugar to the cockatoo.

"Quite so," was his reply, and he carefully gathered in a loose leaf of his cigar. Then, after a pause: "And yet, why so? It's a very pretty world one way and another."

"Yes, it's a pretty world at times."

At that moment they were both looking out over a part of the world known as the Nindobar Plains, and it was handsome to the eye. As far as could be seen was a carpet of flowers under a soft sunset. The homestead by which they sat was in a wilderness of blossoms. To the left was a high rose-coloured hill, solemn and mysterious; to the right— afar off— a forest of gum-trees, pink and purple against the horizon. At their feet, beyond the veranda, was a garden joyously brilliant, and bright- plumaged birds flitted here and there.

The two looked out for a long time, then, as if by a mutual impulse, suddenly turned their eyes on each other. They smiled, and, somehow, that smile was not delightful to see. The girl said presently: "It is all on the surface."

Jack Sherman gave a little click of the tongue peculiar to him, and said: "You mean that the beautiful birds have dreadful voices; that the flowers are scentless; that the leaves of the trees are all on edge and give no shade; that where that beautiful carpet of blossoms is there was a blazing quartz plain six months ago, and there's likely to be the same again; that, in brief, it's pretty, but hollow." He made a slight fantastic gesture, as though mocking himself for so long a speech, and added: "Really, I didn't prepare this little oration."

She nodded, and then said: "Oh, it's not so hollow,— you would not call it that exactly, but it's unsatisfactory."

"You have lost your illusions."

"And before that occurred you had lost yours."

"Do I betray it, then?" He laughed, not at all bitterly, yet not with cheerfulness.

"And do you think that you have such acuteness, then, and I—" Nellie Hayden paused, raised her eyebrows a little coldly, and let the cockatoo bite her finger.

"I did not mean to be egotistical. The fact is I live my life alone, and I was interested for the moment to know how I appeared to others. You and I have been tolerably candid with each other since we met, for the first time, three days ago; I knew you would not hesitate to say what was in your mind, and I asked out of honest curiosity. One fancies one hides one's self, and yet—you see!"

"Do you find it pleasant, then, to be candid and free with some one?…. Why with me?" She looked him frankly in the eyes.

"Well, to be more candid. You and I know the world very well, I fancy. You were educated in Europe, travelled, enjoyed— and suffered." The girl did not even blink, but went on looking at him steadily. "We have both had our hour with the world; have learned many sides of the game. We haven't come out of it without scars of one kind or another. Knowledge of the kind is expensive."

"You wanted to say all that to me the first evening we met, didn't you?" There was a smile of gentle amusement on her face.

"I did. From the moment I saw you I knew that we could say many things to each other 'without pre liminaries.' To be able to do that is a great deal."

"It is a relief to say things, isn't it?"

"It is better than writing them, though that is pleasant, after its kind."

"I have never tried writing— as we talk. There's a good deal of vanity at the bottom of it though, I believe."

"Of course. But vanity is a kind of virtue, too." He leaned over towards her, dropping his arms on his knees and holding her look. "I am very glad that I met you. I intended only staying here over night, but—"

"But I interested you in a way— you see, I am vain enough to think that. Well, you also interested me, and I urged my aunt to press you to stay. It has been very pleasant, and when you go it will be very humdrum again; our conversation, mustering, rounding-up, bullocks, and rabbits. That, of course, is engrossing in a way, but not for long at a time."

He did not stir, but went on looking at her. "Yes, I believe it has been pleasant for you, else it had not been so pleasant for me. Honestly, I don't believe I shall ever get you out of my mind."

"That is either slightly rude or badly expressed," she said. "Do you wish, then, to get me out of your mind?"

"No, no— You are very keen. I wish to remember you always. But what I felt at the moment was this. There are memories which are always passive and delightful. We have no wish to live the scenes of which they are over again, the reflection is enough. There are others which cause us to wish the scenes back again, with a kind of hunger; and yet they won't or can't come back. I wondered of what class this memory would be."

The girl flushed ever so slightly, and her fingers clasped a little nervously, but she was calm. Her voice was even; it had, indeed, a little thrilling ring of energy. "You are wonderfully daring," she replied, "to say that to me. To a school-girl it might mean so much: to me—!" She shook her head at him reprovingly.

He was not in the least piqued. "I was absolutely honest in that. I said nothing but what I felt. I would give very much to feel confident one way or the other— forgive me, for what seems incredible egotism. If I were five years younger I should have said instantly that the memory would be one—"

"Which would disturb you, make you restless, cause you to neglect your work, fill you with regret; and yet all too late— isn't that it?" She laughed lightly and gave a lump of sugar to the cockatoo.

"You read me accurately. But why touch your words with satire?"

"I believe I read you better than you read me. I didn't mean to be satirical. Don't you know that what often seems irony directed towards others is in reality dealt out to ourselves? Such irony as was in my voice was for myself."

"And why for yourself?" he asked quietly, his eyes full of interest. He was cutting the end of a fresh cigar. "Was it"— he was about to strike a match, but paused suddenly— "was it because you had thought the same thing?"

She looked for a moment as though she would read him through and through; as though, in spite of all their candour, there was some lingering uncertainty as to his perfect straightforwardness; then, as if satisfied, she said at last: "Yes, but with a difference. I have no doubt which memory it will be. You will not wish to be again on the plains of Nindobar."

"And you," he said musingly, "you will not wish me here?" There was no real vanity in the question. He was wondering how little we can be sure of what we shall feel to-morrow from what we feel to-day. Besides, he knew that a wise woman is wiser than a wise man.

"I really don't think I shall care particularly. Probably, if we met again here, there would be some jar to our comradeship— I may call it that, I suppose?"

"Which is equivalent to saying that good-bye in most cases, and always in cases such as ours, is a, little tragical, because we can never meet quite the same again."

She bowed her head, but did not reply. Presently she glanced up at him kindly. "What would you give to have back the past you had before you lost your illusions, before you had—trouble?"

"I do not want it back. I am not really disillusionised. I think that we should not make our own personal experience a law unto the world. I believe in the world in spite— of trouble. You might have said trouble with a woman—I should not have minded." He was smoking now, and the clouds twisted about his face so that only his eyes looked through earnestly. "A woman always makes laws

from her personal experience. She has not the faculty of generalisation— I fancy that's the word to use."

She rose now with a little shaking motion, one hand at her belt, and rested a shoulder against a pillar of the veranda. He rose also at once, and said, touching her hand respectfully with his finger tips: "We may be sorry one day that we did not believe in ourselves more."

"Oh, no," she said, turning and smiling at him, "I think not. You will be in England hard at work, I here hard at living; our interests will lie far apart. I am certain about it all. We might have been what my cousin calls 'trusty pals'— no more."

"I wish to God I felt sure of that."

She held out her hand to him. "I believe you are honest in this. I expect both of us have played hide-and-seek with sentiment in our time; but it would be useless for us to masquerade with each other: we are of the world, very worldly."

"Quite useless— here comes your cousin! I hope I don't look as agitated as I feel."

"You look perfectly cool, and I know I do. What an art this living is! My cousin comes about the boarhunt to-morrow."

"Shall you join us?"

"Of course. I can handle a rifle. Besides, it is your last day here."

"Who can tell what to-morrow may bring forth?" he said.

THE NEXT DAY the boar-hunt occurred. They rode several miles to a little lake and a scrub of brigalow, and, dismounting, soon had exciting sport. Nellie was a capital shot, and, without loss of any womanliness, was a thorough sportsman. To-day, however, there was something on her mind, and she was not as alert and successful as usual. Sherman kept with her as much as possible— the more so because he saw that her cousins, believing she was quite well able to take care of herself, gave her to her own resources. Presently, however, following an animal, he left her a distance behind.

On the edge of a little billabong she came upon a truculent boar. It turned on her, but she fired, and it fell. Seeing another ahead, she pushed on quickly to secure it, too. As she went she half-cocked her rifle. Had her mind been absolutely intent on the sport, she had full cocked it. All at once she heard the thud of feet behind her. She turned swiftly, and saw the boar she had shot bearing upon her, its long yellow tusks standing up like daggers. A sweeping thrust from one of them leaves little chance of life.

She dropped upon a knee, swung her rifle to her shoulder, and pulled the trigger. The rifle did not go off. For an instant she did not grasp the trouble. With singular presence of mind, however, she neither lowered her rifle nor took her

eye from the beast; she remained immovable. It was all a matter of seconds. Evidently cowed, the animal, when within a few feet of her, swerved to the right, then made as though to come down on her again. But, meanwhile, she had discovered her mistake, and cocked her rifle. She swiftly trained it on the boar, and fired. It was hit, but did not fall; and came on. Then another shot rang out from behind her, and the boar fell so near her that its tusk caught her dress.

Jack Sherman had saved her.

She was very white when she faced him. She could not speak. That night, however, she spoke very gratefully and almost tenderly.

To something that he said gently to her then about a memory, she replied: "Tell me now as candidly as if to your own soul, did you feel at the critical moment that life would be horrible and empty without me?"

"I thought only of saving you," he said honestly.

"Then I was quite right; you will never have any regret," she said.

"I wonder, ah, I wonder!" he added sorrowfully. But the girl was sure.

The regret was hers; though he never knew that. It is a lonely life on the dry plains of Nindobar.

13: The Missing Pullman Car

W. L. Alden

1837-1908

To-day, 10 Nov 1894

"To-day" *was a "weekly magazine-journal," 1893-1905; edited by Jerome K. Jerome until 1898, then by Barry Pain.*

IT HAD BEEN SNOWING at Jericho all night. The wind had gradually risen until it was blowing hard, and the soft, dry snow was drifting rapidly and heavily. Early in the morning I made my way with difficulty down to the railway-station. I found the stationmaster sitting by his big stove, smoking his after-breakfast pipe, and evidently extremely satisfied with the weather.

"There'll be no gettin' away from here for you today," said he, as I entered. "Everything's blocked. Number Seven is lying up at Spartanville, and Number Ten is doing the same at Athensville; and the snow is more than ten feet deep between the two. There's a regular blizzard in the air, unless I'm mistaken ; and it may be a week before we can get the road in running order again."

I had heard so much of the eccentric ways of a Montana blizzard, that I was not sorry to have the opportunity of seeing one, especially as it was a matter of small consequence whether I got away from Jericho in a day or a week.

"Just you sit down here with me," said the stationmaster, "and we'll chin a while. A blizzard ain't of no sort of harm so long as you can stay indoor, and have got enough to eat, and drink, and smoke, and plenty of firewood. Now, if you was caught out in this storm, and couldn't get anywhere, you'd have reason to find fault with it ; but when a blizzard gives you a holiday, as it's doing for me to-day, and can't get at you to make you uncomfortable, it's what I call a blessing in disguise."

"Isn't that a Pullman car standing out there on the side track?" I asked, trying to make out a shadowy object that occasionally glimmered through the storm in front of the station.

"You're right— it is," replied my friend. "That's the Pullman car 'Hawkeye,' and just the unluckiest car that was ever built. She came up on the 9.43 last night, and, having a hot box, the conductor was obliged to leave her."

"A hot box," I enquired— "what is that?"

"Well— a hot axle, perhaps you'd call it. The axle gets hot, and burns out the brass journal, and your car goes to everlasting smash. That's what a hot box does when you don't take care of it. Thishyer 'Hawkeye ' is always heating up her boxes, and being side tracked. It's a part of her unluckiness and, as I told you before, she's the most unlucky car that ever left any shop."

"Tell me all about her," said I. "There isn't anything to do, and I know you don't mind talking. I've heard of such things as unlucky ships, but I never knew that luck troubled itself about Pullman cars."

"Well— to begin with, there's been a sight of people killed aboard that there car. There was fifteen that was smashed in a collision down by Denver, when she was running on the Pike's Peak road. Not a soul was hurt in any other car on that train. The accident happened where another road crossed the Pike's Peak track, and the train on this other road struck the Pike's Peak train just where thishyer 'Hawkeye' was, and naturally went through it.

"The company repaired her, and she got to running again, and killed two brakemen and a conductor, and then the Pike's Peak folks said they had had enough of her, and they got rid of her as soon as they could. That was when she came on our road, and she hadn't made her third trip on the Spartanville division before a man was killed aboard her for snoring. I don't say it didn't serve him right, but it was an unlucky thing for the company, for they had to pay his full value, and, besides, it gave the road a bad name.

"Thishyer man was one of those fellows that snores in a sort of miscellaneous way. Not a regular, straightfoward snore, you understand, but a snore that keeps doing unexpected and uncalled-for things, and that is full of chokings, and wheezings, and such. The car happened to be pretty full, and when this chap settled down to business there wasn't a man that could get a wink of sleep. The other passengers remonstrated with him, by heaving boots, and cussin' him; but it didn't do him no good. He'd stop for a few minutes, and, maybe, apologise a little ; but just as soon as he dropped off to sleep he'd begin again, and seem to be trying to make up for lost time. The women and children were crying because they couldn't get the sleep that they'd paid the company for, and the men were gradually getting madder and madder. About two o'clock in the morning they came to the conclusion that something must be done, and they got the snoring man up out of his berth, and set him on the coal-box, with a miner a-setting opposite to him, and ready to job him in the ribs, or maybe the stomach, with the poker, in case he should drop off to sleep. This worked well; but the miner fell asleep himself, and then the fellow, not having the fear of the poker before his eyes, began to snore worse than ever. So about a dozen men turned out, and one of them, happening to have a Smith's Lung Plaster in his bag, he contributed it to the general fund, and the men put it over the snorer's nose and mouth, and held it there till it was good and dry. Then they tied him hand and foot, and chucked him into his bunk, and they all slept the sleep of the just till late the next morning.

"When they came to look after the man they found he was dead. The plaster had suffocated him, as any fool might have knowed it would, for when once you put one of them plasters on you, it's got to stay there unless you are willing to

tear the skin off with it. Besides, this chap couldn't get his hands loose, to monkey with the plaster, even if he had been so disposed, so he just lay there and died, without making any disturbance. This was more than the passengers had bargained for, and when it turned out that the man was a leading citizen of Chicago, they didn't lose much time in leaving the train. The jury who assessed the damages against the railroad company made them pay forty-five thousand dollars to the heirs of the man, and, though some papers said that this was an exorbitant value to put on any Chicago man, the verdict was pretty generally popular, as anything that takes money out of a railroad company is sure to be.

"Then there was a shooting match on the 'Hawkeye,' a little later on, between the conductor and a man whom he tried to prevent from going to bed with his boots on, the day having been a particular muddy one ; and as the conductor shot wild, he wounded two passengers before he was shot through the head. I seem to remember something about a nigger porter being hanged aboard that same car, but incidents of that hind are so frequent, that perhaps it isn't fair to throw it up against the ' Hawkeye.'

"But the most remarkable thing that ever happened to that car was her being lost one whole winter, and the company searching all over the whole United States for her. You'd think a big Pullman car wasn't an easy thing to mislay, but mislaid this car was, and no mistake.

"It was just about this time of year, two years ago. Perhaps you've heard of the great blizzard of 1890? No? Well, the news does seem pretty slow in getting round to England, as I've noticed more than once in my experience.

"About thirty miles from here is a side track, that runs to the southward, and then takes a bend, and comes into the main line again fifteen miles further on. It was made, in the first place, so as to reach some gravel pits, and as the gravel pits stretched along a good piece, and the track following them up, it was easier to connect the track with the main line up beyond Athensville than it was to bring the trains back over it every time. At the time I'm speaking about, the track wasn't used, the company having no call for gravel just then. One day, however, a wild cat, meeting the mail train close by the lowrer switch, opened it, and went on thishyer side track until the mail had passed."

"Wait a minute!" said I. "What in the world is a switch?"

"Oh!" replied the stationmaster, "I forgot you were an Englishman. You don't act as if you owned the whole earth; and you don't keep reminding everybody that ain't an Englishman that he's a poor miserable sinner, without no manners and no religion. So, you see, I find myself forgetting every now and then that you are English. Besides, you talk like a white man, and most Englishmen that pass through here don't seem to know how to speak the American language. Well, we can't all be free-born Americans. If we were, there wouldn't be no room for us to brag about being superior to all the combined nations of the

earth. Such as you are, I've found you a square man, and I'll maintain that same against anybody that ventures to doubt it."

"Thanks, very much, for your good opinion," said I; "but it doesn't exactly tell me what a switch is."

"I forgot where I was for a minute," said the stationmaster. "A switch is what Englishmen call 'points,' and a switchman is what you call a ' pointsman.' At least, so I've been informed. If I'm not correct, I shall be glad to be corrected."

I intimated that his explanation was entirely satisfactory, and he proceeded with his narrative—

"Now, whether it was because the blizzard had begun, and the brakeman who opened the switch was half-froze, or whether, the snow being middling deep, the switch didn't work easy, I can't say. What did happen was that the brakeman didn't close the switch after the wild cat had backed out on to the main track again. There was no other train due to come along just there till the West-bound express that passes here at 4.13; and by the time she got up to the switch it was snowing so hard, and blowing so rampageous, that the engineer couldn't see the length of his cab ahead of him. The switch being open, the train naturally ran on to the side track, and kept right on, as if it knew it was in the right path, and was thinking no evil, as the good book says.

"The engineer afterwards said that he couldn't help wondering what had made the track so rough, all of a sudden, and several times he was astonished at finding his engine on a curve, when, according to his reckoning, there wasn't any curve at that part of the road. However, he reflected that no man could be expected to say just where he was while a blinding blizzard was blowing and his intellects was half froze, so he kept his train a-going as well as he could, she beginning to find the snow too much for her, and slowing down among the drifts in a way that showed that if the snow should get much deeper she would be blocked for good.

"The 'Hawkeye' was the last car of the train, which was just her luck. She was full, having thirty-three passengers besides the conductor and the nigger porter. The conductor I knew pretty well, and he wasn't a bad fellow for a Pullman conductor. You see, every Pullman car has its own conductor. He don't do no conducting ; but he is put there by the Pullman Company to prevent the regular train conductor from stealing the Pullman fares. There's where the Pullman people are shortsighted, for, of course, the Pullman conductor has to divide with the train conductor, for no train conductor with any self-respect! is going to stand by and see a Pullman man knock down fares on his train without he is going to have some benefit from it. The consequence is that the Pullman Company has to supply two conductors with extras, as you might say, instead of one, and it must cost them a good deal in the course of the year.

"But this hasn't anything to do with my story. The train kept on over the side track till she came to where it joined the main line again, a little west of Jerusalemville. The engineer caught a glimpse of a light glimmering ahead, and blew his whistle, and the switchman seeing that somebody was coming down the side track opening the switch, and the train went on to the main line and the conductor never knew where he had been until next spring.

"Now, when the train left Spartanville, the 'Hawkeye' was all right, but when she reached Jerusalemville, she was missing. The coupling had become uncoupled, and the car had been left behind on the track. That was what anybody could see, but the trouble was to know just where the accident had happened. From Spartanville to Jerusalemville is forty-three miles, and, when the conductor thought of the blizzard that was blowing he decided that he'd be— well! he said he wouldn't go back for that there car on that there night for nobody, and I don't blame him.

"But the next day everybody all along the line was notified that the 'Hawkeye' was missing, and asked if they knew anything about her. Not a station-master had seen hide or hair of her. So the Jerusalemville station-master fired up a locomotive that was kept at his place, there being a stiff grade just there, and trains frequently needing an extra engine to pull them up, and he sends it with a snow-plough down the road looking for the 'Hawkeye.' The locomotive took fourteen hours to get through to Spartanville, the snow had drifted so amazing deep ; but nothing was seen of the missing car. It was clear that she wasn't anywhere on the main line between those two stations, and she wasn't anywhere beyond Spartanville, for the track was clear all the way from Spartanville to Milwaukee, and trains were running over it all the time.

"The General Superintendent came down here about the matter, and, after going over the road himself, he made up his own mind that the car had been stolen. Stealing freight cars is something that happens every day, but stealing a Pullman was something new in the stealing line. You see, it's easy enough to steal a freight car. You load one up in New York, for instance, and send it two or three thousand miles away. It passes over half a dozen different roads, and, when it is started back empty, with its destination chalked on to it, it is constantly getting left behind here and there, because it stands to reason that. loaded cars must always have precedence over empty ones. By-and-bye the chalk marks get rubbed off, and the railroad men forget where the car ought to go, so she just lies on a siding month after month. If it so happens that the company owning the track where she lies is short of freight cars, nothing is easier than to give her a new coat of paint, and there she is, and her original owners can never identify her again. There ain't a road in the country that don't keep men constantly on the go, searching for lost freight cars. They generally find them after a while, for it's a mighty curious thing that when a freight car is

lost she is generally sure to find her way either to Omaha, or Chattanooga, or Indianapolis, and if you search those three places for her you'll stand a middling good chance of finding her. No man can, say why this is so. There was a college professor down here one time from Chicago, and I asked him about this. He said that missing cars went to those places because they were gregorious That's a pretty big word, but I can't see as it makes the thing any plainer. What's your idea about it, may I ask?"

"I'll think about it while you tell me about the 'Hawkeye,' " I replied, evasively.

"I declare I'd pretty nigh forgot about her. Well! when the Superintendent had made up his mind that she was stole, he sent a man out to search for her. I didn't take any stock in his theory, for, granting that the Northern Pacific, for instance, wanted to steal a Pullman car, they wouldn't steal one choke-full of passengers, for what on earth could they do with them? Of course, the searcher never found that car, and the mystery preyed on the General Superintendent so heavy that he went to Canada with the Company's ready money a full year before he had intended to go, sacrificing in this way at least fifty thousand dollars that he might have taken with him. But he was a mighty proud man, and the fact that a car had been lost, and he couldn't explain how, hurt his pride.

"What did become of that car? Well, I'm going to tell you in due time. Just you keep your collar on, and don't get excited. I never was one who could be hurried, and I'm too old to begin now.

"What had happened to the unfortunate 'Hawkeye' was this. She had become uncoupled in the middle of a deep cut that the side track ran through about ten miles this side of Jerusalemville. It was snowing and drifting something awful just at that time, and everybody aboard the car was asleep. When they woke up the next morning the car was snowed under, and, if you'd been outside, and looking for her, you couldn't have seen a thing except a monstrous big drift that filled the whole cutting.

"The passengers waited till pretty near noon for the train to start, and then, the firewood running low, and there being nothing more to eat aboard the car, some of them tunnelled out through the snow, and saw what was the matter.

"They weren't much frightened at first, so the nigger porter said, for they thought they could walk to some settlement as soon as the blizzard stopped. But the blizzard didn't stop all that day, and the next night, and when, on the second morning, they tunnelled out again, they found that they might as well try to walk through a quicksand as through that snow. Half-a-dozen men tried it, and only two of them came back again, the others sinking in the snow, and, when they became exhausted, stopping here for good. By this time the passengers were starving and freezing, for there was no more coal left, and nothing whatsoever to burn."

The station-master paused in his narrative and smoked thoughtfully. "What finally became of the passengers?" I asked, after leaving him for a short time to his meditations.

"Well! after they had stayed in the car and froze and starved till they must have been mighty weak, they made another attempt to break out. This time the whole lot of them started together; but they never got nowhere, barring the nigger porter, who, being the most worthless of the lot, naturally had the best luck. They all sank down, one by one, and went to sleep, and that was: the end of them— that is, till the wolves and the coyotes found them, a little later on. The nigger porter, however, kept up till he struck a frozen river, about ten miles south of the cutting, and then he found it middling easy travelling on the ice. He managed to get down to Carthageopolis, where he was found, and put in a hospital, he having, by this time, lost his wits, and being pretty sick. He laid in that hospital till spring, and, before he got back to the road, and told the story about the 'Hawkeye,' the snow had thawed, and the company had found her.

"You can look at her, setting out there on the track as innocent, so far as appearance goes, as any car that ever ran. But I wouldn't travel in that car not for no money. If the company knew its business, they'd either sell her, or they'd take and make her into kindling wood. You mark my words. She hasn't got through yet, and, before she comes to her end, she'll do something that will cost the company ten times her value, and fill a whole cemetery full of graves."

14: The Friend in Need

George Gissing

1857-1903

To-Day, 4 May 1895

From the short series "Nobodies At Home". Gissing was a celebrated Victorian novelist, his best regarded novels being "New Grub Street", "Demos", and "The Odd Women". He also wrote short stories, largely forgotten.

"HOW I do like to sit down to a paper with a good murder trial in it!"

Thus, after a supper of gross abundance, as he drew to the fender, Mr. Henry Bellamy, pawnbroker. The labours of a well-spent day were over, and he had his family about him : two sons, a daughter, and the wife espoused in second nuptials after the death of his children's mother. Mrs. Bellamy was a high-coloured adipose woman, arrayed, as always for the evening— with the barbarous splendour justified by her independent income; courted by Bellamy twenty years ago, she had forsaken him for another, but now, in the mellowing of her charms, fulfilled those early vows. Admirably did the couple suit each other, and they were never so conscious of the fact as after high feeding. Of the youths, one had a rakish, the other a stolid aspect; their sister was characterised by an unwholesome skin and shrill hilarity.

"I wouldn't care to be young again," Bellamy had remarked. "To my mind, this is the 'appiest time of life." And his look declared sincerity. Complete baldness emphasised the simian shape of his head; than his visage none more vulgar could be discovered in all Peckham; but unmistakable felicity enwrapped him. He was the owner of houses in swarming neighbourhoods, and his business had long been lucrative. The house above the shop, crammed with ostentatious furniture, which he had acquired in the way of trade, was still his abode, but he talked of "retiring," and often inspected "eligible villas."

Absorbed in the newspaper, he did not perceive that a servant summoned his wife from the room. On her return in a minute or two, Mrs. Bellamy told him that a woman stood at the door below. "It's that Mrs. Brookes. She wants you for Gawd's sake to let her have something on a dress. There's one of her children ill, and she hasn't a penny in the 'ouse, and not even coal to make a fire. I've told her you can't do business after hours, but she won't go away. It's fair cruel to hear the pore creature talk."

"Bring the pledge up here," said Bellamy, without raising his eyes from the paper. And the garment was brought; a better dress than might have been expected, worth to a secondhand dealer some seven and sixpence. Mrs. Bellamy spread it upon a table, and the family grouped about it.

"She says for Gawd's sake let her have all it's worth, 'Arry."

Now it was certain, as the pawnbroker knew, that this pledge would never be redeemed. Mrs. Brookes had brought numerous articles to the shop of late; a widow with many children, she was fighting hopelessly against inevitable pauperdom. Bellamy, after a few cold glances, took from his pocket one shilling and a threepenny-piece.

"Tell her to come for the ticket to-morrow— and we won't say nothing about the 'apenny."

A scarce perceptible pause, and Mrs. Bellamy left the room. The two youths exchanged a grin, but spoke no word; the daughter, with deft hand, rolled the garment together, and threw in into a corner; then, as if to break silence, she began singing: "It won't be a. stylish marriage— I can't afford a carriage "

Mrs. Bellamy was absent for rather a. long time, and when she reappeared her husband had finished his reading.

"Well, I have had a job to get rid of her. But she went quiet at last, and said I was to thank you for attending to her out of business hours."

"I'm glad she was civil," replied Bellamy, with a satisfied air. "It's what I always am myself, even to the poorest. Just think! A night like this without a bit of fire! Why, it fair makes your blood run cold! I am sorry for that woman! Yes, I am. She used to be comfortable. It's hard lines. But that's the world, my sonnies; one up and the other down. Life isn't all honey. Be thankful you wasn't born in a family like that."

He was talkative how, and quite cheerful. "See—" he remarked— "what a useful friend a pawnbroker was to the poor. Suppose that wretched woman had had no such person to call upon in her need." It wasn't charity. He didn't believe in charity. Nothing was any use that hadn't a solid basis of business.

"You may give and give, and you don't really help people. They must learn to help themselves." Mrs. Bellamy made strong assent, and cited instances of the demoralising effect of almsgiving. Then the subject was dismissed, and all began to talk of the murder trial; they reviewed with gusto every terrible and loathsome detail ; they probed possibilities, debated evidence, and, in short, thoroughly enjoyed the close of the evening.

In his bedroom, the pawnbroker, as he undressed before a glowing fire, observed musingly how glad he was that he hadn't refused to oblige that poor woman.

"It's a cruel night. She'll have got a fire lit by now. What's the matter with the child?"

"Hooping cough, pore little thing. Why, I'd rather have given money out of my own pocket than think of them all night Iong in a freezing bedroom. It makes me shiver to think of it!"

"No good thinking about that kind of thing. It doesn't do. You get uncomfortable, and where's the use? Life's life, and business is business. But there's a pleasure in feeling we've done her a kindness. It's worth the money. Yes, it is."

Bellamy spoke gravely, pausing to reflect, as he unbuttoned his waistcoat. Not a trace of troubled consciousness marked his demeanour. He smiled with the nearest approach to benevolence possible on such features, and then he sighed, as though dismissing his melancholy.

"I've a good mind to make it next midsummer, Jane— the retiring. I haven't done badly; we're comfortably off, old girl. I feel it about time I took a rest. It hasn't been all honey, you know."

"You've worked 'ard for it, 'Arry," answered the woman, with genuine kindness. "Yes, I'd make it midsummer if I was you."

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15: A Tale of Three Lions

H. Rider Haggard

1856-1925

Atalanta Oct, Nov, Dec 1887

Wide Awake, Dec 1887

In: *Twenty complete novelettes by popular authors*, New York, 1894

1. The Interest on Ten Shillings

MOST OF YOU will have heard that Allan Quatermain, who was one of the party that discovered King Solomon's mines some little time ago, and who afterwards came to live in England near his friend Sir Henry Curtis. He went back to the wilderness again, as these old hunters almost invariably do, on one pretext or another. They cannot endure civilization for very long, its noise and racket and the omnipresence of broad-clothed humanity proving more trying to their nerves than the dangers of the desert. I think that they feel lonely here, for it is a fact that is too little understood, though it has often been stated, that there is no loneliness like the loneliness of crowds, especially to those who are unaccustomed to them. "What is there in the world," old Quatermain would say, "so desolate as to stand in the streets of a great city and listen to the footsteps falling, falling, multitudinous as the rain, and watch the white line of faces as they hurry past, you know not whence, you know not whither? They come and go, their eyes meet yours with a cold stare, for a moment their features are written on your mind, and then they are gone for ever. You will never see them again; they will never see you again; they come up out of the unknown, and presently they once more vanish into the unknown, taking their secrets with them. Yes, that is loneliness pure and undefiled; but to one who knows and loves it, the wilderness is not lonely, because the spirit of nature is ever there to keep the wanderer company. He finds companions in the winds— the sunny streams babble like Nature's children at his feet; high above them, in the purple sunset, are domes and minarets and palaces, such as no mortal man has built, in and out of whose flaming doors the angels of the sun seem to move continually. And there, too, is the wild game, following its feeding-grounds in great armies, with the springbuck thrown out before for skirmishers; then rank upon rank of long-faced blesbuck, marching and wheeling like infantry; and last the shining troops of quagga, and the fierce-eyed shaggy vilderbeeste to take, as it were, the place of the cossack host that hangs upon an army's flanks.

"Oh, no," he would say, "the wilderness is not lonely, for, my boy, remember that the further you get from man, the nearer you grow to God," and though this is a saying that might well be disputed, it is one I am sure that anybody will easily understand who has watched the sun rise and set on the limitless

deserted plains, and seen the thunder chariots of the clouds roll in majesty across the depths of unfathomable sky.

Well, at any rate we went back again, and now for many months I have heard nothing at all of him, and to be frank, I greatly doubt if anybody will ever hear of him again. I fear that the wilderness, that has for so many years been a mother to him, will now also prove his grave and the grave of those who accompanied him, for the quest upon which he and they have started is a wild one indeed.

But while he was in England for those three years or so between his return from the successful discovery of the wise king's buried treasures, and the death of his only son, I saw a great deal of old Allan Quatermain. I had known him years before in Africa, and after he came home, whenever I had nothing better to do, I used to run up to Yorkshire and stay with him, and in this way I at one time and another heard many of the incidents of his past life, and most curious some of them were. No man can pass all those years following the rough existence of an elephant-hunter without meeting with many strange adventures, and in one way and another old Quatermain has certainly seen his share. Well, the story that I am going to tell you in the following pages is one of the later of these adventures, though I forget the exact year in which it happened, at any rate I know that it was the only trip upon which he took his son Harry (who is since dead) with him, and that Harry was then about fourteen. And now for the story, which I will repeat, as nearly as I can, in the words in which Hunter Quatermain told it to me one night in the old oak-panelled vestibule of his house in Yorkshire. We were talking about gold-mining—

"Gold-mining!" he broke in; "ah! yes, I once went gold-mining at Pilgrims' Rest in the Transvaal, and it was after that that we had the business about Jim-Jim and the lions. Do you know Pilgrim's Rest? Well, it is, or was, one of the queerest little places you ever saw. The town itself was pitched in a stony valley, with mountains all about it, and in the middle of such scenery as one does not often get the chance of seeing. Many and many is the time that I have thrown down my pick and shovel in disgust, clambered out of my claim, and walked a couple of miles or so to the top of some hill. Then I would lie down in the grass and look out over the glorious stretch of country— the smiling valleys, the great mountains touched with gold— real gold of the sunset, and clothed in sweeping robes of bush, and stare into the depths of the perfect sky above; yes, and thank Heaven I had got away from the cursing and the coarse jokes of the miners, and the voices of those Basutu Kaffirs as they toiled in the sun, the memory of which is with me yet.

"Well, for some months I dug away patiently at my claim, till the very sight of a pick or of a washing-trough became hateful to me. A hundred times a day I lamented my own folly in having invested eight hundred pounds, which was

about all that I was worth at the time, in this gold-mining. But like other better people before me, I had been bitten by the gold bug, and now was forced to take the consequences. I bought a claim out of which a man had made a fortune— five or six thousand pounds at least— as I thought, very cheap; that is, I gave him five hundred pounds down for it. It was all that I had made by a very rough year's elephant-hunting beyond the Zambesi, and I sighed deeply and prophetically when I saw my successful friend, who was a Yankee, sweep up the roll of Standard Bank notes with the lordly air of the man who has made his fortune, and cram them into his breeches pockets. 'Well,' I said to him— the happy vendor— 'it is a magnificent property, and I only hope that my luck will be as good as yours has been.'

"He smiled; to my excited nerves it seemed that he smiled ominously, as he answered me in a peculiar Yankee drawl: 'I guess, stranger, as I ain't the one to make a man quarrel with his food, more especial when there ain't no more going of the rounds; and as for that there claim, well, she's been a good nigger to me; but between you and me, stranger, speaking man to man, now that there ain't any filthy lucre between us to obscure the features of the truth, I guess she's about worked out!'

"I gasped; the fellow's effrontery took the breath out of me. Only five minutes before he had been swearing by all his gods— and they appeared to be numerous and mixed— that there were half a dozen fortunes left in the claim, and that he was only giving it up because he was downright weary of shovelling the gold out.

" 'Don't look so vexed, stranger,' went on my tormentor, 'perhaps there is some shine in the old girl yet; anyway you are a downright good fellow, you are, therefore you will, I guess, have a real A1 opportunity of working on the feelings of Fortune. Anyway it will bring the muscle up upon your arm, for the stuff is uncommon stiff, and, what is more, you will in the course of a year earn a sight more than two thousand dollars in value of experience.'

"Then he went just in time, for in another moment I should have gone for him, and I saw his face no more.

"Well, I set to work on the old claim with my boy Harry and half a dozen Kaffirs to help me, which, seeing that I had put nearly all my worldly wealth into it, was the least that I could do. And we worked, my word, we did work— early and late we went at it— but never a bit of gold did we see; no, not even a nugget large enough to make a scarf-pin out of. The American gentleman had secured it all and left us the sweepings.

"For three months this went on, till at last I had paid away all, or very near all, that was left of her little capital in wages and food for the Kaffirs and ourselves. When I tell you that Boer meal was sometimes as high as four pounds

a bag, you will understand that it did not take long to run through our banking account.

"At last the crisis came. One Saturday night I had paid the men as usual, and bought a muid of mealie meal at sixty shillings for them to fill themselves with, and then I went with my boy Harry and sat on the edge of the great hole that we had dug in the hill-side, and which we had in bitter mockery named Eldorado. There we sat in the moonlight with our feet over the edge of the claim, and were melancholy enough for anything. Presently I pulled out my purse and emptied its contents into my hand. There was a half-sovereign, two florins, ninepence in silver, no coppers— for copper practically does not circulate in South Africa, which is one of the things that make living so dear there— in all exactly fourteen and ninepence.

" 'There, Harry, my boy!' I said, 'that is the sum total of our worldly wealth; that hole has swallowed all the rest.'

" 'By George!' said Master Harry; 'I say, father, you and I shall have to let ourselves out to work with the Kaffirs and live on mealie pap,' and he sniggered at his unpleasant little joke.

"But I was in no mood for joking, for it is not a merry thing to dig like anything for months and be completely ruined in the process, especially if you happen to dislike digging, and consequently I resented Harry's light-heartedness.

" 'Be quiet, boy!' I said, raising my hand as though to give him a cuff, with the result that the half-sovereign slipped out of it and fell into the gulf below.

" 'Oh, bother,' said I, 'it's gone.'

" 'There, Dad,' said Harry, 'that's what comes of letting your angry passions rise; now we are down to four and nine.'

"I made no answer to these words of wisdom, but scrambled down the steep sides of the claim, followed by Harry, to hunt for my little all. Well, we hunted and we hunted, but the moonlight is an uncertain thing to look for half-sovereigns by, and there was some loose soil about, for the Kaffirs had knocked off working at this very spot a couple of hours before. I took a pick and raked away the clods of earth with it, in the hope of finding the coin; but all in vain. At last in sheer annoyance I struck the sharp end of the pickaxe down into the soil, which was of a very hard nature. To my astonishment it sunk in right up to the haft.

" 'Why, Harry,' I said, 'this ground must have been disturbed!'

" 'I don't think so, father,' he answered; 'but we will soon see,' and he began to shovel out the soil with his hands. 'Oh,' he said presently, 'it's only some old stones; the pick has gone down between them, look!' and he began to pull at one of the stones.

" 'I say, Dad,' he said presently, almost in a whisper, 'it's precious heavy, feel it;' and he rose and gave me a round, brownish lump about the size of a very

large apple, which he was holding in both his hands. I took it curiously and held it up to the light. It *was* very heavy. The moonlight fell upon its rough and filth-encrusted surface, and as I looked, curious little thrills of excitement began to pass through me. But I could not be sure.

" 'Give me your knife, Harry,' I said.

"He did so, and resting the brown stone on my knee I scratched at its surface. Great heavens, it was soft!

"Another second and the secret was out, we had found a great nugget of pure gold, four pounds of it or more. 'It's gold, lad,' I said, 'it's gold, or I'm a Dutchman!'

"Harry, with his eyes starting out of his head, glared down at the gleaming yellow scratch that I had made upon the virgin metal, and then burst out into yell upon yell of exultation, which went ringing away across the silent claims like shrieks of somebody being murdered.

" 'Be quiet!' I said; 'do you want every thief on the fields after you?'

"Scarcely were the words out of my mouth when I heard a stealthy footstep approaching. I promptly put the big nugget down and sat on it, and uncommonly hard it was. As I did so I saw a lean dark face poked over the edge of the claim and a pair of beady eyes searching us out. I knew the face, it belonged to a man of very bad character known as Handspike Tom, who had, I understood, been so named at the Diamond Fields because he had murdered his mate with a handspike. He was now no doubt prowling about like a human hyæna to see what he could steal.

" 'Is that you, 'unter Quatermain?' he said.

" 'Yes, it's I, Mr. Tom,' I answered, politely.

" 'And what might all that there yelling be?' he asked. 'I was walking along, a-taking of the evening air and a-thinking on the stars, when I 'ears 'owl after 'owl.'

" 'Well, Mr. Tom,' I answered, 'that is not to be wondered at, seeing that like yourself they are nocturnal birds.'

" ''Owl after 'owl!' he repeated sternly, taking no notice of my interpretation, 'and I stops and says, "That's murder," and I listens again and thinks, "No, it ain't; that 'owl is the 'owl of hexultation; some one's been and got his fingers into a gummy yeller pot, I'll swear, and gone off 'is 'ead in the sucking of them." Now, 'unter Quatermain, is I right? is it nuggets? Oh, lor!' and he smacked his lips audibly— 'great big yellow boys— is it them that you have just been and tumbled across?'

" 'No,' I said boldly, 'it isn't'— the cruel gleam in his black eyes altogether overcoming my aversion to untruth, for I knew that if once he found out what it was that I was sitting on— and by the way I have heard of rolling in gold being spoken of as a pleasant process, but I certainly do not recommend anybody who

values comfort to try sitting on it— I should run a very good chance of being 'handspiked' before the night was over.

" 'If you want to know what it was, Mr. Tom,' I went on, with my politest air, although in agony from the nugget underneath— for I hold it is always best to be polite to a man who is so ready with a handspike— 'my boy and I have had a slight difference of opinion, and I was enforcing my view of the matter upon him; that's all.'

" 'Yes, Mr. Tom,' put in Harry, beginning to weep, for Harry was a smart boy, and saw the difficulty we were in, 'that was it— I halloed because father beat me.'

" 'Well, now, did yer, my dear boy— did yer? Well, all I can say is that a played-out old claim is a wonderful queer sort of place to come to for to argify at ten o'clock of night, and what's more, my sweet youth, if ever I should 'ave the argifying of yer'— and he leered unpleasantly at Harry— 'yer won't 'oller in quite such a jolly sort 'o way. And now I'll be saying good-night, for I don't like disturbing of a family party. No, I ain't that sort of man, I ain't. Good-night to yer, 'unter Quatermain— good-night to yer, my argified young one;' and Mr. Tom turned away disappointed, and prowled off elsewhere, like a human jackal, to see what he could thieve or kill.

" 'Thank goodness!' I said, as I slipped off the lump of gold. 'Now, then, do you get up, Harry, and see if that consummate villain has gone.' Harry did so, and reported that he had vanished towards Pilgrim's Rest, and then we set to work, and very carefully, but trembling with excitement, with our hands hollowed out all the space of ground into which I had struck the pick. Yes, as I hoped, there was a regular nest of nuggets, twelve in all, running from the size of a hazel-nut to that of a hen's egg, though of course the first one was much larger than that. How they all came there nobody can say; it was one of those extraordinary freaks, with stories of which, at any rate, all people acquainted with alluvial gold-mining will be familiar. It turned out afterwards that the American who sold me the claim had in the same way made his pile— a much larger one than ours, by the way— out of a single pocket, and then worked for six months without seeing colour, after which he gave it up.

"At any rate, there the nuggets were, to the value, as it turned out afterwards, of about twelve hundred and fifty pounds, so that after all I took out of that hole four hundred and fifty pounds more than I put into it. We got them all out and wrapped them up in a handkerchief, and then, fearing to carry home so much treasure, especially as we knew that Mr. Handspike Tom was on the prowl, made up our minds to pass the night where we were— a necessity which, disagreeable as it was, was wonderfully sweetened by the presence of that handkerchief full of virgin gold— the interest of my lost half-sovereign.

"Slowly the night wore away, for with the fear of Handspike Tom before my eyes I did not dare to go to sleep, and at last the dawn came. I got up and watched its growth, till it opened like a flower upon the eastern sky, and the sunbeams began to spring up in splendour from mountain-top to mountain-top. I watched it, and as I did so it flashed upon me, with a complete conviction which I had not felt before, that I had had enough of gold-mining to last me the rest of my natural life, and I then and there made up my mind to clear out of Pilgrims' Rest and go and shoot buffalo towards Delagoa Bay. Then I turned, took the pick and shovel, and although it was a Sunday morning, woke up Harry and set to work to see if there were any more nuggets about. As I expected, there were none. What we had got had lain together in a little pocket filled with soil that felt quite different from the stiff stuff round and outside the pocket. There was not another trace of gold. Of course it is possible that there were more pocketfuls somewhere about, but all I have to say is I made up my mind that, whoever found them, I should not; and, as a matter of fact, I have since heard that this claim has been the ruin of two or three people, as it very nearly was the ruin of me.

" 'Harry,' I said presently, 'I am going away this week towards Delagoa to shoot buffalo. Shall I take you with me, or send you down to Durban?'

" 'Oh, take me with you, father!' begged Harry, 'I want to kill a buffalo!'

" 'And supposing that the buffalo kills you instead?' I asked.

" 'Oh, never mind,' he said, gaily, 'there are lots more where I came from.'

"I rebuked him for his flippancy, but in the end I consented to take him."

2. What Was Found In The Pool

"SOMETHING over a fortnight had passed since the night when I lost half-a-sovereign and found twelve hundred and fifty pounds in looking for it, and instead of that horrid hole, for which, after all, Eldorado was hardly a misnomer, a very different scene stretched away before us clad in the silver robe of the moonlight. We were camped— Harry and I, two Kaffirs, a Scotch cart, and six oxen— on the swelling side of a great wave of bushclad land. Just where we had made our camp, however, the bush was very sparse, and only grew about in clumps, while here and there were single flat-topped mimosa-trees. To our right a little stream, which had cut a deep channel for itself in the bosom of the slope, flowed musically on between banks green with maidenhair, wild asparagus, and many beautiful grasses. The bed-rock here was red granite, and in the course of centuries of patient washing the water had hollowed out some of the huge slabs in its path into great troughs and cups, and these we used for bathing-places. No Roman lady, with her baths of porphyry or alabaster, could have had a more delicious spot to bathe herself than we found within fifty yards of our skerm, or

rough inclosure of mimosa thorn, that we had dragged together round the cart to protect us from the attacks of lions. That there were several of these brutes about, I knew from their spoor, though we had neither heard nor seen them.

"Our bath was a little nook where the eddy of the stream had washed away a mass of soil, and on the edge of it there grew a most beautiful old mimosa thorn. Beneath the thorn was a large smooth slab of granite fringed all round with maidenhair and other ferns, that sloped gently down to a pool of the clearest sparkling water, which lay in a bowl of granite about ten feet wide by five feet deep in the centre. Here to this slab we went every morning to bathe, and that delightful bath is among the most pleasant of my hunting reminiscences, as it is also, for reasons which will presently appear, among the most painful.

"It was a lovely night. Harry and I sat to the windward of the fire, where the two Kaffirs were busily employed in cooking some impala steaks off a buck which Harry, to his great joy, had shot that morning, and were as perfectly contented with ourselves and the world at large as two people could possibly be. The night was beautiful, and it would require somebody with more words on the tip of his tongue than I have to describe properly the chastened majesty of those moonlit wilds. Away for ever and for ever, away to the mysterious north, rolled the great bush ocean over which the silence brooded. There beneath us a mile or more to the right ran the wide Oliphant, and mirror-like flashed back the moon, whose silver spears were shivered on its breast, and then tossed in twisted lines of light far and wide about the mountains and the plain. Down upon the river-banks grew great timber-trees that through the stillness pointed solemnly to Heaven, and the beauty of the night lay upon them like a cloud. Everywhere was silence— silence in the starred depths, silence on the bosom of the sleeping earth. Now, if ever, great thoughts might rise in a man's mind, and for a space he might forget his littleness in the sense that he partook of the pure immensity about him.

" 'Hark! what was that?'

"From far away down by the river there comes a mighty rolling sound, then another, and another. It is the lion seeking his meat.

"I saw Harry shiver and turn a little pale. He was a plucky boy enough, but the roar of a lion heard for the first time in the solemn bush veldt at night is apt to shake the nerves of any lad.

" 'Lions, my boy,' I said; 'they are hunting down by the river there; but I don't think that you need make yourself uneasy. We have been here three nights now, and if they were going to pay us a visit I think that they would have done so before this. However, we will make up the fire.'

" 'Here, Pharaoh, do you and Jim-Jim get some more wood before we go to sleep, else the cats will be purring round you before morning.'

"Pharaoh, a great brawny Swazi, who had been working for me at Pilgrims' Rest, laughed, rose, and stretched himself, then calling to Jim-Jim to bring the axe and a reim, started off in the moonlight towards a clump of sugar-bush where we cut our fuel from some dead trees. He was a fine fellow in his way, was Pharaoh, and I think that he had been named Pharaoh because he had an Egyptian cast of countenance and a royal sort of swagger about him. But his way was a somewhat peculiar way, on account of the uncertainty of his temper, and very few people could get on with him; also if he could find liquor he would drink like a fish, and when he drank he became shockingly bloodthirsty. These were his bad points; his good ones were that, like most people of the Zulu blood, he became exceedingly attached if he took to you at all; he was a hard-working and intelligent man, and about as dare-devil and plucky a fellow at a pinch as I have ever had to do with. He was about five-and-thirty years of age or so, but not a 'keshla' or ringed man. I believe that he had got into trouble in some way in Swaziland, and the authorities of his tribe would not allow him to assume the ring, and that is why he came to work at the gold-fields. The other man, or rather lad, Jim-Jim, was a Mapoch Kaffir, or Knobnose, and even in the light of subsequent events I fear I cannot speak very well of him. He was an idle and careless young rascal, and only that very morning I had to tell Pharaoh to give him a beating for letting the oxen stray, which Pharaoh did with the greatest gusto, although he was by way of being very fond of Jim-Jim. Indeed, I saw him consoling Jim-Jim afterwards with a pinch of snuff from his own ear-box, whilst he explained to him that the next time it came in the way of duty to flog him, he meant to thrash him with the other hand, so as to cross the old cuts and make a "pretty pattern" on his back.

"Well, off they went, though Jim-Jim did not at all like leaving the camp at that hour, even when the moonlight was so bright, and in due course returned safely enough with a great bundle of wood. I laughed at Jim-Jim, and asked him if he had seen anything, and he said yes, he had; he had seen two large yellow eyes staring at him from behind a bush, and heard something snore.

"As, however, on further investigation the yellow eyes and the snore appeared to have existed only in Jim-Jim's lively imagination, I was not greatly disturbed by this alarming report; but having seen to the making-up of the fire, got into the skerm and went quietly to sleep with Harry by my side.

"Some hours afterwards I woke up with a start. I don't know what woke me. The moon had gone down, or at least was almost hidden behind the soft horizon of bush, only her red rim being visible. Also a wind had sprung up and was driving long hurrying lines of cloud across the starry sky, and altogether a great change had come over the mood of the night. By the look of the sky I judged that we must be about two hours from day-break.

"The oxen, which were as usual tied to the disselboom of the Scotch cart, were very restless— they kept snuffling and blowing, and rising up and lying down again, so I at once suspected that they must wind something. Presently I knew what it was that they winded, for within fifty yards of us a lion roared, not very loud, but quite loud enough to make my heart come into my mouth.

"Pharaoh was sleeping on the other side of the cart, and, looking beneath it, I saw him raise his head and listen.

" 'Lion, Inkoos,' he whispered, 'lion!'

"Jim-Jim also jumped up, and by the faint light I could see that he was in a very great fright indeed.

"Thinking that it was as well to be prepared for emergencies, I told Pharaoh to throw wood upon the fire, and woke up Harry, who I verily believe was capable of sleeping happily through the crack of doom. He was a little scared at first, but presently the excitement of the position came home to him, and he grew quite anxious to see his majesty face to face. I got my rifle handy and gave Harry his— a Westley Richards falling block, which is a very useful gun for a youth, being light and yet a good killing rifle, and then we waited.

"For a long time nothing happened, and I began to think that the best thing we could do would be to go to sleep again, when suddenly I heard a sound more like a cough than a roar within about twenty yards of the skerm. We all looked out, but could see nothing; and then followed another period of suspense. It was very trying to the nerves, this waiting for an attack that might be developed from any quarter or might not be developed at all; and though I was an old hand at this sort of business I was anxious about Harry, for it is wonderful how the presence of anybody to whom one is attached unnerves a man in moments of danger. I know, although it was now chilly enough, I could feel the perspiration running down my nose, and in order to relieve the strain on my attention employed myself in watching a beetle which appeared to be attracted by the firelight, and was sitting before it thoughtfully rubbing his antennæ against each other.

"Suddenly, the beetle gave such a jump that he nearly pitched headlong into the fire, and so did we all— gave jumps, I mean, and no wonder, for from right under the skerm fence there came a most frightful roar— a roar that literally made the Scotch cart shake and took the breath out of me.

"Harry made an exclamation, Jim-Jim howled outright, while the poor oxen, who were terrified almost out of their hides, shivered and lowed piteously.

"The night was almost entirely dark now, for the moon had quite set, and the clouds had covered up the stars, so that the only light we had came from the fire, which by this time was burning up brightly again. But, as you know, firelight is absolutely useless to shoot by, it is so uncertain, and besides, it penetrates but

a very little way into the darkness, although if one is in the dark outside, one can see it from far away.

"Presently the oxen, after standing still for a moment, suddenly winded the lion and did what I feared they would do— began to 'skrek,' that is, to try and break loose from the trektow to which they were tied, to rush off madly into the wilderness. Lions know of this habit on the part of oxen, which are, I do believe, the most foolish animals under the sun, a sheep being a very Solomon compared to them; and it is by no means uncommon for a lion to get in such a position that a herd or span of oxen may wind him, skrek, break their reims, and rush off into the bush. Of course, once there, they are helpless in the dark; and then the lion chooses the one that he loves best and eats him at his leisure.

"Well, round and round went our six poor oxen, nearly trampling us to death in their mad rush; indeed, had we not hastily tumbled out of the way, we should have been trodden to death, or at the least seriously injured. As it was, Harry was run over, and poor Jim-Jim being caught by the trektow somewhere beneath the arm, was hurled right across the skerm, landing by my side only some paces off.

"Snap went the disselboom of the cart beneath the transverse strain put upon it. Had it not broken the cart would have overset; as it was, in another minute, oxen, cart, trektow, reims, broken disselboom, and everything were soon tied in one vast heaving, plunging, bellowing, and seemingly inextricable knot.

"For a moment or two this state of affairs took my attention off from the lion that had caused it, but whilst I was wondering what on earth was to be done next, and how we should manage if the cattle broke loose into the bush and were lost— for cattle frightened in this manner will so straight away like mad things— my thoughts were suddenly recalled to the lion in a very painful fashion.

"For at that moment I perceived by the light of the fire a kind of gleam of yellow travelling through the air towards us.

" 'The lion! the lion!' holloaed Pharaoh, and as he did so, he, or rather she, for it was a great gaunt lioness, half wild no doubt with hunger, lit right in the middle of the skerm, and stood there in the smoky gloom lashing her tail and roaring. I seized my rifle and fired it at her, but what between the confusion, my agitation, and the uncertain light, I missed her, and nearly shot Pharaoh. The flash of the rifle, however, threw the whole scene into strong relief, and a wild sight it was I can tell you— with the seething mass of oxen twisted all round the cart, in such a fashion that their heads looked as though they were growing out of their rumps; and their horns seemed to protrude from their backs; the smoking fire with just a blaze in the heart of the smoke; Jim-Jim in the foreground, where the oxen had thrown him in their wild rush, stretched out

there in terror, and then as a centre to the picture the great gaunt lioness glaring round with hungry yellow eyes, roaring and whining as she made up her mind what to do.

"It did not take her long, however, just the time that it takes a flash to die into darkness, for, before I could fire again or do anything, with a most fiendish snort she sprang upon poor Jim-Jim.

"I heard the unfortunate lad shriek, and then almost instantly I saw his legs thrown into the air. The lioness had seized him by the neck, and with a sudden jerk thrown his body over her back so that his legs hung down upon the further side.* Then, without the slightest hesitation, and apparently without any difficulty, she cleared the skerm face at a single bound, and bearing poor Jim-Jim with her vanished into the darkness beyond, in the direction of the bathing-place that I have already described. We jumped up perfectly mad with horror and fear, and rushed wildly after her, firing shots at haphazard on the chance that she would be frightened by them into dropping her prey, but nothing could we see, and nothing could we hear. The lioness had vanished into the darkness, taking Jim-Jim with her, and to attempt to follow her till daylight was madness. We should only expose ourselves to the risk of a like fate.

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** I have known a lion carry a two-year-old ox over a stone wall four feet high in this fashion, and a mile away into the bush beyond. He was subsequently poisoned by strychnine put into the carcass of the ox, and I still have his claws.*
— Editor.

"So with scared and heavy hearts we crept back to the skerm, and sat down to wait for the dawn, which now could not be much more than an hour off. It was absolutely useless to try even to disentangle the oxen till then, so all that was left for us to do was to sit and wonder how it came to pass that the one should be taken and the other left, and to hope against hope that our poor servant might have been mercifully delivered from the lion's jaws.

"At length the faint dawn came stealing like a ghost up the long slope of bush, and glinted on the tangled oxen's horns, and with white and frightened faces we got up and set to the task of disentangling the oxen, till such time as there should be light enough to enable us to follow the trail of the lioness which had gone off with Jim-Jim. And here a fresh trouble awaited us, for when at last with infinite difficulty we had disentangled the great helpless brutes, it was only to find that one of the best of them was very sick. There was no mistake about the way he stood with his legs slightly apart and his head hanging down. He had got the redwater, I was sure of it. Of all the difficulties connected with life and travelling in South Africa those connected with oxen are perhaps the worst. The ox is the most exasperating animal in the world, a negro excepted. He has absolutely no constitution, and never neglects an opportunity of falling sick of

some mysterious disease. He will get thin upon the slightest provocation, and from mere maliciousness die of 'poverty'; whereas it is his chief delight to turn round and refuse to pull whenever he finds himself well in the centre of a river, or the waggon-wheel nicely fast in a mud hole. Drive him a few miles over rough roads and you will find that he is footsore; turn him loose to feed and you will discover that he has run away, or if he has not run away he has of malice aforethought eaten 'tulip' and poisoned himself. There is always something with him. The ox is a brute. It was of a piece with his accustomed behaviour for the one in question to break out— on purpose probably— with redwater just when a lion had walked off with his herd. It was exactly what I should have expected, and I was therefore neither disappointed nor surprised.

"Well, it was no use crying as I should almost have liked to do, because if this ox had redwater it was probable that the rest of them had it too, although they had been sold to me as 'salted,' that is, proof against such diseases as redwater and lungsick. One gets hardened to this sort of thing in South Africa in course of time, for I suppose in no other country in the world is the waste of animal life so great.

"So taking my rifle and telling Harry to follow me (for we had to leave Pharaoh to look after the oxen— Pharaoh's lean kine, I called them), I started to see if anything could be found of or appertaining to the unfortunate Jim-Jim. The ground round our little camp was hard and rocky, and we could not hit off any spoor of the lioness, though just outside the skerm was a drop or two of blood. About three hundred yards from the camp, and a little to the right, was a patch of sugar bush mixed up with the usual mimosa, and for this I made, thinking that the lioness would have been sure to take her prey there to devour it. On we pushed through the long grass that was bent down beneath the weight of the soaking dew. In two minutes we were wet through up to the thighs, as wet as though we had waded through water. In due course, however, we reached the patch of bush, and by the grey light of the morning cautiously and slowly pushed our way into it. It was very dark under the trees, for the sun was not yet up, so we walked with the most extreme care, half expecting every minute to come across the lioness licking the bones of poor Jim-Jim. But no lioness could we see, and as for Jim-Jim there was not even a finger-joint of him to be found. Evidently they had not come here.

"So pushing through the bush we proceeded to hunt every other likely spot, but with the same result.

" 'I suppose she must have taken him right away,' I said at last, sadly enough. 'At any rate he will be dead by now, so God have mercy on him, we can't help him. What's to be done now?'

" 'I suppose that we had better wash ourselves in the pool, and then go back and get something to eat. I am filthy,' said Harry.

"This was a practical if a somewhat unfeeling suggestion. At least it struck me as unfeeling to talk of washing when poor Jim-Jim had been so recently eaten. However, I did not let my sentiment carry me away, so we went down to the beautiful spot that I have described, to wash. I was the first to reach it, which I did by scrambling down the ferny bank. Then I turned round, and started back with a yell— as well I might, for almost from beneath my feet there came a most awful snarl.

"I had lit nearly upon the back of the lioness, that had been sleeping on the slab where we always stood to dry ourselves after bathing. With a snarl and a growl, before I could do anything, before I could even cock my rifle, she had bounded right across the crystal pool, and vanished over the opposite bank. It was all done in an instant, as quick as thought.

"She had been sleeping on the slab, and oh, horror! what was that sleeping beside her? It was the red remains of poor Jim-Jim, lying on a patch of blood-stained rock.

" 'Oh! father, father!' shrieked Harry, 'look in the water!'

"I looked. There, floating in the centre of the lovely tranquil pool, was Jim-Jim's head. The lioness had bitten it right off, and it had rolled down the sloping rock into the water."

3. Jim-Jim Is Avenged

"WE NEVER BATHED in that pool again; indeed for my part I could never look at its peaceful purity fringed round with waving ferns without thinking of that ghastly head which rolled itself off through the water when we tried to catch it.

"Poor Jim-Jim! We buried what was left of him, which was not very much, in an old bread-bag, and though whilst he lived his virtues were not great, now that he was gone we could have wept over him. Indeed, Harry did weep outright; while Pharaoh used very bad language in Zulu, and I registered a quiet little vow on my account that I would let daylight into that lioness before I was forty-eight hours older, if by any means it could be done.

"Well, we buried him, and there he lies in the bread-bag (which I rather grudged him, as it was the only one we had), where lions will not trouble him any more— though perhaps the hyænas will, if they consider that there is enough on him left to make it worth their while to dig him up. However, he won't mind that; so there is an end of the book of Jim-Jim.

"The question that now remained was, how to circumvent his murderess. I knew that she would be sure to return as soon as she was hungry again, but I did not know when she would be hungry. She had left so little of Jim-Jim behind her that I should scarcely expect to see her the next night, unless indeed she had cubs. Still, I felt that it would not be wise to miss the chance of her coming, so

we set about making preparations for her reception. The first thing that we did was to strengthen the bush wall of the skerm by dragging a large quantity of the tops of thorn-trees together, and laying them one on the other in such a fashion that the thorns pointed outwards. This, after our experience of the fate of Jim-Jim, seemed a very necessary precaution, since if where one goat can jump another can follow, as the Kaffirs say, how much more is this the case when an animal so active and so vigorous as the lion is concerned! And now came the further question, how were we to beguile the lioness to return? Lions are animals that have a strange knack of appearing when they are not wanted, and keeping studiously out of the way when their presence is required. Of course it was possible that if she had found Jim-Jim to her liking she would come back to see if there were any more of his kind about, but still it was not to be relied on.

"Harry, who as I have said was an eminently practical boy, suggested to Pharaoh that he should go and sit outside the skerm in the moonlight as a sort of bait, assuring him that he would have nothing to fear, as we should certainly kill the lioness before she killed him. Pharaoh however, strangely enough, did not seem to take to this suggestion. Indeed, he walked away, much put out with Harry for having made it.

"It gave me an idea, however.

" 'By Jove!' I said, 'there is the sick ox. He must die sooner or later, so we may as well utilize him.'

"Now, about thirty yards to the left of our skerm, as one stood facing down the hill towards the river, was the stump of a tree that had been destroyed by lightning many years before, standing equidistant between, but a little in front of, two clumps of bush, which were severally some fifteen paces from it.

"Here was the very place to tie the ox; and accordingly a little before sunset the sick animal was led forth by Pharaoh and made fast there, little knowing, poor brute, for what purpose; and we began our long vigil, this time without a fire, for our object was to attract the lioness and not to scare her.

"For hour after hour we waited, keeping ourselves awake by pinching each other— it is, by the way, remarkable what a difference of opinion as to the force of pinches requisite to the occasion exists in the mind of pincher and pinched— but no lioness came. At last the moon went down, and darkness swallowed up the world, as the Kaffirs say, but no lions came to swallow us up. We waited till dawn, because we did not dare to go to sleep, and then at last with many bad thoughts in our hearts we took such rest as we could get, and that was not much.

"That morning we went out shooting, not because we wanted to, for we were too depressed and tired, but because we had no more meat. For three hours or more we wandered about in a broiling sun looking for something to kill, but with absolutely no results. For some unknown reason the game had grown

very scarce about the spot, though when I was there two years before every sort of large game except rhinoceros and elephant was particularly abundant. The lions, of whom there were many, alone remained, and I fancy that it was the fact of the game they live on having temporarily migrated which made them so daring and ferocious. As a general rule a lion is an amiable animal enough if he is left alone, but a hungry lion is almost as dangerous as a hungry man. One hears a great many different opinions expressed as to whether or no the lion is remarkable for his courage, but the result of my experience is that very much depends upon the state of his stomach. A hungry lion will not stick at a trifle, whereas a full one will flee at a very small rebuke.

"Well, we hunted all about, and nothing could we see, not even a duiker or a bush buck; and at last, thoroughly tired and out of temper, we started on our way back to camp, passing over the brow of a steepish hill to do so. Just as we climbed the crest of the ridge I came to a stand, for there, about six hundred yards to my left, his beautiful curved horns outlined against the soft blue of the sky, I saw a noble koodoo bull (*Strepsiceros kudu*). Even at that distance, for as you know my eyes are very keen, I could distinctly see the white stripes on its side when the light fell upon it, and its large and pointed ears twitch as the flies worried it.

"So far so good; but how were we to get at it? It was ridiculous to risk a shot at that great distance, and yet both the ground and the wind lay very ill for stalking. It seemed to me that the only chance would be to make a detour of at least a mile or more, and come up on the other side of the koodoo. I called Harry to my side, and explained to him what I thought would be our best course, when suddenly, without any delay, the koodoo saved us further trouble by suddenly starting off down the hill like a leaping rocket. I do not know what had frightened it, certainly we had not. Perhaps a hyæna or a leopard— a tiger as we call it there— had suddenly appeared; at any rate, off it went, running slightly towards us, and I never saw a buck go faster. I am afraid that forgetting Harry's presence I used strong language, and really there was some excuse. As for Harry, he stood watching the beautiful animal's course. Presently it vanished behind a patch of bush, to emerge a few seconds later about five hundred paces from us, on a stretch of comparatively level ground that was strewn with boulders. On it went, clearing the boulders in its path with a succession of great bounds that were beautiful to behold. As it did so, I happened to look round at Harry, and perceived to my astonishment that he had got his rifle to his shoulder.

" 'You young donkey!' I exclaimed, 'surely you are not going to'— and just at that moment the rifle went off.

"And then I think I saw what was in its way one of the most wonderful things I ever remember in my hunting experience. The koodoo was at the moment in

the air, clearing a pile of stones with its fore-legs tucked up underneath it. All of an instant the legs stretched themselves out in a spasmodic fashion, it lit on them, and they doubled up beneath it. Down went the noble buck, down upon his head. For a moment he seemed to be standing on his horns, his hind-legs high in the air, and then over he rolled and lay still.

" 'Great Heavens!' I said, 'why, you've hit him! He's dead.'

"As for Harry, he said nothing, but merely looked scared, as well he might, for such a marvellous, I may say such an appalling and ghastly fluke it has never been my lot to witness. A man, let alone a boy, might have fired a thousand such shots without ever touching the object; which, mind you, was springing and bounding over rocks quite five hundred yards away; and here this lad— taking a snap shot, and merely allowing for speed and elevation by instinct, for he did not put up his sights— had knocked the bull over as dead as a door-nail. Well, I made no further remark, as the occasion was too solemn for talking, but merely led the way to where the koodoo had fallen. There he lay, beautiful and quite still; and there, high up, about half-way down his neck, was a neat round hole. The bullet had severed the spinal marrow, passing through the vertebræ and away on the other side.

"It was already evening when, having cut as much of the best meat as we could carry from the bull, and tied a red handkerchief and some tufts of grass to his spiral horns, which, by the way, must have been nearly five feet in length, in the hope of keeping the jackals and aasvögels (vultures) from him, we finally got back to camp, to find Pharaoh, who was getting rather anxious at our absence, ready to greet us with the pleasing intelligence that another ox was sick. But even this dreadful bit of intelligence could not dash Harry's spirits; the fact of the matter being, incredible as it may appear, I do verily believe that in his heart of hearts he set down the death of the koodoo to the credit of his own skill. Now, though the lad was a pretty shot enough, this of course was ridiculous, and I told him so plainly.

"By the time that we had finished our supper of koodoo steaks (which would have been better if the koodoo had been a little younger), it was time to get ready for Jim-Jim's murderess. Accordingly we determined again to expose the unfortunate sick ox, that was now absolutely on its last legs, being indeed scarcely able to stand. All the afternoon Pharaoh told us it had been walking round and round in a circle as cattle in the last stage of redwater generally do. Now it had come to a standstill, and was swaying to and fro with its head hanging down. So we tied him up to the stump of the tree as on the previous night, knowing that if the lioness did not kill him he would be dead by morning. Indeed I was afraid that he would die at once, in which case he would be of but little use as a bait, for the lion is a sportsmanlike animal, and unless he is very

hungry generally prefers to kill his own dinner, though when that is once killed he will come back to it again and again.

"Then we again went through our experience of the previous night, sitting there hour after hour, till at last Harry fell fast asleep, and, though I am accustomed to this sort of thing, even I could scarcely keep my eyes open. Indeed I was just dropping off, when suddenly Pharaoh gave me a push.

" '*Listen!*' he whispered.

"I was awake in a second, and listening with all my ears. From the clump of bush to the right of the lightning-shattered stump to which the sick ox was tied came a faint crackling noise. Presently it was repeated. Something was moving there, faintly and quietly enough, but still moving perceptibly, for in the intense stillness of the night any sound seemed loud.

"I woke up Harry, who instantly said, 'Where is she? where is she?' and began to point his rifle about in a fashion that was more dangerous to us and the oxen than to any possible lioness.

" 'Be quiet!' I whispered, savagely; and as I did so, with a low and hideous growl a flash of yellow light sped out of the clump of bush, past the ox, and into the corresponding clump upon the other side. The poor sick creature gave a sort of groan, staggered round and then began to tremble. I could see it do so clearly in the moonlight, which was now very bright, and I felt a brute for having exposed the unfortunate animal to such agony as he must undoubtedly be undergoing. The lioness, for it was she, passed so quickly that we could not even distinguish her movements, much less fire. Indeed at night it is absolutely useless to attempt to shoot unless the object is very close and standing perfectly still, and then the light is so deceptive and it is so difficult to see the foresight that the best shot will miss more often than he hits.

" 'She will be back again presently,' I said; 'look out, but for Heaven's sake don't fire unless I tell you to.'

"Hardly were the words out of my mouth when back she came, and again passed the ox without striking him.

" 'What on earth is she doing?' whispered Harry.

" 'Playing with it as a cat does with a mouse, I suppose. She will kill it presently.'

"As I spoke, the lioness once more flashed out of the bush, and this time sprang right over the doomed and trembling ox. It was a beautiful sight to see her clear him in the bright moonlight, as though it were a trick which she had been taught.

" 'I believe that she has escaped from a circus,' whispered Harry; 'it's jolly to see her jump.'

"I said nothing, but I thought to myself that if it was, Master Harry did not quite appreciate the performance, and small blame to him. At any rate, his teeth were chattering a little.

"Then came a longish pause, and I began to think that the lioness must have gone away, when suddenly she appeared again, and with one mighty bound landed right on to the ox, and struck it a frightful blow with her paw.

"Down it went, and lay on the ground kicking feebly. She put down her wicked-looking head, and, with a fierce growl of contentment, buried her long white teeth in the throat of the dying animal. When she lifted her muzzle again it was all stained with blood. She stood facing us obliquely, licking her bloody chops and making a sort of purring noise.

" 'Now's our time,' I whispered, 'fire when I do.'

"I got on to her as well as I could, but Harry, instead of waiting for me as I told him, fired before I did, and that of course hurried me. But when the smoke cleared, I was delighted to see that the lioness was rolling about on the ground behind the body of the ox, which covered her in such a fashion, however, that we could not shoot again to make an end of her.

" 'She's done for! she's dead, the yellow devil!' yelled Pharaoh in exultation; and at that very moment the lioness, with a sort of convulsive rush, half-rolled, half-sprang, into the patch of thick bush to the right. I fired after her as she went, but so far as I could see without result; indeed the probability is that I missed her clean. At any rate she got to the bush in safety, and once there, began to make such a diabolical noise as I never heard before. She would whine and shriek with pain, and then burst out into perfect volleys of roaring that shook the whole place.

" 'Well,' I said, 'we must just let her roar; to go into that bush after her at night would be madness.'

"At that moment, to my astonishment and alarm, there came an answering roar from the direction of the river, and then another from behind the swell of bush. Evidently there were more lions about. The wounded lioness redoubled her efforts, with the object, I suppose, of summoning the others to her assistance. At any rate they came, and quickly too, for within five minutes, peeping through the bushes of our skerm fence, we saw a magnificent lion bounding along towards us, through the tall tambouki grass, that in the moonlight looked for all the world like ripening corn. On he came in great leaps, and a glorious sight it was to see him. When within fifty yards or so, he stood still in an open space and roared. The lioness roared too; then there came a third roar, and another great black-maned lion stalked majestically up, and joined number two, till really I began to realize what the ox must have undergone.

" 'Now, Harry,' I whispered, 'whatever you do don't fire, it's too risky. If they let us be, let them be.'

"Well, the pair marched off to the bush, where the wounded lioness was now roaring double tides, and the three of them began to snarl and grumble away together there. Presently, however, the lioness ceased roaring, and the two lions came out again, the black-maned one first— to prospect, I suppose— walked to where the carcass of the ox lay, and sniffed at it.

" 'Oh, what a shot!' whispered Harry, who was trembling with excitement.

" 'Yes,' I said; 'but don't fire; they might all of them come for us.'

"Harry said nothing, but whether it was from the natural impetuosity of youth, or because he was thrown off his balance by excitement, or from sheer recklessness and devilment, I am sure I cannot tell you, never having been able to get a satisfactory explanation from him; but at any rate the fact remains, he, without word or warning, entirely disregarding my exhortations, lifted up his Westley Richards and fired at the black-maned lion, and, what is more, hit it slightly on the flank.

"Next second there was a most awful roar from the injured lion. He glared around him and roared with pain, for he was badly stung; and then, before I could make up my mind what to do, the great black-maned brute, clearly ignorant of the cause of his hurt, sprang right at the throat of his companion, to whom he evidently attributed his misfortune. It was a curious sight to see the astonishment of the other lion at this most unprovoked assault. Over he rolled with an angry snarl, and on to him sprang the black-maned demon, and began to worry him. This finally awoke the yellow-maned lion to a sense of the situation, and I am bound to say that he rose to it in a most effective manner. Somehow or other he got to his feet, and, roaring and snarling frightfully, closed with his mighty foe.

"Then ensued a most tremendous scene. You know what a shocking thing it is to see two large dogs fighting with abandonment. Well, a whole hundred of dogs could not have looked half so terrible as those two great brutes as they rolled and roared and rent in their horrid rage. They gripped each other, they tore at each other's throat, till their manes came out in handfuls, and the red blood streamed down their yellow hides. It was an awful and a wonderful thing to see the great cats tearing at each other with all the fierce energy of their savage strength, and making the night hideous with their heart-shaking noise. And the fight was a grand one too. For some minutes it was impossible to say which was getting the best of it, but at last I saw that the black-maned lion, though he was slightly bigger, was failing. I am inclined to think that the wound in his flank crippled him. Anyway, he began to get the worst of it, which served him right, as he was the aggressor. Still I could not help feeling sorry for him, for he had fought a gallant fight, when his antagonist finally got him by the throat,

and, struggle and strike out as he would, began to shake the life out of him. Over and over they rolled together, a hideous and awe-inspiring spectacle, but the yellow one would not loose his hold, and at length poor black-mane grew faint, his breath came in great snorts and seemed to rattle in his nostrils, then he opened his huge mouth, gave the ghost of a roar, quivered, and was dead.

"When he was quite sure that the victory was his own, the yellow-maned lion loosed his grip and sniffed at the fallen foe. Then he licked the dead lion's eye, and next, with his fore-feet resting on the carcass, sent up his own chant of victory, that went rolling and pealing down the dark paths of the night. And at this point I interfered. Taking a careful sight at the centre of his body, in order to give the largest possible margin for error, I fired, and sent a.570 express bullet right through him, and down he dropped dead upon the carcass of his mighty foe.

"After that, fairly satisfied with our performances, we slept peaceably till dawn, leaving Pharaoh to keep watch in case any more lions should take it into their heads to come our way.

"When the sun was well up we arose, and went very cautiously— at least Pharaoh and I did, for I would not allow Harry to come— to see if we could find any trace of the wounded lioness. She had ceased roaring immediately upon the arrival of the two lions, and had not made a sound since, from which we concluded that she was probably dead. I was armed with my express, while Pharaoh, in whose hands a rifle was indeed a dangerous weapon, to his companions, had an axe. On our way we stopped to look at the two dead lions. They were magnificent animals, both of them, but their pelts were entirely spoiled by the terrible mauling they had given to each other, which was a sad pity.

"In another minute we were following the blood spoor of the wounded lioness into the bush, where she had taken refuge. This, I need hardly say, we did with the utmost caution; indeed, I for one did not at all like the job, and was only consoled by the reflection that it was necessary, and that the bush was not thick. Well, we stood there, keeping as far from the trees as possible, searching and looking about, but no lioness could we see, though we saw plenty of blood.

" 'She must have gone somewhere to die, Pharaoh,' I said in Zulu.

" 'Yes, Inkoos,' he answered, 'she has certainly gone away.'

"Hardly were the words out of his mouth, when I heard a roar, and starting round saw the lioness emerge from the very centre of a bush, in which she had been curled up, just behind Pharaoh. Up she went on to her hind-legs, and as she did so I noticed that one of her fore-paws was broken near the shoulder, for it hung limply down. Up she went, towering right over Pharaoh's head, as she did so lifting her uninjured paw to strike him to the earth. And then, before I could get my rifle round or do anything to avert the oncoming catastrophe, the

Zulu did a very brave and clever thing. Realizing his own imminent danger, he bounded to one side, and swinging the heavy axe round his head, brought it down right on to the back of the lioness, severing the vertebræ and killing her instantaneously. It was wonderful to see her collapse all in a heap like an empty sack.

" 'My word, Pharaoh!' I said, 'that was well done, and none too soon.'

" 'Yes,' he answered, with a little laugh, 'it was a good stroke, Inkoos. Jim-Jim will sleep better now.'

"Then, calling Harry to us, we examined the lioness. She was old, if one might judge from her worn teeth, and not very large, but thickly made, and must have possessed extraordinary vitality to have lived so long, shot as she was; for, in addition to her broken shoulder, my express bullet had blown a great hole in her middle that one might have put a fist into.

"Well, that is the story of the death of poor Jim-Jim and how we avenged it. It is rather interesting in its way, because of the fight between the two lions, of which I never saw the like in all my experience, and I know something of lions and their manners."

"And how did you get back to Pilgrim's Rest?" I asked Hunter Quatermain when he had finished his yarn.

"Ah, we had a nice job with that," he answered. "The second sick ox died, and so did another, and we had to get on as best we could with three harnessed unicorn fashion, while we pushed behind. We did about four miles a day, and it took us nearly a month, during the last week of which we pretty well starved."

"I notice," I said, "that most of your trips ended in disaster of some sort or another, and yet you went on making them, which strikes one as a little strange."

"Yes, I dare say: but then, remember I got my living for many years out of hunting. Besides, half the charm of the thing lay in the dangers and disasters, though they were terrible enough at the time. Another thing is, my trips were not all disastrous. Some time, if you like, I will tell you a story of one which was very much the reverse, for I made several thousand pounds out of it, and saw one of the most extraordinary sights a hunter ever came across. It was on this trip that I met the bravest native woman I ever knew; her name was Maiwa. But it is too late now, and besides, I am tired of talking about myself. Pass the water, will you!"

16: Werewolf of the Sahara

G. G. Pendarves

Gordon Trenery, 1885-1938

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THE THREE OF THEM were unusually silent that night over their after-dinner coffee. They were camping outside the little town of Sollum on the Libyan coast of North Africa. For three weeks they had been delayed here en route for the Siwa oasis. Two men and a girl.

"So we really start tomorrow." Merle Anthony blew a cloud of smoke toward the glittering night sky. "I'm almost sorry. Sollum's been fun. And I've done two of the best pictures I ever made here."

"Was that why you burned them up yesterday?" her cousin, Dale Fleming, inquired in his comfortable pleasant voice.

The girl's clear pallor slowly crimsoned. "Dale! What a—"

"It's all right, Merle," Gunnar Sven interrupted her. "Dale's quite right. Why pretend this delay has done you any good? And it's altogether my fault. I found that out today in the market. Overheard some Arabs discussing our expedition to Siwa."

"Your fault!" Merle's beautiful face, and eyes gray as a gull's wing, turned to him. "Why, you've simply slaved to get the caravan ready."

Gunnar got to his feet and walked out to the verge of the headland on which they were camped. Tall, straight as a pine he stood.

The cousins watched him; the girl with trouble and perplexity, the man more searchingly. His eyes, under straight upper lids, flatly contradicted the rest of his appearance. He was very fat, with fair hair and smooth unlined face despite his forty years. A sort of Pickwickian good humor radiated from him. Dale Fleming's really great intellectual power showed only in those three-cornered heavily-lidded eyes of his.

"Why did you give me away?" Merle demanded.

His round moon face beamed on her.

"Why bluff?" he responded.

"Snooping about as usual. Why don't you go and be a real detective?" she retorted crossly.

He gave a comfortable chuckle, but his eyes were sad. It was devilishly hard to watch her falling for this Icelander. Ever since his parents had adopted her—an orphan of six— she had come first in Dale's affections. His love was far from Platonic. Gunnar Sven was a fine creature, but there was something wrong. Some mystery shadowed his life. What it was, Dale was determined to discover.

"Truth will out, my child! The natives are in terror of him. You know it as well as I do! They're all against helping you and me because he's our friend."

"Stop being an idiot. No one could be afraid of Gunnar. And he's particularly good with natives."

"Yes. He handles them well. I've never seen a young 'un do it better."

"Well, then?"

"There's something queer about him. These Arabs know it. We know it. It's about two months now since he joined forces with us. Just after my mother decamped and left us in Cairo. The cable summoning her home to Aunt Sue's death-bed arrived Wednesday, May 3rd. She sailed May 5th. Gunnar Sven turned up May 6th."

"All right. I'm not contradicting you. It's never any use."

"You refused to wait for Mother's return in Cairo, according to her schedule."

"Well! Cairo! Everyone paints Cairo and the Nile. I wanted subjects that every five-cent tourist hadn't raved over."

"You wanted Siwa Oasis. Of all God-forsaken dangerous filthy places! And in the summer—"

"You know you're dying to see the oasis too," she accused. "Just trying to save your face as my guardian and protector. Hypocrite!"

He roared with laughter. The Arab cook and several other servants stopped singing round their cooking-pots to grin at the infectious sound.

"Touche! I'd sacrifice my flowing raven locks to go to Siwa. But"— his face grew surprizingly stern—"about Gunnar. Why does he take such enormous pains not to tell us the name of the man he's been working for?"

"I've never asked him."

"I haven't in so many words, of course. But I've led him up to the fence over and over again. He's steadily refused it. With good reason."

"Well?"

"He works for an Arab. A sheykh. A man notorious from Morocco to Cairo. His nickname's Sheykh El Afrit. The Magician! His real name is Sheykh Zura El Shabur."

"And what's so earth-shaking about that?" asked Merle, patting a dark curl into place behind her ear.

"He's a very— bad— hat! Black Magic's no joke in this country. This Sheykh El Shabur's gone far. Too far."

"I'm going to talk to Gunnar. He'll tell me. It's fantastic. Gunnar and Black Magic indeed!"

Dale watched her, amused and touched. How she loathed subtleties and mysteries and tangled situations!

"She'd waltz up to a lion and pull its whiskers if anyone told her they were false. As good at concealment as a searchlight."

GUNNAR turned from the sea as Merle walked purposefully in his direction. He stood beside her— mountain pine overshadowing a little silver birch.

"H-m-m!" Dale threw away a freshly lighted cigarette and took another. "Merle and I wouldn't suggest that. More like Friar Tuck and Maid Marian."

He was startled to see Gunnar suddenly leap and turn. The man looked as if he'd had a tremendous shock. He stood peering across the wastelands stretching eastward, frozen into an attitude of utmost horror.

Dale ran across to Merle. She broke from his detaining hand and rushed to Gunnar's side.

"What is it? What do you see? Gunnar! Answer me, Gunnar!"

His tense muscles relaxed. He sighed, and brushed a hand across his eyes and wet forehead.

"He's found me. He's coming. I had hoped never—"

"Who? What are you talking about?"

She shook his arm in terror at his wild look and words.

"He said I was free! Free! I wouldn't have come near you if I'd known he lied. Now I've brought him into your life. Merle! Forgive me!"

He took her hands, kissed them frantically, then turned to Dale with burning haste and fairly pushed him away.

"Go! Go! Go! Now— before he comes. Leave everything! Ride for your lives. He'll force me to… go! Go!"

"*Ma yarudd*! What means this, Gunnar— my servant?"

The deep guttural voice seemed to come up from the bowels of the earth. The three turned as if a bomb had exploded. A figure loomed up not ten feet away. Merle stared with wide startled eyes. A minute ago the level wasteland had shown bare, deserted. How had this tall Arab approached unseen?

Gunnar seemed to shrink and wither. His face was tragic. The newcomer fixed him for a long moment in silence, staring him down.

"What means this, Gunnar, my servant?" Once more the words vibrated through the still night.

The Icelander made a broken ineffectual movement of his hands, and began to speak. His voice died away into low, vague murmurings.

"For this you shall account to me later," promised the tall Arab.

He strode forward. His black burnoose rippled and swayed about him. Its peaked hood was drawn close. A long face with pointed black beard, proud curving nose, and eyes dark and secret as forest pools gleamed beneath the hood.

Merle shrank back. Her fingers clutched Gunnar's. They were cold and limp in her grasp.

Dale leaned forward, peering into the Arab's face as a connoisseur examines an etching of rare interest.

"You speak very good English, my friend. Or is it enemy?"

The whole demeanor of the Arab changed. His white teeth flashed. He held out welcoming hands, clasped Dale's in his own, and bowed low to the girl. He turned last to the Icelander.

"Present me!" he ordered.

GUNNAR performed the small ceremony with white lips. His voice sounded as if he'd been running hard.

"Zura El Shabur. Zura of the Mist," translated the sheykh. "I am your friend. I have many friends of your Western world. The language! All languages are one to me!"

Dale beamed. "Ah! Good linguist and all that! Jolly good name yours, what! Gave us quite a scare, popping up out of the atmosphere like Aladdin's djinnee!"

El Shabui's thin lips again showed his teeth.

"Those that dwell in the desert's solitude and silence learn to reflect its qualities."

"Quite! Quite!" Dale gurgled happy agreement. "Neat little accomplishment Very convenient— for you!"

"Convenient on this occasion for you also, since my coming prevented the inhospitality of my servant from driving you away."

"No! You're wrong there. Gunnar's been our guardian angel for weeks past. Given us a wonderful time."

"Nevertheless, I heard that he urged you to go— to go quickly from Solium."

Dale burst into laughter; long, low gurgles that relieved tension all around. "I'm one of those fools that'd rather lose a pot of gold than alter my plans. One of the camel-drivers has made off with a few bits of loot. You heard the thrifty Gunnar imploring me to follow him."

Merle backed up the tale with quick wit. "Nothing of vast importance. My silver toilet things, a leather bag, and a camera. Annoying, but hardly worth wasting hours to retrieve."

She came forward, all anxiety to give Gunnar time to pull himself together.

El Shabur made her a second low obeisance and stared down into her upturned vivid face. "Such youth and beauty must be served. Shall I send Gunnar after the thief?"

The idea of separation gave her a shock. Intuition warned her to keep the Icelander at her side for his sake, and for her own. Together there seemed less danger.

Danger! From what? Why did the word drum through her brain like an S.O.S. signal? She glanced at Gunnar. His face was downbent.

"No." She met the Arab's eyes with effort and gave a valiant little smile. "No. Indeed not. We can't spare him. He's promised to come with us, to be our guide to the Siwa Oasis."

"Hope this won't clash with your plans for him. We've got so dependent on his help now." Dale's cherubic face registered anxiety.

"So." The Arab put a hand on Gunnar's shoulder. "It is good. You have done well."

The young man shivered. His eyes met Merle's in warning.

El Shabur turned to reassure her and Dale.

"Now all goes well. I, too, will join your caravan. It is necessary for my— my work— that I should visit Siwa very soon. I go also."

Dale took the outstretched hand. "Fine! Fine! We'll make a record trip now."

IN HIS TENT, Dale slept after many hours of hard, concentrated thought and intellectual work— very pink, very tired, younger-looking than ever in his profound repose.

In her tent, Merle lay quiet too.

Native servants snored, shapeless cocoons in their blankets. Even the camels had stopped moaning and complaining, and couched peacefully, barracked in a semicircle. Great mounds of baggage within its wide curve lay ready for loading.

Moonlight silvered long miles of grass and rushes. Leagues of shining water swung in almost tideless rhythm half a mile from camp.

Gunnar looked out on the scene from his tent. What had roused him from sleep? Why was his heart thumping, and the blood drumming in his ears? He peered out into the hushed world.

Tents, men, camels and baggage showed still as things on a painted canvas. He left his tent, made a noiseless detour about the sleeping camp, then frowned and stared about in all directions.

A bird, rising on startled wing, made him look sharply at an old Turkish fort. It stood, grim and battered sentinel, on a near-by promontory of Solium Bay. Through its gaping ruined walls he caught a glint of fire— green, livid, wicked names that stained the night most evilly.

"El Shabur! Already! The Pentacle of Fire!"

His whisper was harsh as the faint drag of pebbles on the shore. For several minutes he. stood as if chained. Fear and anger warred with dawning resolution and a wild anxiety. Then he stumbled over to Merle's tent and tore open its flap. Flashlight in hand, he went in and stared down at the sleeping girl. She lay white and rigid as if in a trance. Gunnar touched her forehead, took up a limp hand in his own. She gave no sign of life.

He stood looking down at the still, waxen features. The rather square, resolute little face was uniformly white, even to the curved, just-parted lips. The

hair seemed wrought in metal, so black and heavy and lifeless did it wave above the broad, intelligent brow. Gunnar looked in awe. The girl's animated, sparkling face was changed to something remote and strange and exquisite. Half child, half priestess.

"And in a few short weeks or months," he muttered, "El Shabur will initiate her. This is the first step. She will rot— perish— as I am doing!"

He bent, in passionate horror, over the still face.

"No! No! Not for you! Dear lovely child!"

He clenched his hands. "But if I disturb him now!"

For minutes he stood irresolute. Fear took him by the throat. He could not— he could not interfere! At last his will steadied. He mastered the sick terror that made him tremble and shiver like a beaten dog. As he left the tent, he glanced back once more.

"Good-bye! I'll do all I can," he promised softly. "I'd give my soul to save you— if I still had one."

He ran to the headland where the old fort stood. If El Shabur's occupation was what he feared, he would neither hear nor see. Intensely concentrating on his rites, nothing in the visible world would reach him.

Gunnar's calculations were justified. He went boldly in through the arched entrance to an inner court where green fires burned in a great ring, five points of two interlacing triangles which showed black upon the gray dust of the floor. In the center of this cabalistic symbol stood El Shabur, clothed in black. The rod he held was of black ebony.

Gunnar drew breath. He listened to the toneless continuous muttering of the sheykh. What point had El Shabur reached in his conjurations? How long since he had drawn Merle's soul from the lovely quiet body lying in her tent? It was of vital importance to know. If the devilish business was only begun, he might free her. If El Shabur had reached the last stage, closed the door behind the soul he was luring from its habitation, then it was fatally late.

He listened, head thrust forward, trying to distinguish the rapidly muttered words.

"Shekinah! Aralim! Ophanim! Assist me in the name of Melek Taos, Ruler of wind and stars and sea, who commands the four elements in the might of Adonai and the Ancient Ones!"

"A-h-h-h!" Gunnar gave a deep gasping sigh of relief. He was not too late. Sheykh El Shabur called on his allies. Merle's spirit was not yet cut off from its home. Her will resisted the Arab's compulsion.

HE LEAPED forward, oversetting all five braziers. Their fire spilled and died out instantly. In the cold clear moonlight, El Shabur loomed tall, menacing. He stood glaring across the courtyard at the intruder. His black-clad figure

overshadowed the Icelander's by many inches, like a cloud, like a bird of prey. Malignant, implacable he towered.

Gunnar's golden head sank. His strong, straight body seemed to shrink and crumple. Inch by inch he retreated, until he reached the wall. He tried to meet the Arab's unblinking stare and failed. Again his bright head sank. His eyes sought the dusty earth. But his whole frame trembled with a wild, fanatical excitement. He had succeeded so far— had brought El Shabur back from that void where Merle's spirit had so perilously wandered. She was free. Free to go back to that still white body lying in her tent.

"So! You love this girl. You would save her from me. You— who cannot save yourself!"

"You're right." The young man's voice shook. "Right as far as I'm concerned. But Miss Anthony's on a different plane. You're not going to play your filthy tricks on her."

"So! It would seem that, in spite of my teaching, you are not yet well disciplined. Have you forgotten your vow? Have you forgotten that a cabalist may never retreat one inch of the road he treads? Have you forgotten the punishment that overtakes the renegade?"

"I would die to save her from you."

The other showed white teeth in a mirthless sardonic grin.

"Die!" echoed his deep, mocking voice. "Death is not for us. Are you not initiated and under protection? What can bring death to such as you?"

"There must be a way of escape for me— and for her. I will defeat you yet, El Shabur!"

The Icelander's voice rose. His eyes were blazing. He stepped forward. Moonlight touched his shining hair, his passion-contorted features, his angry, bloodshot eyes. Control slipped from him. He strove in vain to recapture it, to use his reason. He knew that anger was delivering him bound and helpless into his enemy's hands. It had been so from their first encounter. Emotion versus reason. He knew his fatal weakness, and strove against it now— in vain. Long habit ruled. Anger made his will a thing of straw.

"You would defy me— the Power I serve— the Power that serves me?"

Gunnar felt the blood rushing to his head. His ears sang. Red mist obscured his sight.

"You are a devil! And you serve devils!" he shouted. "But you won't always win the game! Curse you, El Shabur! Curse you! Curse you!"

The Arab looked long into his angry eyes, and came closer. With an incredibly swift movement he clasped the shaking, furious figure.

Gunnar felt dry lips touch his ears and mouth and brow, heard a low quick mutter. Then EI Shabur released him suddenly, and stood back.

"Ignorant and beast-like! Be what you are— slave to your own passion! You, yourself, create the devil that haunts you. Therefore are you mine— for all devils are subject to me. Be what you are! Out, beast! Howl and snarl with your own kind until the dawn."

For a moment something dark scuffled in the dust at El Shabur's feet. The courtyard rang with a long, desolate howl. A shadow, lean and swift, fled from the camp, far, far out across the empty wasteland.

AT SUNSET, the next day, Dale Fleming and his caravan reached Bir Augerin, the first well on their march. They had delayed their start some hours. Merle had insisted in waiting for Gunnar, but he had not turned up.

"He will join us en route," the sheykh had assured her. "He is well used to desert travel, Mademoiselle!"

"But his camel?"

"We will take it. He can easily hire another."

"Have you no idea why he went off and left us without warning? It's so unlike him."

El Shabur gave his dark unmirthful smile.

"He is young. Young and careless and— undisciplined. He has— friends. Oh, he is popular! That golden hair of his— it has a fascination...."

Merle's face crimsoned and grew pale. Dale's round face concealed his thoughts. He glanced at the Arab's lean hands that twisted a stiff length of wire rope with such slow and vicious strength. He had learned how betraying hands may be.

Merle made no more objections, and at 3:30 p. m. the caravan set out. The natives were superstitious about a journey's start. Mondays, Thursdays and Saturdays were fortunate; and Saturday the luckiest of the week.

At Bir Augerin, camp was quickly made. The servants drew up water from the large rectangular tank in leather buckets. Merle sat disconsolate to watch, and smoke, and think of Gunnar. Dale joined her, leaving the sheykh to direct the men.

"I don't believe it!" Merle burst out.

"About our absent friend?"

"Gunnar's not that sort. I think they've had a quarrel. Dale!" She put a beseeching hand on his arm. "You don't think— he wouldn't kill Gunnar!"

"My prophetic bones tell me not." He patted the hand in brisk, business-like fashion. "He'll turn up and explain himself. Don't worry. This Sheykh of the Mist's a queer old josser. About as trustworthy as a black panther, but the boy's too useful to be killed off in a hurry. All the same— look here, Merle: keep this handy at night."

He put a small snub-nosed automatic in her hand.

"It's loaded. And I've taught you to use it. Listen! There are wolves on this trail. Heard 'em last night about the camp."

"Wolves? In the desert? Jackals, you mean."

"Don't speak out of turn. Wolves. You know— things that go off like this."

He threw back his head and gave a blood-curdling howl that electrified the camp. El Shabur spun on his heel, long knife drawn. The servants groveled, then ran to pluck brands from the fire.

Dale gave a rich, infectious gurgle. "Splendid! Must have done that jolly well. Now perhaps you'll recognize a wolf when you hear it. If you do— shoot!"

SOON AFTER four a. m. the caravan set out again in the chill clear moonlight. In spite of grilling days, the nights remained cool and made travel easy. They reached their next halt, BirHamed, about eight o'clock. This cistern was the last before real desert began. They decided to give the camels a good day's grazing and watering and push off again in the small hours before dawn.

Cooking-pots were slung over crackling fires. Fragrance of wood smoke mingled with odor of frying sausages and onions. Dale went over and implored the cook to refrain from using last night's dish-water to brew coffee. El Shabur approached Merle and pointed to the east.

"He comes."

She dropped a camera and roll of films and jumped to her feet.

"Who? Gunnar? I see no one."

"He comes riding from over there."

Low rolling dunes to the east showed bare and smooth and empty of life. She stared, and frowned at the speaker. "I see nothing. Dale!" she called out. "The sheykh says Gunnar's coming from over there. Can you see him?"

Dale scrutinized the empty eastern horizon, then turned to El Shabur with a bland wide smile. "Ah, you wonderful Arabs! Putting one over on us, aren't you? You people have extra valve sets. Pick up things from the ether. It's enough to give me an inferiority complex."

He thrust an arm through Merle's. "If he says so, it is so! I'll tell cook to fry a few more sausages.

"Servants are all in a state of jim-jams this morning," he said as he returned from his hospitable errand. "Ilbrahaim's been handing out samples from the Thousand and One Nights' Entertainments, What d'you suppose he's started now?"

"They talk much," the sheykh's deep scornful voice replied. "And they say nothing."

"Ilbrahaim is a chatty little fellow. Be invaluable at a funeral, wouldn't he? Distract the mourners and all that! Unless he got on to vampires and ghouls. He's keen on cabalistic beliefs."

"Such things are childish; they have no interest for a cabalist."

"No— really! Well, you probably know. Is there a place called Bilad El Kelab?"

El Shabur's eyes glinted. His chin went up in a gesture of assent.

"There is? Ah, then Ilbrahaim tells the truth now and then. His brother went to this place. Country of the Dogs— suggestive name! The yarn is that all the men there turn to dogs at sunset. Like werewolves, you know."

"Bilad El Kelab is far away. South— far south in the Sudan. Ilbrahaim has no brother, moreover."

"No?"

"No. There are many foolish legends from the Sudan."

"Not so foolish. I'm interested in folklore and legend and primitive beliefs. That's why I'm going to Siwa, apart from looking after my little cousin here."

El Shabur's eyes smoldered. "It is unwise to be too curious about such things. That which feeds an eagle is no meat for a fish."

"Quite! Quite! Good that, isn't it, Merle? Meaning we Westerners are fish! Oh, definitely good! This Ilbrahaim, though— he swears our camp's being haunted. He thinks a weredog, or werewolf, has attached itself to us. Says he woke and saw it prowling about last night."

"A long trail from the Bilad El Kelab!"

"You're right, El Shabur. Still, what's a few hundred miles to a werewolf? And I suppose it travels on camel-back by day, if it's got its man's body in good repair. Have to be a new camel each morning— eh? Not likely a self-respecting mehari would trot hoof in paw with a wolf each night."

"Dale! Is it the same wolf you said was—"

A cousinly kick on the ankle, as Dale moved to replace a blazing branch on the fire, warned her.

"Is it the wolf-tale they talked about in Alexandria?" she switched off quickly.

"Dear child!" Dale beamed approval. "How your little wits do work! No! That wolf was a jackal that haunted the Valley of the Kings in Egypt."

El Shabur turned his head sharply. "The lost one arrives," he remarked.

In the distance, magnified and distorted by the hot desert air, a vast camel and rider loomed. Merle lighted a cigarette with slow, unsteady hands.

"It may be anyone. Impossible to tell yet."

The sheykh spread his hands. "Mademoiselle will soon discover."

In half an hour, Gunnar rode into Camp. A sorry figure, disheveled, unshaven, he looked as if he'd been across Africa with a minimum of food and sleep. Merle had meant to be unrelenting at first, to await explanation, but her heart betrayed her at sight of this desperately weary man. She ran to meet him as he dismounted, and tried to lead him over to where Dale and the Arab sat smoking.

He stood swaying on his feet. "No. Not now." His cracked, parched lips could scarcely frame the words. "I must sleep. I— I could not help it. I was prevented— I was prevented," he croaked.

"Gunnar— of course!" She beckoned to a servant. "Take care of him. I'll send Dale effendi to give him medicine. He is ill."

IN THE LATE AFTERNOON the camp was in more or less of an uproar. The camels were driven in from pasturage to drink once again. They would have preferred to go on grazing, and, being camels, they expressed disapproval noisily, and gave much trouble to the cursing, sweating men.

Dale sauntered off from their vicinity. The sun was casting shadows that lengthened steadily. He stopped in the shadow of a huge boulder and stared thoughtfully out across the barren desert.

"Got his goat all right about that legend and the cabalists. Now, just why did that strike home? The pattern's there, but all in little moving bits. I can't get the confounded mosaic right. Cabalists! Werewolves! Gunnar and the Sheykh of the Mist! Haunted camp and all the rest of it! A very, very pretty little mix-up. I wonder now.... I wonder...."

His eyes, fixed in abstracted non-seeing gaze, suddenly became wary. His big body grew taut. Then, with the lightness of movement for which fat men are often remarkable, he vanished into a cleft of the great rock. His hearing was acute and voices carried far in the desert stillness.

"…until we reach Siwa. From sunrise to sunset I will be with her." Gunnar's bitterness was apparent. "If you interfere I will tell her what you are!"

"In return I will explain what you are— after sunset!" El Shabur's voice mocked. "Will the knowledge make her turn to you for protection?"

"You devil!"

"You fool! Do not meddle with power you cannot control. Until Siwa, then."

They passed out of earshot. Dale watched them return to camp.

"More bite of mosaic, nice lurid color, too. Looks as though Siwa's going to be even more promising than I imagined. Evil old city, enough to make one write another Book of Revelations?"

THE SUN cast long shadows, stretching grotesquely over pink-stained leagues of sand. Dale was anxious to watch Gunnar when the sun actually did set; he felt that phrase of the young Icelander's had been significant: From sunrise to sunset I will be with her. Rather an odd poetic reference to time! Taken in conjunction with his unexplained disappearance last night, it was specially odd.

Dale ambled slowly in the direction of camp, empty pipe between his teeth. He had stayed a long hour. From his rocky crevice, he had watched Gunnar and

the Arab return, seen Gunnar start off again with Merle into the desert. The two were returning now— dark against the reddening sky.

He was curious to see how the young man was going to behave; what explanation, if any, he had given to Merle. He was overwhelmingly anxious to discover just how far she returned the love that burned so stedfastly in Gunnar's eyes. If it was serious— really serious— with her, the whole queer dangerous situation was going to be deadly.

She would go her own way. If her heart was given, it was given, for good or evil. It seemed entirely evil, in his judgment, if she had decided to link her fate with this Icelander.

And El Shabur! How dangerous was this notorious Arab magician? Men of his practises fairly haunted desert cities and oases. Mostly they were harmless, sometimes genuinely gifted in the matter of prophecy. Rarely, they were men of inexplicable and very terrible power; who were dedicated, brain and body, to the cause of evil— evil quite beyond the comprehension of normal people.

Dale's eyes were cold and implacable as he recollected one or two such men he had known: his pleasant face looked unbelievably austere and grim.

One way or another, Merle stood in imminent and pressing danger; from Gunnar, no less than from EI Shabur; from Gunnar, not because he was of himself evil, but because he was a channel through which the Arab could reach her. She was vulnerable in proportion to her love. There were infinite sources of danger ahead. El Shabur had a definite plan regarding her, something that would mature at Siwa. Three days remained to discover the nature of that plan.

Three days! Perhaps not even that. Gunnar's relations with the Arab seemed dangerously explosive; a crisis might work up at any moment. Merle would then be implicated, for she would defend Gunnar with blind partizanship. All the odds were on El Shabur. It was his country; he could queer the expedition easily without any supernatural agency. And, if he were the deadly poisonous creature Dale began to suspect, then the lonely desert made a superb background for murder…he called it murder to himself, unwilling to give a far more terrible name to what he suspected EI Shabur might do.

The lovers, walking slowly, reluctantly back to camp, were completely absorbed in each other.

"If only I'd known you earlier!" The man's sunken eyes looked down on the erect, slim, lovely girl beside him with immense regret.

"The only thing we can do about it is to make up for lost time, darling."

He stopped, faced her, took both firm, lather square hands in his own. "Merle, you're being a miracle. But it's impossible. I oughtn't to have told you how much I cared."

"Poor dear! You hadn't any choice, really. I did the leap year stunt before you could stop me; and, being a little gent, you simply had to say you loved me, too!"

She rattled away, hardly knowing what she said. "I've got to alter that look in his eyes," she told herself. "I thought it was because of me, conceited little beast that I am. But it isn't— it isn't!

"Gunnar," she tackled him with characteristic impetuosity, "Is your fear of El Shabur the biggest thing in your life? Is it bigger than— than your love for me?"

The grip of his hands tightened. His face bent to hers. His haunted red-rimmed eyes looked into her candid gray ones, that shone with love and kindness and a stedfast unwavering trust that made him want to kiss her dusty shoes. Instead, he dropped her hands, pulled his hat down over his face, walked on with quickened stride toward the distant encampment.

"It's no use… I can't go on with it. I'm in a tangle that no one on earth can straighten out. It's revolting to think of you being caught up in such a beastly mess. I went into this thing because I was a young inquisitive fool! I'd no idea what it involved, no idea at all that there was something behind it stronger…stronger than death! I was blind, I was credulous, I was utterly ignorant; I walked into El Shabur's trap— and the door shut behind me!"

"Gunnar, darling, can't you explain? People don't have to go on serving masters they hate unless— unless—"

"Exactly! Unless they're slaves. Well, I am his slave."

"I don't understand you."

"Thank heaven for it, and don't try! It's because you must never, never understand such things that I wanted you and Dale to go away that night at Sollum."

"If you owe the sheykh your time, can't you buy him off? Surely any contract can be broken."

"Not the one that binds me to him. Listen, Merle, my own! I can't— I daren't say more than this. Think of him as a poison— as something that blackens and burns like vitriol. Will you do what may seem a very childish thing, will you do it to please me?"

"What is it?"

"Tie this across the entrance of your sleeping-tent at night." He held out a little colored plait, four threads of green, white, red, and black, from which a seal depended. "Once more, I daren't explain, but use it. Promise me!"

TAKEN ABACK by his tone and manner, she promised. What, she thought, had a bit of colored string to do with all this mystery about him and the sheykh? A fleeting doubt as to his sanity came to her.

"No," he answered the look. "I was never more sane than now— when it's too late. Too late for myself, at least. You— nothing shall happen to you!"

"Won't you talk to Dale? He's such a queer wise old thing, I'm sure he could help if only you'd explain things to him."

"No. Not yet, at any rate. Not until we get to Siwa. I'll explain everything then. Silence is the price I've paid to be with you on this trip."

"But, really Dale is—"

"If you don't want him to die suddenly, say nothing to him. Anyone that interferes with El Shabur gets rubbed out like this!"

Gunnar stamped a small pebble deep into the sand.

"All right," she promised with a shiver. That quick vicious little movement had given her a sudden horrid fear of the sheykh— more than all Gunnar's words. "I'll say nothing. But Dale is pretty hard to deceive. There never seems any need to tell him things; he just knows them. I expect he's burrowing away underground about El Shabur already, just like an old ferret! I happen to know he loathes him."

"Nobody'd think so to see them chinwagging."

"He behaves like a garrulous moron when he's putting salt on anyone's tail, and I've seldom seen him wallowing quite so idiotically as now."

"Much more likely the sheykh's putting salt on his tail by pretending to believe Dale's a fool."

"You don't know Dale."

"You don't know El Shabur." Gunnar had the last word— it proved to be accurate.

They found the two in camp and deep in talk.

"Arguing about our pet werewolf." Dale was bland. "Will you sit up with me and try a pot shot at the beast, Gunnar?"

The tall Icelander stood in silence. His face was a gray mask, his sunken eyes stared hard and long into the other's blank smooth face. He turned to the sheykh at length.

"You suggested this?"

Merle shivered at his voice.

The Arab shrugged. "On the contrary. It would be wisdom to sleep before tomorrow's march. If the effendi desires to hunt it would be well to wait until we reach the hills of Siwa."

"Well," Dale seemed determined to prolong the discussion, "what do you vote for, old man? The werewolf tonight, or the Siwa hills later?"

"The hills— definitely, the hills," the young man's voice cracked on a laugh, "According to legend, you can't kill a werewolf. No use wasting our shots and a night's sleep too."

"Thwarted!" moaned Dale. "The hills of Siwa, then. You can promise good hunting there, Sheykh?"

"By my sacred wasm."

"Wasm?" Dale lighted a cigarette with casual air.

"My mark, my insignia, my tribal sign. It is like heraldry in your land."

"Heavens above! I must remember to call my little label a wasm in future. Intriguing word, that! And what is your mark?"

El Shabur leaned forward and traced it in the sand. Dale regarded it with a smile that masked deep uneasiness. He recognized the ghastly little sign; he was one of the very few who had the peculiar knowledge to do so. A smoke-screen from his eternal pipe shielded his face from the watchful Arab. Was El Shabur trying to trick him into exposing his very special and intimate knowledge of the occult; or did he make that deadly mark feeling sure that only an initiate would recognize it?

El Shabur was a Yezidee, a Satanist, and worshipped Melek Taos. The symbol was unmistakably the outspread tail of the Angel-Peacock. Dale recoiled inwardly at having his darkest fears confirmed; he knew of no tribe on earth more vicious and powerful than the Yezidees, Their name and their fame went back into mists of time. Seldom did one of them leave his hills and rock-dwelling up beyond Damascus. Once in a century or so, throughout the ages, a priest of the Yezidees would stalk the earth like a black destroying god to acquaint himself with the world and its conditions. He would return to teach his tribe. So they remained, a nucleus of evil power that never seemed to die out.

"Nice little design; looks like half a ray-fish," he commented. Impossible to fathom what was going on behind the sheykh's carven, immobile features. "Wasm— did you say? Wait, I must write that down."

The whites of the Arab's eyes glinted as he glanced at Merle. "Are you like your cousin in this— do you also suffer from loss of memory?"

"I— we— what do you mean?"

"You have a saying in your Book of Wisdom, "Thy much learning doth turn thee to madness.' The effendi is like to that man, Paul. For who, after years and years of study, could forget so simple a thing as a wasm?"

Dale didn't move a muscle. His bluff was called. All right! On with the next dance! Too late he realized why the Arab had started the absorbing wasm topic. It had been intended to shock and distract his own thoughts from Gunnar— to prevent his keeping an eye on him.

The Icelander had got up and gone over to his tent a minute ago with a murmur about tobacco. He had not returned. Dale was on his feet and peering into Gunnar's tent in a flash. No one there. He looked at the western horizon— the sun had dipped beyond it. He scanned the desert. It offered no shelter for

Gunnar's six feet of height. He looked into every tent; saw that only the servants crouched before their fires, that only baggage lay heaped upon the ground.

Shadows were melting into dusk. But one long shadow seemed to move over there among the dunes not far away! Were his own dark thoughts inventing the thing that fled across the desert?

The darkest thought of all came as he went back to Merle and the silent watchful Arab. Was he a match for this man?

"YOU NEEDN'T worry about Gunnar. The Arab's at the back of these nightly disappearances, I'm quite certain, although the reasons he gave were of his own invention."

"Then you think he'll come back?" Merle looked tired and anxious in the light of her small lamp.

"He'll come back," asserted the man. "Good night, old lady. If you feel nervous or want anything, just give a yelp. I'll be awake— got to finish a bit of research work."

She caught a look that belied his cheerful voice. "Why d'you look round my tent like that? Is there any special danger— that wolf?"

"Well, I don't mind telling you there is a spot of danger. You're not the sort that goes off like a repeating-rifie at being warned. But— have you got your doodah handy?"

She showed the automatic underneath her pillow. "Perhaps I ought to tell you that Gunnar warned me too. No. Not about the wolf, but El Shabur."

"Worse than a whole pack of wolves," he agreed. "Know where you are with those noisy brutes, but the sheykh's another cup of tea, entirely."

"He gave me this. Told me to tie up my tent with it. Queer, don't you think?"

He examined the plait of colored string with profound interest.

"Jerusalem the Golden! If we ever reach dry land again, this will be an heirloom for you to hand on. That is, unless you're hard up and want to sell it to some Croesus for a sack of diamonds. This, my dear Black-eyed Susan, is a relic dating back thousands of years. The seal, of course, not the threads. It's an emerald. And that's the Eye of Horus cut in it."

"Emerald! It must be fearfully valuable. How on earth d'you think Gunnar got it?"

"From his master the sheykh. It's the sort of thing he'd need, poor fellow! It's a safeguard— oh, quite infallible."

"I never know when you're serious or when you're just being idiotic. Protection from what? What does it mean?"

"It means that El Shabur's a cabalist. And that Gunnar is an initiate and pretty far advanced too, to be in possession of this very significant thing. He's gone a long, long way on the road— poor lad!"

"He's in danger?"

"Extreme and imminent danger; there's scarcely a chance to cut him free now. Better face the thing, dear. Gunnar's not in a position to love or marry any woman; he's tied body and soul to El Shabur. It's a hideous, deplorable, ghastly mess, the whole affair." He sat down beside her on the little truckle bed and took her hand. "This is my fault. I knew well enough even at Solium that there was something abnormal about Gunnar."

"I love him," she answered very quietly, "and nothing can ever alter that. Whatever he's done, or is— I love him."

He stared at her a long minute. "And that's the damndest part of the whole show," he remarked with immense gravity.

He turned back at the tent opening. "About that thing Gunnar gave you. Fasten the tent-flap with it if you value your soul; wear it under your dress by day, never let the sheykh catch a glimpse of it. We reach Siwa the day after tomorrow. Try not to let El Shabur know we suspect anything, meantime. Sure you're all right— not afraid?"

"Not for myself. I don't understand what it's all about. But I'm afraid for my poor Gunnar. He's the sort that can't stand alone. Not like you and me, we're too hard-headed old things!"

"You're a wonder. Any other girl stranded here with a half-mad native sorcerer would go right up the pole. Tie up your tent, though, d'you hear?"

"The moment you've gone. Cross my heart!"

NIGHT WORE swiftly on. Dale sat smoking in his own tent, fully dressed, alert and expectant. He felt convinced that something was in the wind tonight. The sound of shots far off across the desert took him outside, rifle in hand. Sleep held the camp; not a man had stirred. The black Bedouin tent in which die sheykh slept was closed. No one seemed to have been disturbed except himself. Again came that queer little tug of his senses— a warning of danger near.

His grip tightened on his weapon. He went on more slowly. A shadow seemed to move round the great mass of rock which had sheltered him a few hours ago. He halted half-way between rock and camp. Should he go back and rouse the ment? Or should he go closer and inspect for himself? He walked on.

A high, piping wind blew clouds across the sky. A black mass obscured the moon. He halted once more, turned back to camp in a sudden certainty of peril. Too late. A rush. A scuffle. An arm of steel clasped him from behind, a hand like a vise was clamped across his lips before he could call out. His big body was enormously muscular and he fought like a tiger, threw off his assailant, shouted loudly. The strong wind shouted louder, tore his voice to shreds. It swept the black cloud from the moon too, and he saw a small band of natives, their faces

veiled, knives glinting, burnooses bellying out like sails as they shouted and ran at him.

They were too close to take aim. He made for the rock. Unencumbered, and a good sprinter, he reached it safely, stood with his back to it and coolly picked out one after another of his enemies. It was only a momentary advantage; they were too many for him, and ran in again with savage yells.

To his amazement, a dark long swift body flung itself upon his attackers. A great wolf, huge, shaggy, thin and sudden as a torpedo. In vain the men plunged their knives into its rough pelt. Again and again Dale saw the wicked twisted blades drop as the brute caught the wrists of the raiders in its teeth.

The fight was short. Not a man was killed, but none escaped a wound. Some had faces slashed so that blood ran down and blinded them; some dragged a maimed foot; some a mangled arm. In terror of the swift, silent punishing creature that stood between them and their victim, the raiders turned and fled.

The wolf itself had been damaged in the savage encounter; an ear was torn, and it limped as it ran at the heels of the raiders, chasing them to their camels behind the huge rock pile.

The great panting beast looked full at Dale as it passed by. The man felt his heart beat, beat, beat in slow painful thuds against his chest. The creature's yellow, bloodshot eyes turned on him with a glance that cut deeper than any raider's knife. He leaned back. He felt very sick. The vast desert seemed to heave.

Slowly, soberly he made his way back to camp. He did not so much as glance back at the wolf. He knew now. He knew!

SIWA! Actually Siwa at last! The strange fort-like city loomed before the thin line of camels and their dusty weary riders. Like a vast house of cards Siwa had risen up and up from the plain. On its foundation of rock, one generation after another had built; father for son, father for son again; one story on another, the sun-baked mud and salt of its walls almost indistinguishable from the rock itself.

Tiny windows flecked the massive precipitous piles. Vast hives of life, these buildings. Layer upon layer, narrowing from their rocky base into turrets and towers and minarets.

Dale's eyes were for Merle, however. She rode beside him, her face so white and strained, her eyes so anxious that he was torn with doubt. Ought he to have told her Gunnar's secret? He had not turned up since the desert fight. Merle was sick with anxiety. Sheykh El Shabur smiled in his beard as he saw her quivering underlip, her glance that looked about with ever increasing fear.

"Where is he? Where is he?" She turned upon the sheykh. "You said he would be here at Siwa, waiting for us. Where is he?" she demanded.

Dale could have laughed had the situation been less grave and horrible. She loved as she hated, with her whole strong vigorous soul and body. She tackled the sinister, haughty Arab, demanding of him the man she loved, with the fearlessness of untried youth.

She was worth dying for, his little Merle! And it looked as though he, and she too, would make a finish here in this old barbaric city. If he had to go, he would see to it that she was not left behind, to be a sacrifice on some blood-stained ancient altar hewn in the rock beneath the city, to die slowly and horribly that the lust of Melek Taos should be appeased, to die in body— to live on in soul, slave to Sheykh Zura El Shabur.

And Gunnar? It was unnerving to think what might be happening to him. Dale knew that Gunnar had saved his life as surely as that El Shabur had plotted to kill him two nights ago. It was not nice to consider how the cabalist might punish this second interference of his young disciple.

They rode on through an endless warren of twisting dark lanes. Dale dropped behind Merle and the Arab when only two could ride abreast; he liked to have El Shabur before his eyes when possible. He could see Merle talking earnestly. Her companion seemed interested, his hands moved in quick eloquent gesture, he seemed reassuring her on some point. Gunnar, surely! No other subject in common could exist between those two.

Past the date-markets, under the shadow of the square white tomb of Sidi Suliman, past palm-shaded gardens, until they reached a hill shaped like a sugar-loaf and honeycombed with tombs.

"The Hill of the Dead!" El Shabur waved a lean dark hand.

"Quite," replied Dale. "It looks like it."

The Arab pointed to the white Rest-House built on a level terrace cut in the hillside. "It is there that travelers stay— such as come to Siwa."

"Very appropriate. One does associate test with tombs, after all."

Merle looked up at the remarkable hill with blank, uninterested gaze.

"Ilbrahaim will take your camels. If you will dismount here! The jonduk is on the other side of the city."

The sheykh dismounted as he spoke. He sent the servant off with the weary beasts, and left the cousins with a salaam to Dale and a deep mocking obeisance to the girl. They watched him out of sight. The hood of his black burnoose obscured head and face; its wide folds, dark and ominous as the sable wings of a bird of prey, swung to his proud free walk. They sighed with relief as the tall figure vanished in Siwa's gloomy narrow streets.

"What were you two chinning about on the way here?" Dale steered the exhausted girl up the steep rocky path. "You seemed to goad our friend to unusual eloquence."

"I was asking about Gunnar. What else is there to say to him? Oh, do look at that!"

Below stretched rolling sandy dunes, palm groves, distant ranges of ragged peaks, the silver glint of a salt lake, and a far-off village on the crest of a rocky summit in the east.

He looked, not at the extraordinary beauty of desert, hill and lake, but at Merle. She had switched the conversation abruptly. Also, she was gazing out over the desert with eyes that saw nothing before them. He was certain of that. She was keyed up— thinking, planning, anticipating something. What? He knew she'd made up her mind to action, and guessed it was concerned with Gunnar. Long experience had taught him the futility of questioning her.

They found the Rest-House surprizingly clean and cool. Ilbrahaim presently returned to look after them. No other guests were there.

It was getting on toward evening when Dale was summoned to appear before the Egyptian authorities and report on his visit. He knew the easily offended, touchy character of local rulers and authorities, and that it was wise to obey the summons. But about Merle!

He glanced at her over the top of a map he was pretending to study.

"Would you care to come along with me across the city? Or will you stay here with Ilbrahaim and watch the sunset? Famous here, I've read."

"Yes," she replied, her eyes on a pencil sketch she was making of the huddled roofs seen from an open window where she sat.

"My fault, I'll start again! A— Will you come with me? B— Will you stay with Ilbrahaim?"

"B." She looked up for a moment, then returned to her sketch.

He got the impression of peculiar and sudden relief in her eyes, as if the problem had solved itself.

"Wants to get me off the scene!" he told himself.

She stopped further uneasy speculation on his part by bringing her sketch across and plunging into technical details about it. He was a sound critic and was beguiled into an enthusiastic discourse on architecture. She listened and argued and discussed points with flattering deference, until the sun was low and vast and crimson in the west.

Then she casually remarked, "You needn't go now, surely?"

He started up. "I'd completely forgotten my little call. Sorry, dear, to leave you even for an hour. Etiquette's extremely stiff on these small formalities; better go, I think. "Bye, old lady, don't go wandering about."

"Thank heaven, he's gone!" Merle thrust her drawings into a portfolio, put on a hat, scrutinized her pale face in her compact-mirror, applied lipstick and rouge with an artist's hand, and walked down the hill path.

At its junction with the dusty road, a tall black-clad figure joined her.

"You are punctual, Mademoiselle! That is well, for we must be there before sunset."

It seemed an interminable walk to her as they dived and twisted through a labyrinth of courtyards, flights of steps, and overshadowed narrow streets. She followed her silent guide closely. It would be unpleasant to lose even such a grim protector as El Shabur. She shrank from the filthy whining beggars with their rags and sores, from the bold evil faces of the young men who stood to stare at her. Even the children revolted her— pale unhealthy abnormal little creatures that they were.

The sheykh hurried on through the old town with its towering fort-like houses to newer Siwa. Here the dwellings were only of two or three stories with open roofs that looked like great stone boxes shoved hastily together in irregular blocks.

EL SHABUR looked at the sun, then turned to his companion with such malice in his black eyes that she shrank from him.

"He is here."

She looked up at the house-front with its tiny windows and fought back the premonition of horror that made her throat dry and her heart beat heavily. She despised her weakness. Inside this sinister house, behind one of those dark slits of windows, Gunnar was waiting for her.

Why he'd not come to her, why she must visit him secretly with El Shabur, she refused to ask herself. She loved him. She was going to be with him. The rest did not count at all.

She followed her guide through a low entrance door, stumbled up a narrow dark stairway, caught glimpses of bare, untenanted, low-ceilinged rooms. El Shabur opened a door at the top of the house, drew back with a flash of white teeth. She stooped to enter the low doorway.

"Gunnar!"

There was no answer in words, but from the shadows a figure limped, his face and head cut and bleeding, so gaunt, so shadow-like too, that she cried out again.

"Oh! Oh, my dear!"

He took her in his arms. She clasped him, drew his head down to hers, kissed the gray tortured face with passionate love and pity.

"Gunnar, I am here with you! Look at me! What is it?— tell me, darling, let me help you!"

His eyes met hers in such bitter despair and longing that she clutched him to her again, pressing her face against his shoulder. With gentle touch he put her from him.

"Listen to me, Merle, my darling. My beloved! Listen carefully. This is the last time I shall see you— touch you— for ever. I am lost— lost and damned. In a moment you will see for yourself. That is why he brought you here. Remember that I love you more than the soul I have lost— always— always, Merle!"

He pushed her from him, retreated to the shadows, stood there with head flung up and back pressed to the gray mud wall. Even as she would have gone to him, he changed, swiftly, dreadfully! Down— down in the dust— torn rough head and yellow wolf's eyes at her feet.

MERLE SAT UP on the broad divan. Dale had returned to find her walk. ing up and down, up and down the long main room of the Rest-House. For long he had been unable to distract her mind from the terrible inner picture that tormented her. She would answer his anxious questions with an impatient glance of wild distracted eyes, then begin her endless restless pacing again.

She had drunk the strong sedative he gave her as if her body were acting independently of her mind, but the drug had acted. She had slept. Now she was awake and turned to the man who watched beside her— large, protecting, compassionate. She tried to tell him, but her voice refused to put the thing into words.

"My dear child, don't! Don't! I know what you saw."

"You know! You've seen him when— when—" She covered her face, then slipped from the divan and stood erect before him.

"Dale! I'm all right now. It was so inhuman, such a monstrous unbelievable thing! But he has to bear it— live through it. And we must talk about it. We have to help him. Dale! Dale! Surely there is a way to free him?"

He took her hands in his, swallowed hard before he could command his voice. "My chi—" He broke off abruptly.

There was nothing left of the child! It was a very resolute woman whose white face and anguished eyes confronted him. She looked, she was in effect, ten years older. He could not insult her by anything but the whole unvarnished truth now. She must make the final decision herself. He must not, he dare not withhold his knowledge. It would be a betrayal. Of her. Of Gunnar. Of himself.

"Merle!"

At the tightening of his clasp, the new note in his voice, she looked up with a passion of renewed hope.

"There is— there is a way?"

He nodded, and drew her down beside him on the divan. He looked ill and shaken all at once. His tongue felt stiff, as if it would not frame words. It was like pushing her over a precipice, or into a blazing fire. How cruel love was! Hers for Gunnar. His for Merle. Love that counted— it was always a sharp sword in the heart.

"There is a way," his hoarse voice made effort. "It's a way that depends on your love and courage. Those two things alone— love and courage! It's a test of both, a most devilish test, so dangerous that the chances are you will not survive it. And if you don't—"

For a moment he bowed his head, put a hand up to shield his face from her wide eager gaze.

"Dear! It's a test, a trial of your will against that fiend, El Shabur. There are ancient records. It has been done. Only one or two survived the ordeal. The others perished— damned— lost as Gunnar is!"

"No." The low, softly breathed word was more impressive than a defiant blare of trumpets. "He is not lost, for I shall save him. Tell me what to do."

EL SHABUR listened in silence, looked from Merle's white worn face to Dale's maddening smile. He had not expected resistance. He had not thought this lovesick girl would try to win back her lover. The man was at the back of it, of course. Had taught her the formula, no doubt. Should he stoop to take up the gage to battle— with a woman?

"First time your bluff's ever been called, eh, Sheykh of the Mist? Are you meditating one of your famous disappearances? Am I trying you a peg too high? It is, of course, a perilous experiment— this trial of will between you and my little cousin!"

The Arab's white teeth gleamed in St mocking, mirthless smile. His eyes showed two dark flames that flared up hotly at the taunt.

"You cannot save him. He is mine, my creature, my slave."

"Not for long, Sheykh El Shabur," the girl spoke softly.

"For ever," he suavely corrected her. "And you also put yourself in my hands by this foolish test— which is no test!"

Dale stood watching near the door of the Rest-House. Could this be the child he had known so well, this resolute stern little figure, whose stedfast look never wavered from the Arab's face?— who spoke to him with authority on which his evil sneering contempt broke like waves on a rock?

"You think that you— a woman, can withstand me? A vain trifling woman, and one, moreover, who is overburdened by lust for my servant as a frail craft by heavy cargo. I will destroy you with your lover."

"I don't take your gloomy view of the situation," Dale interrupted. He watched the other intently from under drooped eyelids, saw that Merle's fearlessness and his own refusal to be serious were piercing the man's colossal self-esteem, goading him to accept the challenge to his power. El Shabur felt himself a god on earth. In so far as he was master of himself, he was a god! Dale had never met so disciplined and powerful a will. Few could boast so controlled and obedient an intellect. But he was proud, as the fallen Lucifer was proud!

It was the ultimate weakness of all who dabbled in occult powers. They were forced to take themselves with such profound seriousness that in the end the fine balance of sanity was lost.

Dale continued as if they were discussing a trifling matter that began to bore him. His mouth was so dry that he found difficulty in speaking at all. It was like stroking an asp.

"The point is that I have never seen our young friend take this extraordinary semblance of a— a werewolf. My cousin is, as you remark so emphatically, a woman. Not her fault, and all that, of course! But no doubt she was over-sensitive, imaginative, conjured up that peculiar vision of our absent Gunnar by reason of excessive anxiety."

"She saw my disobedient servant," the sheykh's deep voice rang like steel on an anvil, "undergoing punishment. It was no delusion of the senses."

"Ah! Good! Excellent! You mean she was not so weak, after all. That's one up to her, don't you think? I mean, seeing him as he really was. Rather penetrating, if you take me!"

"She saw what she saw, because it was my design that she should. She is no more than a woman because of it."

"Ah, I can't quite agree there." Dale was persuasive, anxious to prove his point politely. "I'll bet she didn't scream or faint. Just trotted home a bit wobbly at the knees, perhaps?"

"She is obstinate, as all women are obstinate." The sheykh's lean hands were hidden by flowing sleeves, to Dale's disgust; but a muscle twitched above the high cheek-bone, and the dark fire of his eyes glowed red.

"Since you desire to sacrifice yourself," the Arab turned to Merle, "Ilbrahaim shall bring you just before sundown to the house."

"Any objections to my coming along?" Dale spoke as if a supper-party were under discussion. "My interest in magic-ceremonial—"

EI Shabur cut in. "You think to save her from me? Ah, do I not know of your learning, your researches, your study of occult mysteries! It will avail you nothing. No other cabalist has dared what I have dared. I— the High Priest of Melek Taos! Power is mine. No man clothed in flesh can stand against me."

He seemed, in the dim low-ceilinged room, to fill the place with wind and darkness and the sound of beating wings. Suddenly he was gone. Like a black cloud he was gone.

Dale looked after him for long tense minutes. "No man clothed in flesh," he quoted reflectively. "And there's quite a lot of clothing in my case, too."

ONCE MORE the grim stone house in the outskirts of the city. The cousins stood before it. Ilbrahaim, who had guided them, put a hand before his face in terror.

"Effendi, I go! This is an evil place." The whites of his eyes glinted between outspread fingers. "An abode of the shaitans!"

He turned, scuttled under a low archway. They heard the agitated clap-clap of his heelless slippers on hard-baked earth. Then silence closed round about them. They stood in the warm glow of approaching sunset.

Merle looked at the western sky and the great globe that was remorselessly bringing day to a close. Dale studied her grave, set face. He hoped against hope that she might even now turn back. Her eyes were on the round red sun as it sank.

He too stared as if hypnotized. If he could hold it— stop its slow fatal moving on…on.… It was drawing Merle's life with it. It was vanishing into darkness and night. Merle too would vanish into darkness…into awful night.…

She turned and smiled at him. The glory of the sky touched her pale face with fire. Her eyes shone solemn and clear as altar lamps. He gave one last glance at the lovely earth and sky and glorious indifferent sun, then opened the low door for Merle to pass.

Gunnar, in the upper room, stood by the narrow slit of his solitary window, more gaunt, more shadowy than yesterday. He saw Merle, rushed across to her, pushed her violently back across the threshold.

"I will not have it! This monstrous sacrifice! Take her away— at once. Go! I refuse it. Take her away!"

He thrust her back into Dale's arms, tried to close the door in their faces. Once more a faint hope cf rescuing Merle at the eleventh hour rose in Dale's mind. But the door was flung wide. El Shabur confronted them, led them into the room, imperiously motioned Gunnar aside.

"Ya! Now is it too late to turn back. My hour is come. My power is upon me. Let Melek Taos claim his own!"

Merle went over to Gunnar, took his hand in hers, looked up into his gray face with the same look of shining inner exaltation Dale had seen as they lingered at the outer door.

"Yes, it is too late now to turn back," she affirmed. "For this last time you must endure your agony. The last time, Gunnar— my beloved. It shall swiftly pass to me. Can I not bear for a brief moment what you have borne so long? Through my soul and body this devil that possesses you shall pass to El Shabur, who created it. Endure for my sake, as I for yours."

"No! No! You cannot guess the agony— the torture—"

Dale sprang forward at her gesture, and drew about them a circle with oil poured from a long-necked phial. Instantly the two were shut within a barrier of fire, blue as wood-hyacinths, that rose in curving, swaying, lovely pillars to the ceiling, transforming the gray salt mud to a night-sky lit with stars.

"*Ya gomâny*! O mine enemy!" El Shabur's deep voice held sudden anguish. "Is it thou? Through all the years thy coming has been known to me, yet till now I knew thee not. Who taught thee such power as this?"

He strode to the fiery circle, put out a hand, drew it back scorched and blackened to the bone. He turned in savage menace. Dale's hand flashed, poured oil in a swift practised fling about El Shabur's feet and touched it to leaping flame.

Within this second ring the Arab stood upright. His voice boomed out like a great metal gong.

"Melek Taos! Melek Taos! Have I not served thee truly? Give aid— give aid! Ruler of Wind and Stars and Fire! I am held in chains!"

Dale breathed in suffocating gasps, He was cold to the marrow of his bones. He lost all sense of time— of space. He was hanging somewhere in the vast gulf of eternity. Hell battled for dominion in earth and sea and sky.

"To me, Abeor! Aberer! Chavajoth! Aid— give aid!" Again the great voice called upon his demon-gods.

A sudden shock made the room quiver. Dale saw that the fires grew pale. "Was I too soon? Too soon?" he asked himself in agony. "If the oil burns out before sundown—"

There was a crash. On every hand the solid ancient walls were riven. Up— up leaped the blue fiery pillars.

A shout of awful appeal. "Melek Taos! Master! Give aid!"

With almost blinded eyes, Dale saw Gunnar drop at Merle's feet, saw in his stead a wolf-shape crouching, saw her stoop to it, kneel, kiss the great beast between the eyes, heard her clear, steady voice repeat the words of power, saw the flames sink and leap again.

The issue was joined. Now! Now! God or Demon! The Arab, devil-possessed, calling on his gods. Merle, fearless before the onrush of his malice. Hate, cruel as the grave. Love, stronger than death.

Dale's breath tore him. Cold! Cold! Cold to the blood in his veins! God! it was upon her!

Gunnar stood in his own body, staring with wild eyes at the beast which brushed against his knee. He collapsed beside it, blind and deaf to further agony.

And still El Shabur's will was undefeated. Still beside the unconscious Gunnar stood a wolf, its head flung up, its yellow lambent eyes fixed, remote, suffering.

Again Dale felt himself a tiny point of conscious life swung in the womb of time. Again the forces that bear up the earth, sun, moon, and stars were caught in chaos and destruction. Again he heard the roar of fire and flood and winds that drive the seas before them. Through all the tumult there rang a voice,

rallying hell's legions, waking old dark gods, calling from planet to planet, from star to star, calling for aid!

Dale knew himself on earth again. Stillness was about him. In a dim and dusty room he saw Merle and Gunnar, handfast, looking into each other's eyes. About their feet a little trail of fire ran— blue as a border of gentian.

Another circle showed, its fires dead, black ash upon the dusty ground. Across it sprawled a body, its burnoose charred and smoldering. Servant of Melek Taos. Victim of his own dark spells. El Shabur destroyed by the demon that had tormented Gunnar. Driven forth, homeless, it returned to him who had created it.

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17: *Under a Far Western Verandah*: In the Land of Dreadful Night

John Arthur Barry

1851-1911

The Australasian Pastoralists' Review: 15 Feb 1897

The worst recorded dought in Australian history ran from 1895 to about 1903. It mostly affected New South Wales and Queensland.

FOR A LONG TIME the silence was only broken by the hum of the spiteful mosquitoes and the subdued anathemas of their four victims, who smoked prodigiously, not for pleasure, but in sheer self-defence. The four men sat or lounged in cane and canvas chairs. The silent house behind them lay in deep shadow. In front stretched an arid patch of garden, shrub-dotted, down towards the white palings that separated it from the thick mass of scrub running up to them on every side. Year in, year out, these four sat o'nights— the hot sweating nights of summer— until their very souls stagnated in the apotheosis of monotony. Night after night they had told the same old stories, cracked the same old jokes (jokes become dismal and worn by repetition), entered on the same old arguments, swapped the same old lies about impossible dogs and wondrous horses, hopelessly discussed the weather, stale items of fortnight-old news, dimly remembered days "down below."

" Damn the mosquitoes!"

"Well, they're not as bad as they were last year this time. I remember when we were mustering the big paddock you couldn t see the sheep for 'em."

"May be, but they bite harder this year a lot."

"Wonder when we're going to have some rain? Lord, isn't this awful? No use turning in; can't sleep if one does. No good havin' a bath— water's nearly boilin' in the pipes. What's the glass?"

"Hundred-and-five, is it ? Not bad for 11 o'clock at night."

"I remember one year it kept at 112 degrees right through the night on this very verandah. There's a lot of flyin' ants about. Sign of rain, eh?"

"Sign of your grandmother! You'll get no rain in these parts till you hear the frogs croaking and see the crabs beginning to walk about. Damn all insects!" The speaker slaps his hands vigorously, and goes to a water-bag, one of several hanging between the verandah posts. The rest unanimously call to him to bring them a drink.

"Oh, hang it, you fellows, don't be so lazy; get up and get your own drinks. Who was your servant last year?" Brings drinks around all the same in tin mugs, growling the while.

"What d' ye say if we light the lamps inside, and try to read?"

"What's the use. There's nothing new. We've got through all the books and papers. Besides, the cursed ants and things'd put the lamps out in no time. Why, the other night, y' know, we had to get brooms and sweep 'em away."

A long silence, broken at last by a solitary portentous croak on the well-plate of the verandah.

"By jove, there's your old frog! Flood now, I s'pose. Wonder where he is. Let's look." The four strike matches, and eventually discover a great green frog coiled up under the shingles. He stares at them out of expressionless black eyes, and crawls slowly down and plunges into a water-bag.

"That's the rain he's after. Croaked because he was thirsty, poor beggar. Oh! leave him alone. Frogs clear the water y' know— eat microbes and bacilli and all those sort of things. No harm in 'em."

"Hello, look out there! Jump on 'em! Squash 'em,— quick! What whoppers! Another sign of rain, I suppose." (The four hop about hurriedly, and "squash" half-a-dozen big centipedes that have wriggled on to the verandah from some crevices in the slabs). "Good job we struck those matches or we'd ha' missed the beggars, and they might ha' crept up our trousers. I remember two years ago a lot came out just in the same way. You chaps were out on the run, and I killed 'em with a chair-cushion. The marks are on it yet. Oh ! damn these mosquitos! Gettin' a bit cloudy to the southward there, isn't it?"

A long silence. The moon rises, turning the brigalows to frosted silver with her light that, however, has no power to cool the hot air. Somebody begins a long story about a horse, starting from its colthood, and following its biography right through to old age and eventual recognition when fallen dead in a Sydney street. The rest doze and slap the mosquitoes, and, at intervals, fill their pipes and visit the water-bags. They have heard the story a dozen times before. But no matter! If Brown likes to go on telling it, why shouldn't he ? Have they not also their old stories, told and retold a dozen times. And, sure enough, presently Johnson, shaking himself, begins to maunder through that old, old yarn about the cock-horned bullock, and the way he charged him (Johnson) in the Ridge paddock, and of the terribly narrow escape of both horse and rider by reason of a lot of rabbits running through the old warrior's fore legs, and tripping him up so that he fell head over heels, whilst Johnson galloped off.

"Oh," remarks someone wearily, "you're not telling it the same way as you always do."

Johnson snorts indignantly, but takes no other notice, resuming in an even monotone, varied only by an oath thrown now and again to the mosquitoes, who, as the night wears on, seem to get more bloodthirsty.

Presently a wind arises— a hot, stifling wind, blowing as if off many furnaces, and bringing with it sand and twigs, and leaves which litter the verandah, whilst even the stern dark greenery of the bushes seems to shrivel

visibly before it. It is hotter than ever. The moon glares red and ominous through the great clouds of sand with which the upper airs are filled. Midnight, and the glass at 112 degrees!

By-and-bye the wind drops and the mosquitoes return unerringly and resume their interrupted feast on faces, hands, and ankles. "Damn!" exclaims someone presently, "I can't stand this! I'm sick of smoking! Must get under the nets and see about a little sleep."

The others laugh cheerlessly as he retires, and refill their pipes, although their tongues are sore with the acrid fumes and their throats so parched that the waterbags are in almost incessant demand. In the paddock a mob of horses can be heard galloping furiously, as the mosquitos torment them; for the same reason the dogs in the kennels whine and moan pitifully. A little bird comes and perches on an oleander bush and cries in a high-pitched note— "*Sweet little creature, pretty-sweet-little-creature*."

"He don't care about the mosquitoes," remarks a man, enviously. "Doesn't seem to feel the heat either."

Presently a couple start a sleepy discussion as to whether sheep lamb better in big paddocks, in big mobs, or in small paddocks in small ones. The thing has been threshed out for years in the same spot on similar nights, and there is no interest left on the dry bones of the discussion, in the midst of which the man who went to bed returns dripping sweat at every pore.

"Pouf! " says he, "the sheets are hot. I laid in my skin. That was hotter still. I was wet through in two minutes, and the net was stifling me. I might have known it was of no use. Damn such a country."

"Damn such a country," agree the rest in chorus, as they wipe their wet faces in sympathy.

A horrid deadly smell of decay and corruption comes along and pervades everything, making the men rise in their chairs and sniff and spit with disgust.

"Sign of rain," remarks one, "when the gidgee stinks like that."

"Rot!" replies another. "Everything's a sign of rain in a blasted hole like this, where rain never falls unless by accident. A curse is on it— the curse of an eaten-out land, of starving and perished stock, witnesses of a monumental greed, whose whitened bones lie thick all over it."

"Gammon," replies another, as the speaker sinks back exhausted. "The country's all right. Couldn't get better country in the colony if it only had the rain. Look at that mountain paddock, for instance."

"With 5,000 dead sheep in it this last month," retorts the first speaker. "I wouldn't own the darned place if you'd make me a present of it. How do they expect a man, I wonder, to manage a cursed desert relieved by dust-storms? If you searched all over the shop you'd not find as much grass as'd clean your pipe."

"Oh, shut up growling, do!" says another, as he struggles out into the moonlight and looks up at the cloudless sky.

"There's a halo round her," he remarks, meaning the moon; "some people say that's a sign of rain."

"Sign of—!" replies a voice irritably. "I never saw such a fellow; always lookin' for signs. How'd you like to be in the 'Australia' bar, now, with a deep whisky-squash, iced, before you, eh? Signs wouldn't trouble you much then, I bet."

Four big audible sighs float out on the hot air, and a long silence ensues, broken only by the ceaseless buzz of mosquitoes. A clock inside strikes two. But the night, or rather morning, grows no cooler. High overhead a great flapping of many wings fills the air as across the face of the moon passes a long black wedge-shaped mass.

"Wild ducks!" murmurs somebody, "More sense than we've got, leavin' the blasted country."

"*Sweet-pretty-little-creature! Sweet, sweet, sweet*," chatters the "shepherd's companion" with cheerful egoism.*

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The "willie wagtail", a small black bird with white chest and distinctive long narrow tailfeathers.

"Oh, shut up, do, you little fool, and go to sleep," says an exasperated man. But the bird takes no notice. The big frog climbs out of the water bag, and sitting on its edge, seems to be gravely scrutinising the party. No one is smoking now. They are drowsy, and the mosquitoes are having an undisturbed fill. Presently the frog, overbalancing, falls with a heavy thump on to the erandah, and lies there. From amidst some withered weeds a snake protrudes his head and fixes his eyes upon the frog, who retreats under an empty chair. Gradually the snake draws himself coil by coil on to the verandah. He is six feet long, of a yellowish brown colour, and he has an early breakfast well in hand. A swift silent rush, a stifled croak, and the frog disappears through the extended jaws.

"Snake!" shouts a man who has been watching the whole performance, as he brings his chair down on the reptile's back, breaking both with the blow. The others rise heavily and stare at the writhing snake.

"Company can't stand that," says some one, taking up the broken chair, "You'll have to fork out seven-and-sixpence, old man."

"What's that a sign of?" asks another, as the frog is suddenly ejected, and hops away apparently none the worse.

"Why, the break-up of the drought, *a la* daily newspaper, of course," replies a man. "And now, for Heaven's sake, let's try and get an hour's sleep. The glass

has gone down a few degrees. We may get a little rest before the flies come. A —— of a country, aint it?"

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18: The Country Doctor

Don Marquis

1878-1937

The American Magazine March 1935

IT WAS still raining; the water had we, been flung turbulently down out of the sky all day long. And now it was early dusk, an October dusk, and the world outside the Doctor's windows was a chaos of cold, wind-driven rain and lowering gloom and mud, the sticky black mud of northwestern Illinois which clings and clogs and overwhelms. Dr. Stewart peered out at the village street, or as much of it as he could see through the wind-slashed crevices in the murky wall of storm, and drew the heavy shawl tighter about his shoulders, and took another sip of his hot lemonade, and breathed a little prayer that he would not have a call, especially a call out to the Swamp.

He shuddered when he thought of what the Swamp would be like tonight. Green River, which drained the vast tract westward to Rock River and the Mississippi, would be up and roaring and tearing at its low clay banks; and the swamp roads— if you could call them roads at all when the spring and autumn floods were in spate— would be roiled and brawling creeks, themselves, in places, almost rivers. And here and there would be a melancholy twinkle of light, flickering through mists and scrub timber across the bogs and bayous, from some lonely farmhouse perched on a wooded island. For scattered over the district, forty miles or so in length and half as broad, were many farmers; and even when the freshets left them only a third or a quarter of the crops they had planted, they still could live, for the land was incredibly rich.

Dr. Stewart knew the Swamp and its people, none better; for day and night, winter, spring, and fall, sick or well, he had had a good many years of it.

"Always ague, malaria, and influenza," he murmured. And then, with grim self irony, "I've dumped enough quinine into that hole, myself, to pave a solid road from Dante's frozen hell to Timbuctoo, and still it shakes, shivers, and shakes."

HE SHIVERED, himself, for he had the flu, and put another lump of soft coal on the grate fire. His office was in the front part of his residence on the main street, and presently he noticed a bedraggled object bogged down in a lake of mud across the way, and chuckled. A feeble glimmer from the post-office windows illumined its dejected contours.

"Young Dr. Hastings' horseless carriage," grinned Dr. Stewart to himself.

People still called them "horseless carriages" in the late nineties of the last century.

"I can see how Hastings might break his arm cranking the damned thing," he mused, ''but how the deuce did he manage to break his leg? He's got no right to break his leg and leave all the work on Jones and me... and Jones just a kid out of college last spring, and me sick, and the whole damned country down with flu and pneumonia!" He snorted indignantly. "Horseless carriage! Hell!' he said.

Then he reflected, "They'll be all right when there are some decent roads for them to run on."

For he was not against progress, far from it. He has seen too much of it not to believe in its continuity. Born in Ohio the same year the British burned the White House in Washington, he had seen the country grow up, and opined that it had a healthy constitution. Ohio had been "out West" when he was a lad; he was now past eighty, and Illinois had long been "an old settled country." Nearer sixty than fifty years of practice of medicine lay between his student days and this present evening.

He shook himself, as if to shake off the sense of the gloom outside and something of the dread that had settled on his spirits— the dread of a call, in his present condition.

"I haven't got time to be sick!' he said. "'People need me."

For he was a country doctor, and he did not know what it was to spare himself. He had been going hard all last winter and spring— battling through prairie blizzards, battling through flooded spring swamps, to some remote house of suffering, battling all night to save a life, and reaching home again in the dawn, to gulp down a pot of boiling coffee and take up the new day's work without an hour of sleep. His hands and feet had been frozen again last winter, but no frost had reached the stout old heart within. But now, he faced a new winter— and before it was fairly begun, here he was, sick!

He hadn't time to be sick, he told himself again, rebelliously. So many people needed him! There were the Simpkins children, down with the measles, for instance; and nobody knew the Simpkins constitution, or how to bring out measles on the reluctant Simpkins hide, as well as he did.

AND there were the Rays, and the Tuckers, and the Prices and the Smiths— sickness in all these families, and what did the two young doctors, Hastings and Jones, know about them? Good doctors, no doubt; fine, conscientious boys— but boys. They had never fought through more than half a century of chill midnights hand to hand with death. And these were his people that were sick, in the village, on the prairie farms round about, out in the Swamp—his people, and they needed him, and what right did he have to be nursing himself here at home? It wasn't natural. Nobody ever heard him say anything about loving these people. Nor did they talk about loving him. Nor did anybody ever hear the word "'service," so popular since, from his lips. The nearest thing to an

expression of affection on either side would be something like this: "Don't you love to rile Old Doc Stewart, just to hear him cuss?'' But there was a pretty good understanding between the Doctor and his people. He had helped bring more than one generation of them into the world; and helped to make a little easier the way out of it for some of their fathers and grandfathers. They took him as naturally as they did sunlight and rain and the change of seasons, and, some of them, as thoughtlessly. He was the last man they paid, after settling with the grocers, the implement dealers, and for the interest on the mortgage...

A MUD-SPLATTERED man on a mud-splattered horse wallowed through the mire, and came to a stop in front of his house. A second later the man hammered on the outside door.

"It's come!" groaned Dr. Stewart.

He had known it would, had "felt it in his bones."' He let the man in himself, for his housekeeper was nursing a case of pneumonia in the village, and, save for her, he lived alone. He was a childless widower.

He opened the door, and one of his own Swamp Angels, as he called them, stood dripping mud and water in the entry way.

"Jason Tucker, isn't it?' said the Doctor, peering at him.

"Uh-huh," said Tucker. 'Howdy, Doc?'' A manner of apology, as well as mud and water, oozed from his disheveled wetness.

There was an instant's silence, while the two regarded each other by the gleam of the kerosene lamp in the narrow hallway; and the Doctor read his doom in Tucker's earnestness and anxiety.

"Ts it Myra, Jase?"

"Uh-huh; her time's come,' said Tucker.

"Yes; it would be about now," nodded the Doctor reflectively.

"First baby, too,'' said Tucker, twisting his drenched cap in his nervous fingers, till a little rivulet of water was squeezed from it and ran down to the floor. He gulped, and added, ''She was an old maid when we was married. And she's got this here la grippe on top of everything else, Doctor. What I'm scared of is it turnin' into pneumonia, if it ain't turned already."

Then, with a quick look at the Doctor, "You're sick, yourself, Doc?"'

"Not so sprightly, Jase," admitted Dr. Stewart.

There was another moment's silence. Then Tucker cleared his throat, and murmured, "Doc Hastings, he's got a busted leg. His shin bone. 'Twixt his ankle and knee. It's in a splint."

He gulped again, and added anxiously, "I seen it myself, Doc—his leg's really broke."

"Of course,'' murmured Dr. Stewart.

After another moment, Tucker said, "And Doc Jones, he's out on the Swamp somewheres himself, and I can't get into touch with him." He paused, and drew a long breath. "It's a turrible imposition to come to you, Doc, and you sick like you be."

The thought took shape in the Doctor's mind, though he did not utter the words: "It's more than an imposition; it's probably my death."

For he was running a temperature, and he was weak; it meant, almost certainly, pneumonia. And then there was that pain in the cardiac region, which, he had been telling himself, was only pseudo angina pectoris. Well, pseudo or the real thing, it didn't make much difference at his age; the fact was that the heart had been strained and enlarged, last winter. Oh, damn it! He didn't have time for all this self-diagnosis!

These were the thoughts that ran through his mind. But what he said was, "I'll go, Jase."

"Thanks, Doc; I knowed you would," said Tucker. "How you goin'?"

"Come in,' said Dr. Stewart. He scribbled on a prescription pad. "Take that over to the drug store and get it filled. Get back home as quick as you can with it, and give her the dose that will be marked on the bottle.'"' Then he answered the other's question. "Buggy," he said.

"Green River's up and a-rarin' tonight," said Tucker. 'Don't trust the wooden bridge, Doc—take the iron one. It's a mile further, but it's safer."

"I've seen it up and a-rarin' before," said Dr. Stewart grimly.

THE men exchanged a brief glance.

Neither of them said a word of the thought in their minds, but both were thinking of the same thing. Myra Tucker was, in a way, one of Dr. Stewart's artistic creations. She had been a country school-teacher, and, four or five years before, she had been kicked by a horse and fallen down, and the horse had then trodden upon her face, breaking her nose and her cheek bones and her jaws. Dr. Stewart had practically built a new face for her, feeding her through tubes until she got the use of her jaws again, and grafting skin from her arms and legs—and this in a day before skingrafting was generally practiced. Myra had been a pug-nosed girl of no beauty; and it had pleased the Doctor, when he made her face over, to give her a bold, aquiline nose.

This was in the days before hospitals in the country regions, or district nurses; he had done it all himself, without help. Myra had some fine, thin lines, scars, on her face after it was healed. But the new nose made a different person of her. Dr. Stewart always said he was responsible for her improved profile, and, indeed, for her marriage to Jason. That made him responsible for this baby that was trying to get itself born out there in the Swamp in the midst of such difficulties.

He chuckled under his breath at the thought, and murmured to himself, "I wonder if the baby will inherit the Roman nose I gave Myra, or her natural one?"

"What say, Doc?" asked Tucker.

"Nothing—except that Green River was up and a-rarin' the night Myra was born, herself, Jase."

"Yep," said Jase; "'you borned her, Doc, didn't you?" And he disappeared into the gloom.

DR. STEWART put on his overcoat and a raincoat over that, and went to the stable, lighted a lantern, and hitched up his horse.

"Two miles north to the county line,"' he said to himself, ''and then four miles west to the iron bridge.... Here! Damn your hide! How'd you like to get lashed in the face yourself with a wet tail? Huh?"

This was to his horse, the latest of a long line of animals familiar with mud and dust and snow.

"If you don't get over that trick of using your tail like a windmill every time I try to put a crupper under it, Pll... I'll'— he paused to think up a terrifying threat— "I'll sell you to a circus, where they'll make you walk a tight rope and feed you on barbed wire."'

He was always making terrible promises to his horses— that they should go to the treadmill, or be manufactured into bologna sausage, or the like; but as a matter of fact he never even carried a buggy whip. His horses perfectly understood the oratorical nature of his threats. Animals worshiped the man. Stray dogs gravitated to his office in the village with such regularity that he had a theory they must have the house marked, as tramps are said to mark houses. All about the place he had nailed up tin cans to trees and posts, which he kept filled with water for the birds in hot, dry weather.

In spite of his coats and lap robe, the Doctor was wet to the skin before he was well into the area where muddy prairie began to merge with drowned swamp, for the wind, so to speak, showed a diabolical cleverness in taking the rain in hand as if it were a weapon, and slicing and slashing with it, thrusting it like a fencer through and around and past all defenses. Half an hour of this soaking— for the Doctor moved slowly over the wretched roads— and he was sure that his temperature was rising.

He stopped, and thrust his thermometer under his tongue, and read what it registered by the light of his lantern. It was as he had suspected. But he went on; he was bound for Jason Tucker's, and he would get there, he told himself, in-spite of hell and high water. He only hoped that he would arrive before the baby did... or, to put it that way, before the mother... was gone.

Thickest night came on, and his horse had difficulty in keeping to the road. Not that it made much difference. The going when the animal stumbled off it,

with the buggy lurching after, was about as good. The sense of sight was practically blocked off; and the sense of hearing brought to him little more than a mingled tumult of waters, far and near, where creek and rivulet met and swelled the roadside ditches, or dashed against and bit into and tore at the gravel-surfaced road itself.

He had been traveling something more than an hour, perhaps, when the sound of these random streams began to be merged with a steady roaring... Green River was ahead of him and it was, as Jason Tucker had said, "up and a-rarin'."

He paused at the road which branched off to the wooden bridge, and got out of his buggy, leaving the horse standing in the road; he could trust the animal to stay quietly until he returned. He wanted to look at the condition of the wooden bridge, himself. He splashed through the mud to the bank of the stream, holding his lantern ahead of him, and .. .

And paused just in time. There wasn't any wooden bridge! It had gone downstream. A line of willow trees, which he remembered as having marked the entrance to it, was not thirty feet from shore.

He had still cherished a hope that the bridge might be there and might be passable, for it would save him a mile or so of mud and ruts... half a mile to the west, and half a mile back east again, after he had crossed the new iron bridge, to get back into the road which passed the Tucker house.

"Rarin' is right!'' said the Doctor, peering out at the flood, on the surface of which his lantern cast a few dancing yellow gleams.

He looked for only a few seconds, but it was long enough to see a chicken coop, part of a straw stack, and a dead pig with all four feet sticking stiffly up in the air, go whirling by.

When he got to the iron bridge he stopped and got out of his buggy once more, for an examination. The water was boiling and spouting over the roadway on the bridge itself, but the structural ironwork looked solid and unshaken. He walked out a few yards on the bridge, stamping on the planks; there was more than a foot of water swirling over the planks; it lashed him nearly to the knees.

"Drenched from toenails to tonsils," said the Doctor to himself. And then, ironically, "The thing to do with this influenza, or grip, as they call it, Dr. Stewart, is to stay warmly in bed, with your feet dry, and avoid violent exertion of any sort; for the heart at such times is particularly susceptible to strains."

SOMETHING banged against the eastern and upstream ironwork of the bridge as he made this facetious recommendation to himself, and then crashed into splinters. The air in front of him was suddenly filled with broken timbers, and, strangely, out of the débris was propelled a speckled hen, which cried shrilly to earth and heaven and flood that she was wet, and outraged because of

it, and then disappeared into the howling night. The major portion of some farmer's barn had slammed into the bridge, and the impact shook the structure. But still it seemed to withstand the shock.

Nevertheless, it was nothing to drive out upon gayly and blithely, with all that water whirling over it. The Doctor went back to where he had left his horse.

"I'll lead him across,'' he said to himself, and started off, his lantern in one hand and the horse with the lurching buggy following. Although the flood rushing across the bridge was not deep, it was swift, and plucked and sucked at his feet. But he went on, and the horse patiently splashed along behind.

In a few moments he paused. Where the hell was the west end of this bridge, anyhow? He must be nearly across it and...

By the Great Horned Toad of Mithridates! There wasn't any west end to it! Nothing ahead of him but water rushing across his path! He reflected on this phenomenon of a bridge unanchored at one end and still standing sturdily, for a moment, and then the solution came to him. The ironwork was stout enough, but between the west end of the bridge and what had been the shore the flood had cut a new channel, narrow, and he did not know how deep.

He would have to cross that, and it was nothing to be got through in a buggy. Nor, he suspected, on foot, either. He unhitched the horse from the buggy, tied up the traces to the horse collar, shortened the driving reins. He'd have to mount and ride the horse through. The buggy he would leave where it was, and it could either sink or swim.

"Damned old worn-out buggy, anyhow," he said.

He took from the vehicle, not his bag, but a smaller, leather-bound pocket case, with a dozen vials in it: morphine tablets, strychnine tablets, a couple of small bottles of brandy, a hypodermic syringe, a thermometer, digitalis, other things. He put this case in the inner breast pocket of his overcoat. The larger bag would be in the way on horseback. The lantern he left, lighted, on the buggy seat.

HE made the effort and mounted the horse, a sharp pain in the region of the left breast took his breath; for a moment he closed his eyes and hung onto the horse's mane.

"Damned old worn-out Doctor, too, I guess,"' he breathed, when he could breathe again. The pang passed. He pulled himself together on the horse's back, and then said, with a resonance in his voice, "But I'm going through!"

It was a challenge to the night and the storm and the treacherous swamp and the wind and all the physical elements; the challenge of the old man's undaunted spirit. There were people ahead who needed what he could do for them, and he was going through! He had always gone through; for more than fifty years he had been going through.

There was a cramp in his left arm. It kinked and twisted. He knew what that meant. He clung to the animal's mane with his right hand, and dug his muddy heels into its flanks. Tohell with theangina! He didn't have time to stop for that. Probably it was only pseudo-angina, anyhow ... gas pressing up. . . indigestion... it was time, at his age, he was getting a little sense about what he ate and when he ate it... he was strict enough with other people's diet....

The horse wallowed into the cut at the west end of the bridge; and if there was a shore on the other side, neither horse nor rider could see it. The Doctor felt the water about his knees... about his thighs... it was up to his seat... the horse staggered... and then...

A black choking... a frantic, lashing struggle... where was the horse? A strained, instinctive muscular reaction... a blankness... and Dr. Stewart found himself clinging to the roots of a willow tree. The rushing water still pulled at his feet and legs and sodden clothing. But he clung. He strove to pull himself up the slippery bank. But the pain... the pain in his chest... it was terrible... but he held on to his willow root... he lay, half in and half out of the water, and was lifted and threshed about by the insensate, brute flood... but he held on... he was going through! Another agonizing effort, and he felt the flood release his legs. He would lie here in the mud a while and rest... it was soft, the mud was. But that pain in his chest! It was as if it were filled with hot ashes, that shifted back and forth and burned and burned when he tried to breathe. No... hot snuff... more like snuff than ashes... it burned and burned... burned like hot snuff would burn, if you had snuff in your lungs.

Presently he managed to get his hand into his overcoat pocket and draw out the leather-bound little case. The morphine tablets were in the first vial. He took one, and lay back in the mud.

"Must look like a damn' old whitewhiskered muskrat," said Dr. Stewart to himself.

He stared up at the sky. And presently he noted something. The storm had broken. The wind was blowing a section of the heavens clear of clouds. He took another morphine tablet. A corner of the moon was clear of cloud. There was a star near it. There was something he wanted to say to that star... he couldn't quite remember what it was. His chest was a little easier. ..a good deal easier... oh, yes, what he wanted to say was, if you stuck it out long enough the mud got a little warmer after a while... the tension in his chest was relaxed; that was a little warmer, too.... No; that wasn't what he wanted to say to that star! What he wanted to say to it was, "Damned funny you didn't get drowned . neither one of us got drowned... damned funny!"

HE lay back; he felt almost comfortable... although his mouth did taste like he'd swallowed a raw catfish... damned funny animal, the catfish... especially

the variety known as the bullhead. He knew how a bullhead must feel in the nice, warm mud in the summertime, and it wasn't so bad.

Then, suddenly, thought returned, in its complete and crvel lucidity, and he struggled to a sitting posture, and then to his feet! Jase Tucker's wife was sick, and he had to get there! He stumbled up the bank to the road. Something was moving up there, some animal. He stood, staring, trying to penetrate the night. It came nearer to him, and stopped. It was his horse, marvelously escaped from the torrent, which had scrambled free from the river and waited in the road. The animal nuzzled at his elbow, as if in relieved welcome. And his own relief was boundless— thank heaven, he wouldn't have to walk that last half-mile to the Tucker house! He doubted if he could have walked that far.

He could see the lights of the farmhouse, gleaming through the roadside trees, in the distance; and he tried to mount the horse again. But the effort brought another sharp pang in his chest, and he desisted.

HE PUT his right arm over the horse's neck and twined his fingers in the mane. His left arm was... not so good

"If you've got sense enough to let me guide you," he told the animal, "we can still make it."

He had started out to go to Jase Tucker's place, and that was where he was going. And, supporting himself in this fashion, he made it.

"And none too soon,"' said the Doctor, as he pulled himself wearily up the gravel path from the road to the front door. For the screams of a woman in the vital anguish of childbirth stabbed his ears.

He opened the front door without ceremony, and stood within the little living room— the parlor, as they called it. Myra was in the best bedroom just off the parlor. The door was open, and he went in. Jase Tucker sat in a corner. Bending over the bed where the woman lay groaning and writhing was a young man with black circles about his eyes and a two days' stubble of beard on his face; he lurched and stumbled strangely towards Dr. Stewart.

"Hello, Doctor,'' he said. "You got here!"'

"She'll come through, Hastings?'' inquired Dr. Stewart

"If the heart lasts,'' said Hastings.

"Hearts are hell," said Dr. Stewart.

They delivered the baby, and not until then did Dr. Stewart's consciousness fully take note of the fact that this was, indeed, the young Dr. Hastings who was supposed to be back in the village with a broken leg.

"How the hell did you get here, Hastings?"

"On a horse. I told Jase I couldn't come. And then I got worried for fear you couldn't make it... bad night, and everything, you know... and so I came anyhow. I must have passed you on the road somewhere."

"I was in the mud,'' murmured Dr. Stewart. "Quite a while, I guess."

Hastings repeated, almost apologetically, "I thought you might not get here." His leg was giving him great pain. He started to speak again.

But he paused. A change had come over Dr. Stewart's face. Hastings supported him, or Dr. Stewart would have fallen. Hastings eased him to a sofa. Dr. Stewart tried to roll up his sleeve.

"Heart, Hastings," he muttered, as he fumbled with his sleeve. The younger man slid it up for him, and the needle went beneath his skin. But, oh, that choking agony... the hot ashes... the hot snuff... hot sand....

"Hastings!" he said. "' Keep me alive ... for a while. I haven't got time to be sick! I haven't got time to die! Not till this damn' flu epidemic is over.... People need me. Keep me going!"

Pretty soon the drug began to take effect; again came the warmth, the relaxation, something more like easiness. But no strength with it. He seemed to himself to be swaying, drifting, falling, floating; carried on by a full tide. Why, he was in the Green River again, he thought, and it was rushing him on... downstream....

It was not so unpleasant now, either. But he must get through. He mustn't let himself drift like this, pleasant as it was. There were people on the other side, people who needed him. He must make an effort.

Clarity returned for a moment.

"Hastings," he said again, as if he were just now seeing the young man for the first time that night, "you got here, broken leg and all!"

AND then something of resonance returned to his voice; and he sat fully upright on the couch and spoke loudly— spoke as a commanding general might, in brevetting a younger officer for gallantry on a field of battle, with pride and authority and affection in his tones:

"By heavens, boy," he said, "you're a Doctor!"

He sighed a long, deep sigh, and relaxed. He let the tide carry him on downstream. He had time now, time to let himself be carried away. He was leaving his people in good hands.

There was the wail of a baby from the bedroom.

"Another damn' little Swamp Angel squawking," said Old Doc Stewart, and smiled; and, smiling, went on with the rushing waters.

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19: A North Queensland Temperance Story

Ernest Favenc (as by "Delcomyn")
1845-1908
The Bulletin, 21 Jan 1893
Collected in: *My Only Murder and Other Tales*, 1899

The three asterisks in para 2 are in the original story.

ANYONE who knows the Goram River, North Queensland, is aware that it simply swarms with alligators. That is to say, it used to swarm with alligators until Dick Transom began his anti-alligator crusade. Which crusade had its origin in the fact that they had eaten his mother-in-law.

At the crossing of the Goram there is a stone causeway. On the up-stream side the water is shallow; on the down-side there is a bottomless hole which formerly was fairly alive with saurians. Old Rumblepeg, who kept the shanty on the west bank, was partly responsible for this. Men who had sampled his notable *** were constantly walking over the edge of the causeway, and so the alligators were as fat, lively and tame as young kittens.

"They were all fly-blown, poor chaps!" Rumblepeg would cheerfully remark of the victims to misplaced confidence. It was a cheap, safe and thoroughly reliable graveyard; cremation was "a fool to it."

It was, unfortunately, on this side that Transom's mother-in-law fell out of the buggy as he was driving her up to the station on a visit to her daughter. Ill-natured people remarked that the accident happened immediately after she had announced her intention of residing permanently with them. Anyhow, she was in the back seat of the vehicle, engaged in giving her son-in-law valuable advice, when the near hind wheel went over an extra-big boulder in the causeway, and as at the same moment the off-one plumped into a hollow— the poor old lady, with but a small piece of her mind delivered, took a sudden header into the fathomless pool from which, needless to remark, she never emerged.

The worst of it was that as she took the fatal plunge she instinctively clutched at whatever was nearest, which happened to be a leather hand-bag; and, of course, the hand-bag went with her.

Transom might have spared the one, but he had forty horse-power reasons for not losing the other. It contained a cash-box holding many articles of value. In the box was his mother-in-law's will. She was a lady of temper, who quarrelled with her eight children in rotation and duly appointed the reigning favourite of the hour as sole legatee. Now, as just then Transom's wife held that enviable position, it was imperatively necessary to recover the will. Again, the ancient dame, who was old-fashioned in her habits, had some valuable jewellery which she always insisted upon carrying about with her, and there were papers

of Transom's own in the box, without which he might one day find himself in Queer-street.

It will thus be seen that although Transom, in a vainglorious way, made out that he was avenging the death of his mother-in-law, in reality he was searching for the lost handbag in the interior of an alligator.

He went about his task systematically. At the lower end of the hole there was a rocky bar of some breadth, and here he stationed men to watch day and night, keeping fires burning during the dark hours. By this means he anticipated confining the guilty "crocks." to the hole until he was prepared to deal with them. A messenger was despatched to town for dynamite cartridges, and, meanwhile, Transom and one or two other good shots sat on the bank and stalked alligators. It was extremely tantalising. The very first 'gator shot contained a bunch of keys, which Transom at once recognised. Then, although they got many strange relics, nothing more appertaining to the deceased lady came to light.

At length the messenger returned, and the bombardment commenced in downright earnest. The sport was splendid, and as the news of what was going on had brought all the inhabitants, black and white, to the spot, there was an animated scene on the banks of the usually lonely Goram.

Alligator after alligator turned up its toes, or floated, stunned, to the surface, to be dragged ashore and slaughtered ; but although enough dismembered fragments of the late lamented were found to furnish forth a respectable corpse, neither handbag nor cashbox was forthcoming.

The inference then was, that the bag was reposing quietly at the bottom of the hole, and as no more alligators appeared, dead or alive, Transom tried to get the blacks to dive for it, but of this they fought shy. It was just possible that one or two reptiles had escaped, and, if so, how about the diver? Meanwhile, the festering carcases exhaled a pestiferous odour, and old Rumblepeg was coining money. The collected remains of Transom's mother-in-law were decently buried and things were at a standstill.

It was rumoured amongst those gathered about the crossing that there was an alligator of enormous size still dormant in the hole. He was a well-known character, and all were certain that he was not included amongst the slain. One hot evening Transom was up at the shanty moodily thinking about abandoning the search when, whether instigated by the stale fumes of the bar or not, an idea entered his head, which he at once proceeded to put into execution.

A bullock had been killed that night, and he procured a good sized leg of beef.

"I am going to fish for that old alligator," he explained, " and I want to give this joint a good penetrating smell." So he got some of Rumblepeg's rum and soaked the beef therein. Next day he stood it in the sun, and by night you could

have smelt it across Torres Straits against a nor'-west monsoon. Half hopefully he took it down and plunged it into the deep pool. "It is my last card," he thought.

The stars were paling when Transom awoke with his usual "head" on him. However, he arose and proceeded to the river to see the result of his ground-bait. By the time he reached the pool it was broad daylight, but nothing was. visible either on the surface or on the banks.

Disconsolately he was about turning away when there was a movement in the water, and he slunk down and watched. A low sand-spit was in front of his post of observation, and on this the largest alligator he had ever seen slowly and unsteadily dragged itself. Waddling across the wet sand it laid its head on a stranded log and groaned with such fervency that Transom had to groan in sympathy. Then it banged its head against the log in a dismal, reproachful sort of way, as much as to say, "No, I'll never, never touch it again; nothing shall ever tempt me." Presently, with much more moaning, it laid its head on the log in such obvious agony that the sympathetic Transom hadn't the heart to shoot.

After about five minutes spent in repentance and good resolutions, the alligator seemed to be taken worse ; it got up, swayed about on its short legs, gave a mighty heave, and there on the sand lay the long-sought hand-bag.

Rumblepeg's rum had beaten the dynamite.

The sick alligator crawled feebly to the water's edge and slowly disappeared. Transom hastened to secure his property, and returned to his camp, but ever since that eventful morning he has been a cast-iron teetotaller.

20: My Elephant

Harold Mercer

1882-1952

Sydney Mail 29 Nov 1933

EVERYBODY, I expect, has felt a flattered delight when a dog he once petted or fed rushes up to him with tail flogging the atmosphere and other signs of pleased recognition. It stands to reason that when the recognition comes from an elephant the delight must be greater. The greeting, a blare of trumpeting which seemed to frighten even the motor-cars, for one near at hand suddenly started off and showed a tendency to dash on to the pavement, and a trunk agitatedly swaying in my direction, were rather startling.

'Mustapha *knows* you, mister; you must have fed 'im some time,' said the attendant who, for some purpose, probably advertisement, was leading the huge animal through the streets.

A recollection flashed into my mind. Matilda and I had decided to take some small relations to see a circus that was making a pause in our suburban area on its way either to or from the city. On the way through the animal tent little Claude had dropped a bag containing some delightful confection purchased on the way; as I picked it up a grey trunk swooped. No doubt the elephant did not mean to be impolite; it imagined that I was intending to make it an offering. When I realised what was happening there was a wail from little Claude, checked by astonishment as he watched his confection, bag and all, being crunched with obvious relish in the mouth of the big animal.

The maker of that confection would have been complimented at its reception. It so tickled the palate of the elephant that, as he swallowed it, he gave a trumpet of delight; the other elephants made it a chorus, apparently rejoicing with him. All the animals in the menagerie, deluded with the idea that it was feeding-time, sprang, to life and sound, with full-throated roars, grunts, and neighs. Never was there such a tumult of applause for a mere confection. As Mustapha's trunk extended pleadingly for more Matilda turned round sharply, naturally startled, as was everybody in the tent, by the uproar.

'What on earth have you been doing, Percy?' she demanded, as if she suspected me of sticking a pin into the elephant.

That the memory of that gift, quite unintended, should have remained with the elephant was pleasing; the keeper's words and the recollection overcame my first shock of fear. I have always been fond of animals, anyway; and it is not every man who is recognised as an old friend by an elephant. As I patted its trunk and, later, fed it with apples from an adjacent shop, whilst a rather awed crowd, quickly gathered, looked on, I felt myself something of a public character.

'An elephant never forgets,' remarked the attendant. I had read that somewhere.

ALTHOUGH I had noticed that the attendant had some difficulty in getting the animal to move on its way as I departed on mine, I fancied the incident was closed until, as I reached a street corner, I heard a sudden sharp trumpeting. As I turned I saw the elephant coming along the street at a swift run, ears flapping and trunk extended, trumpeting what were apparently appeals to me to wait and take it with me.

It was absurd. It was also rather alarming. The prospect of having an elephant following you around the street is not an agreeable one, however fond you may be of animals. I decided that the best course was to dodge out of the sight of the animal. Having dodged round the corner, I even forgot my dignity and broke into a run.

A loud trumpet, however, told me that the elephant had reached the corner and had seen me. Something like desperation seized me. There was a hotel on the corner I had just reached; turning into the next street, out of sight, I made a bolt through the swing doors.

I heaved a sigh of relief as I ordered my drink. It seemed that I had safely eluded the fatuously fond animal, and I did not mind the curious glances of the other customers in the bar, who probably thought that a flight from the police explained my rather precipitate entrance.

A YELL from some of the customers startled me. I suppose that an elephant's trunk, seemingly unattached, swaying in the air between swing doors must have been alarming even to people who were quite sober; but it was when a joyful trumpet announced that Mustapha had located me, and Mustapha, with some difficulty and, by the cracklings of wood and glass, apparently carrying some of the hotel fixings with him, began to enter the bar that the real scare started.

I have never seen a crowded bar clear so quickly. I cleared myself, through a far door, ignoring the rather pathetic appeals of Mustapha for me to stay with him. The man I collided with as I emerged from the hotel was the attendant, panting after his run and, I should say, slightly annoyed.

'Here,' he said, 'you can't go about stealing elephants.'

'I don't,' I retorted! 'Your elephant is in the bar there. Steal elephants! Why, at home we've got canaries, a pet Pom, and two cats—'

He didn't wait to hear more; he was probably anxious about the sounds of breaking glass, mingled with trumpetings, that came from inside the bar. It is hard for an elephant to get in through swing doors, but much harder for it to get out. For my own part I thought it best to go whilst the going was good.

I FELT that my adventure, which had been rather upsetting, was something to laugh at as, later, I boarded a tram. That attendant should have had more sense than to lead the animal, after he had recovered it, along tram routes where it was likely to see again a man for whom it had taken such a violent fancy.

Mustapha announced that it had seen me by another of those joyful trumpets I was beginning to dread. Ignoring the frantic commands of its keeper, it broke into a gallop to catch the tram, which had passed it, carrying me. The tram passengers rose to their feet in a mass to stare at the unusual sight of an elephant running beside a tram just as a dog does when its master is on board. Motorists and cyclists dived into the kerb or speeded to get out of the path of the careering beast.

If the tram driver had only had the sense to keep going we might have shaken off the animal; but it caught us at every stop, and once put its trunk appealingly into the compartment where I was seated. What was I to do? I have had no experience in the management of elephants.

I said, very sternly, 'Go home, sir!'

But it had no effect. My dread was about what would happen when the journey ended and the elephant claimed me. The way out presented itself when I saw Travers's car held up at a street intersection waiting for the tram to pass. Just as the tram started I dropped off on the blind side and, dashing over to Travers, begged for a lift home.

THE elephant, which this time had only just caught the tram as it restarted, followed it for a few yards and then checked, having sensed my absence. It turned as it halted, in a bewildered way, and it caught sight of us just as Travers's car crossed the street, I knew by that joyful trumpet that the chase was on again. It was. As we turned into a straight stretch I saw Mustapha in full pursuit.

'Speed up, Travers,' I said. 'I'm being chased by an elephant.'

'Chased by an elephant!' he exclaimed, as if he thought I had suddenly gone mad.

The animal being on the remote side of the tram, he had not seen it; but as he looked round to see what I was looking at the car gave a jolt which indicated the shock he had received.

'Did you ever stick a pin in it?' he asked, as he got the car steady and accelerated. 'They say an elephant never forgets.'

I was beginning to get a little sick of that. I explained the story hurriedly.

THE sensation that animal made as it ran through the streets was fully reported in the papers; there is no need to deal with it. I do not know how fast

an elephant is supposed to travel, but I do know that Travers, who is proud of his car, was unable to throw off the pursuit. There might have been a different tale if it had not been for the traffic policemen who held us up at intersections. It might be said, however, that the toll collectors on the bridge made no attempt to collect toll from the elephant. Looking round, in fact, I noticed what seemed to me to be a bad dereliction of duty on their part. The way they behaved, it did not seem that they had any interest in the collection of tolls at all.

When, some way on, the elephant being temporarily out of sight, I changed into Tolhurst's car, it seemed that a good method of escape had suggested itself. The elephant, when it caught up, would follow Travers's car until it found I wasn't in it. Anyway, I had a long-standing appointment to have dinner with Tolhurst, who, with the friends he had in his car, also going to dinner, laughed heartily when I told the story of the day's events.

I MERELY told Matilda on the 'phone that Tolhurst had asked me to dinner. I did not mention the elephant. Matilda has a rather disagreeable way of treating some of the stories I tell her; I did not like to try her with an elephant.

The dinner was a fine one; you've got to hand it to Tolhurst as a host. Mrs. Tolhurst enjoyed hearing about my adventures, just as the others had done, and with the wireless on, and sparkling conversation, the evening had become very pleasant when the maid entered suddenly.

She seemed upset, and she divided her attention between myself and Jones, the other guest.

'Did either of you gentleman have an elephant?' she asked. 'It's in the garden.'

To say that we were startled was putting it mildly, and Tolhurst himself, who is very proud of his garden, was something more than startled when, peeping cautiously through the blinds, we saw what the elephant was doing to it.

'If that elephant finds I am in the house he will want to come inside,' I said. 'I'd better go; when he finds I am not here he might be quiet. If I stay he might smell me. You could ring up the circus, and they'll take it away in no time. In the meantime, can I get away through the back entrance?'

'The back entrance is at the front,' said Tolhurst. I have always had my doubts about his assertion that there is not a drop of Irish blood in his veins.

THE Tolhursts did not want to run any risk of the elephant wanting to enter the house. Tolhurst got out his car and we drove past the garden swiftly into the street. But I suppose Mustapha must have associated the noise of a motor-car with his last sight of me, for again he gave one of those joyful trumpets which had become a nightmare to me. We got put with a good start, however,

although as a precaution— and to finish the bottle of whisky Tolhurst had slipped into his hip-pocket— we made a long detour before going to my home.

When I woke up in the morning my impression was, naturally, that I had been dreaming. If I had been drinking heavily I might have had another impression. If any animal had followed me, it must have been a dog and some fantastic mental derangement had made me turn it into an elephant. I was sleepily deciding that I'd have to see a doctor when Matilda, dressing -gowned, arrived in a manner that woke me up properly.

'I'd like to know, Percy, what you'll be doing next,' she said. 'What are you going to do with this dreadful animal you brought home last night?'

'I brought home an animal?' I said, startled. 'I didn't—'

'Unless you were too drunk to remember,' said Matilda, 'you must know you brought it home. I heard it in the garden all night, and there it is now.'

'Oh, it will make a good watchdog,' I said, still thinking, of the dog theory. I wasn't going to admit that I had been drunk when, most certainly, I wasn't.

'Watchdog!' Matilda virtually howled it. 'Do you mean to say that an elephant can be used as a watchdog?'

Elephant! My heart turned stone cold.

'You'll get rid of it without a moment's delay. All the neighbours have rung up to complain; it's made a wreck of the garden; my poor little Fido is almost in convulsions from barking at it through the window; and there's no milk for breakfast.'

'No milk for breakfast?' I exclaimed. It seemed an anti-climax to me, anyway.

'There's no milk for breakfast,' she repeated. 'Mary tells me that she saw the milkman coming up the side path, and then he saw the elephant. He dropped his can and ran, jumped into his car, and went off at full speed. I expect he had been drinking, too,' she added nastily. 'The milk's sinking into the lawn, and when it turns sour it'll smell most abominably.'

I TRIED to explain matters to Matilda as I got into a few clothes and went down to ring up the circus. Her attitude, however, was most disagreeable.

Someone had left the front door open; the tinkle of the telephone must have roused the elephant's curiosity. When he saw me he again lifted up his voice in joy and came at a run. It did not matter to Mustapha that the hall was a restricted area; he came right through it, carrying the telephone, potted palms, and a hallstand with him. I went through it, too, trying to get away, but it was hopeless. When the elephant joined me in the kitchen garden, where there were nice peas and other things for it to eat, it was strangely ornamented with hats and coats, and had the telephone over its head as if it was in training as a telephonist. It was pleased to be with me, and I decided that the only thing was to stay with it until the circus people arrived.

'This stealing elephants ain't no good; you'll have to pay for it,' were the circus man's first words. It was adding insult to injury.

WORSE was to happen, however, when Mustapha refused to budge without me and I had to walk beside it all the way, while people came to their windows to look at me as if I was part of the circus. I was a weary man by the time I had seen iron shackles put on the animal which had developed such a fancy for me.

I don't know how much the episode is going to cost; that hasn't been settled yet. There are all sorts of damages someone will have to pay. Apart from money, however, it has cost me a lot in peace of mind.

Matilda has a new one against me.

'What can you expect of a man who brings home elephants?' she inquires when she wants to be particularly acrimonious.

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21: The Tin Box

Herbert Keen

fl 1894-6

The Idler, April 1896

This obscure English author's best known story, one of six in a series called "The Chronicles of Elvira House". It was reprinted in a vast anthology entitled Victorian Tales of Mystery and Detection*, 1992. Nothing can be found out about him.*

"IF I WERE you, Perkins," said Mr. Booth one evening in the smoking-room, "I should take care what I was about with that little widow."

"You mean Mrs. Williams?" I enquired.

"Oh! Is that her name?" remarked my friend, carelessly, refilling his pipe with deliberation.

"Why, you know it is!" I returned, rather sharply.

"I have a bad memory for names," said Mr. Booth, with a slight shrug; "you seem to be getting quite intimate."

"I'm decently civil to her," I replied, significantly.

"And I have avoided her? Yes; that's quite true," said Mr. Booth, smiling. "Perhaps I instinctively share Mr. Weller senior's antipathy to widows. Anyhow, I don't like the face of this one."

I was astonished and rather disturbed at this. I had great confidence in my friend's judgement, but when I recalled to mind the refined and delicate features, the soft trustful brown eyes, the gentle voice, and the timid shrinking manner of the unfortunate lady he referred to, I was filled with indignation at his cynical attitude. Mrs. Williams had resided at Elvira House for about a week or ten days, with her only child, a pretty little girl of five years old, and, owing to the accident of being placed next to her at the dinner-table, I had struck up an acquaintance with her. But she was neither remarkably good-looking nor particularly young, and my predilection was rather due to sympathy and good-nature than to admiration for her personal charms. Besides, she was apparently the last person to court attention, for her whole thoughts seemed centred upon her child, whom she evidently adored.

"I fancy she manœuvred a little to get put next to you at table," said Mr. Booth, watching me quietly.

"You wouldn't say that if you knew her better," I retorted, hotly.

"You think it was an accident? Well, perhaps!" said my companion, in his enigmatical way.

"I'm sure of it," I said, emphatically. "Mrs. Nix arranged it."

"All right, old fellow. It's no concern of mine," said Mr. Booth, good-humouredly. "Only I shouldn't lend her any more money if I were you."

"How do you know I have done so?" I enquired, reddening.

"You asked me to change you a cheque the other day. It is a mere guess, but putting two and two together—"

"You happen to be right for once," I interrupted, with some vexation. "I lent her ten pounds, till her dividends fall due on Tuesday next. I suppose you are going to suggest that the money is lost?"

"It depends upon her circumstances," he replied, nodding his head.

"Well, do you know anything about her? Come, Booth! Out with it!" I exclaimed, irritably.

"I? How should I?" said he, raising his eyebrows. "I've never seen her before in my life."

"She is the widow of a Mr. John Williams, who died about two years ago. He lived at Gateshead, and was a wholesale tobacconist. He left everything to her by his will," I explained, to show that I was not wholly ignorant of the lady's affairs.

"How do you know?" enquired Mr. Booth.

"She showed me a probate," I replied. "I didn't ask her, but when she requested me to accommodate her with that trifle of money, she volunteered to explain how she was situated."

"I see," observed Mr. Booth, apparently impressed.

"Unfortunately the poor lady was left very badly off," I went on, mollified by the change in my friend's manner, which was now more sympathetic, "and that is what now brings her up to town. She has a fixed belief that her husband, who seems to have been somewhat eccentric in his later days, deposited some money or securities at some bank in London or elsewhere."

"Has she any clue?" enquired Mr. Booth, manifestly interested.

"Not that I know of. She is very reticent," I replied.

"She hasn't asked your assistance then?" said my friend.

"No. Of course I should be pleased to help if I could," I said, with a touch of defiance in my tone.

Mr. Booth did not gainsay me this time; either he was tired of the subject or else he perceived that I rather resented his interference. At all events he relapsed into one of those silent moods in which he was wont to indulge, and sat puffing at his pipe with his eyes fixed on the fire for the remainder of the evening, without joining in the general conversation which presently ensued as other guests strolled in.

I was annoyed with him because I thought that his opinion of poor little Mrs. Williams was unreasonably prejudiced and very unjust; nevertheless, his warning was not quite thrown away upon me, for I determined to observe her with closer attention. The only result of this, however, was to convince me more firmly than ever of her absolute good faith, though I confess that I began to

realize that her refinement of speech and manner was partly assumed. In unguarded moments, she occasionally dropped an aspirate, and when she grew a little excited in speaking of her efforts to trace her husband's missing estate, she sometimes made use of expressions which were suggestive of a humble origin.

But these slight solecisms were hardly perceptible, and of course a defective education is, at most, a misfortune. For the rest, she continued to interest me greatly and when, punctually on the appointed day, she repaid me the ten pounds with many fervent expressions of gratitude, I could not forbear exulting over my friend.

"That is all right," he said, laughingly, on hearing the news, but looking a little shamefaced, as I thought. "You needn't tell her I gave you a friendly warning."

"Of course not," I replied, indignantly.

"Any news about her husband's property?" he asked, carelessly.

"None. She has looked up all his London friends, and done everything she can," I answered.

"Why doesn't she advertise in the newspapers?"

"She did so more than a year ago in *The Times* and other journals. Have you anything to suggest?" I enquired, anxiously.

"No. Don't for goodness' sake, my dear fellow, ask me to mix myself up in the lady's affairs," he said, with more temper than he usually displayed. "I would rather you didn't even tell her you have consulted me about them."

I promised this the more readily because I suddenly remembered having once suggested to Mrs. Williams that she should ask the advice of a friend of mine— having Mr. Booth in my mind— in her difficulty, and had been met by a decided and emphatic refusal. The incident had made no impression on me at the time, but the idea now occurred to me that perhaps Mrs. Williams had guessed whom I referred to, and had been moved by resentment at the marked coldness which Mr. Booth always displayed towards her.

I had assured him, quite truthfully, that Mrs. Williams had never asked me to assist her in her search, nor had I foreseen that she would do so. But a few mornings afterwards, the youth who did the valeting of the male portion of the establishment, entered my room while I was shaving with an urgent message from the lady that she was waiting for me in the drawing-room, and would be obliged if I would descend there as soon as possible.

I found the little widow looking very pale and excited, with an open letter in her hand, which had arrived by the early post. Directly I appeared she flourished triumphantly a slip of blue paper, exclaiming eagerly:

"See, Mr. Perkins, what I have received this morning! My sister, who is taking charge of my house at Gateshead, found it between the leaves of a book,

Boswell's Life of Johnson, which she took out quite by chance from the bookcase in the dining-room. My poor husband was devoted to that work, and was constantly reading it during his illness. I am not much of a reader myself, and if it hadn't been for my sister, the paper might have remained undiscovered for years."

While Mrs. Williams was thus breathlessly explaining, I glanced at the document, which was a form of receipt or acknowledgment from Messrs Drake, Crump & Co., Bankers, of Fleet Street, for a tin box deposited with them by her husband for safe custody on a specified date.

"I congratulate you," I replied, thinking how attractive she looked in her excitement. "It is indeed a fortunate discovery."

"I knew it! I was sure that he had done something of the kind!" exclaimed Mrs. Williams, joyfully. "But he was very secretive about his affairs latterly— it became quite a mania with him— I shouldn't be surprised to find the box contains property of great value."

"The receipt, I see, is dated about six months before your husband died," I observed.

"Yes. We were up in town then, staying in lodgings in Edwardes Square, Kensington," replied Mrs. Williams, reflectively. "I brought him up to see a physician, though nobody suspected at the time the serious nature of his symptoms. He used frequently to go out alone; and I suppose he got the box from his brokers or from some lawyer."

"Anyhow, he deposited it with Drake, Crump, & Co.; there is no doubt about that," I remarked, feeling quite carried away by the widow's satisfaction. "I suppose you will call upon them and claim it at once?"

"Yes, unless— I really feel quite ashamed to ask such a favour of you, Mr. Perkins— but I was going to say, unless you would mind calling upon them in the first instance? The fact is, my little girl is not very well today, and besides, this delightful surprise has rather upset me; my head aches dreadfully," said Mrs. Williams, putting her white hand to her brow, but smiling bravely.

"Oh! I shall be very pleased," I answered, readily. "You had better give me the probate of your husband's will. The bankers will probably want to see that."

"Certainly, I will go and fetch it. I am so very much obliged to you, Mr. Perkins," said the widow, grasping my hand as she left the room.

Our interview thus terminated.

Mrs. Williams brought down the official parchment, and armed with this, I hastened after breakfast to call upon Messrs Drake, Crump, & Co., feeling quite interested and excited about the affair. I did not have an opportunity of telling Mr. Booth of my errand; he was late for breakfast, I remember, and I was impatient to be off so as to look in at the bank on my way to business. I merely

mention this because, as will appear later, he afterwards blamed me for not having confided in him at this juncture.

The banking establishment of Messr Drake, Crump, & Co., was a small private concern which has long since been absorbed by one of the big joint-stock undertakings. In those days its affairs were conducted in a dingy old house with barred windows about halfway down Fleet Street, in a leisurely, sleepy kind of way. The cashier's office was in the front room, the staff consisting of only three or four elderly clerks, and on presenting my card I was ushered into a gloomy little apartment at the back, where sat a quaint white-headed old gentleman in knee-breeches, who was evidently one of the partners.

"Dear me! That is very strange," he exclaimed, when I had explained my business. "Mr. Williams is dead, is he? Well, well, we were wondering! We haven't heard anything of him for quite a long time."

"He has been dead more than two years," I replied.

"Two years, eh? Let me see," he observed, as he rang a hand-bell upon the table. "Mr. Jameson," he added, as a clerk appeared, "when did we last hear from Mr. John Williams?"

"He has not drawn on his account for upwards of two years. His pass-book is here," answered the Clerk.

"Oh! Then he had a current account as well?" I exclaimed.

"A small one— yes," replied the old gentleman.

"What is the balance, Mr. Jameson?"

"About £130," said the clerk.

"You see, the pass-book being here, and the receipt for the box mislaid, his widow had no clue," I explained, eagerly.

"Quite so! Quite so! And this is the probate of his will, eh?" said the old gentleman, taking it up, and holding it close to his nose.

"I wonder you didn't see the advertisements in the papers," I remarked. "His widow knew he had property somewhere, and she advertised."

"Extraordinary that they should have escaped us. We always keep a lookout," said the old gentleman, glancing through the probate. "When did the advertisements appear?"

"I cannot tell you the date. Mrs. Williams will," I answered.

"And you are a friend of the widow's," enquired the old gentleman, looking at me pretty keenly over his spectacles.

"Yes."

"H'm! The probate seems all right. She is the sole executrix, I see. Of course, if she wants to withdraw the money and take away the box, she must attend in person. You can identify her, I suppose, and verify her signature?"

"Certainly."

"H'm! You are Mr. John Perkins, of the Monarchy Insurance Office?" he said, scrutinizing my card. "Who is your present manager?"

"Mr. Middleton."

"To be sure. I have the pleasure of knowing him. Make him my compliments," said the old gentleman, quaintly.

"I will. I suppose Mrs. Williams can draw on the account, and have access to the box when she chooses?" I enquired.

"H'm! H'm! I see the testator was described in his will as of Gateshead," said the old gentleman, doubtfully. "That isn't the address in our books."

"He lived there, and his widow lives there still," I replied. "Mrs. Williams tells me that at the date of that deposit receipt they were residing in lodgings in Edwardes Square, Kensington."

"Quite right. That is the address he gave. Well, sir," he added, replying to my former question; "as everything seems satisfactory, if you will leave the probate for registration, and call here with the lady any time after twelve o'clock tomorrow, the box can be given up. Good morning!"

I was very pleased, for Mrs. William's sake, to find that everything was straightforward; and the fact of there being a substantial sum of money to the dead man's credit, which the widow evidently knew nothing about, would, I thought, be some compensation in case the contents of the box should turn out to be less valuable than she anticipated. Later in the day, my chief, Mr. Middleton, surprised me by coming up to my desk at the office, and saying:

"Mr. Perkins, I have just answered an enquiry about you."

"An enquiry!" I exclaimed, rather startled.

"Yes, from Messrs Drake, Crump, & Co., of Fleet Street. Have you some private business with them? " he asked, curiously.

"Not of my own, sir. A lady in whose affairs I am interested—"

"All right, Mr. Perkins. I don't wish to enquire details," he said, smiling at my embarrassment. "I was of course pleased to vouch for your respectability and integrity."

"Thank you, sir," I replied, secretly annoyed at the banker's inquisitiveness.I now perceived that I had been of more service to Mrs. Williams than I had anticipated, having unconsciously acted as a sort of reference for her, and thereby saved her, perhaps, some little trouble with regard to identification. This gave an additional zest to the pleasure of being able to make such a satisfactory report to her on my return, and I am bound to say that the widow was duly grateful. She overwhelmed me with expressions of thanks, and was really disposed to exaggerate my small civility. I wrote a letter, at her request, to Messrs Drake, Crump, & Co., fixing an appointment with them for two o'clock on the following afternoon, and appending a specimen of Mrs. Williams" signature, and of course I rapidly agreed to accompany her.

When I told Mr. Booth all this, he manifested considerable irritation which, in my surprise, I was foolish enough to attribute to a sort of jealousy, since I could imagine no other possible cause for his ill humour.

"What the deuce do you want to go meddling with this woman's affairs for Perkins?" he said, sharply.

"What harm have I done!" I exclaimed.

"Harm! H'm! That remains to be seen," he growled, puffing angrily at his pipe.

"I cannot understand your prejudice against this poor lady," I said, getting angry in my turn.

"I take no interest in her whatever," said Mr. Booth.

"That's no reason why I shouldn't," I retorted."Oh! Go your own way, only remember that I warned you," said Mr. Booth, dismissing the subject with an impatient shrug.

We might almost have quarrelled, but I was really more amused than angry, and my friend soon recovered his temper. Nothing more was said between us about Mrs. Williams, and I attached so little importance to Mr. Booth's vague warnings, that it never even occurred to me to cancel the appointment I had made.

Accordingly the next day, at two o'clock, I was waiting for the widow at the door of Messrs Drake, Crump, & Co.'s bank as arranged, and, being rather pressed to get back to my office, I began to grow impatient as she did not appear. Ten, twenty, forty minutes passed without any sign of her, and I was on the point of leaving, thinking the lady had made some mistake, when I suddenly espied her on the opposite side of the way; coming up the street from the direction of Saint Paul's. She looked pale and fatigued, and, as I hastened to her assistance, I saw her glance nervously over her shoulder at a slouching, white-bearded, ragged old beggar man who appeared to be following her.

"What is the matter? Has anything happened?" I enquired.

"Oh no! I lost my way, that's all," said Mrs. Williams, with a nervous laugh.

"Has that fellow been annoying you?" I asked, lowering my voice as the old beggar slunk by hurriedly.

"That man!" exclaimed Mrs. Williams, glancing after him, "Oh no! I hadn't noticed him."

I gave her my arm, and escorted her across the crowded road into the bank. In the parlour at the back we found old Mr. Crump awaiting us, and on a side table was a good-sized tin box with Mrs. Williams' name written upon it and a paper label."There it is," exclaimed the widow, as her eyes sparkled.

"I remember it now! I always wondered what had become of it."

"Have you the key, madam?" enquired Mr. Crump, after greeting us with old-fashioned courtesy, and bowing very low to my companion.

"I think so; at least I have one or two keys here, which I haven't been able to account for," said Mrs. Williams, producing her purse eagerly.

She selected one of the keys, and, crossing over to the box, succeeded in opening it immediately. I only had a glimpse of the contents before Mrs. Williams shut down the lid and relocked it; and a they were done up in brown paper parcels or packages I could form no idea of their nature or value.

"I have prepared a cheque so that you can draw out the money if you wish," said Mr. Crump.

"Thank you," replied Mrs. Williams, seating herself at his desk, and affixing her signature to the draft.

"Will you take it in cash?" asked Mr. Crump.

"Yes, please. In notes and £20 in gold," said the widow, with business-like promptitude, as she drew on her glove again.

Mr. Crump summoned a cashier, to whom he handed the draft, with the necessary directions, to which I added a request that the porter might be permitted to call a cab. During the absence of the clerk Mr. Crump observed, in course of conversation which naturally turned on the late Mr. Williams' eccentric conduct with regard to his property, "By the way, I've looked through the files of *The Times* for the advertisement but I couldn't find it."

"What advertisement?" enquired Mrs. Williams.

"I understood from Mr. Perkins that you had advertised in the papers for information about your husband's missing estate," said Mr. Crump, looking at me.

"Oh, yes, so I did," answered the widow colouring slightly.

"What was the date?" asked Mr. Crump.

"Really, I cannot at the moment recollect. I can send you a copy of it when I get back, if it is of any moment," said Mrs. Williams, rather sharply.

"It is of no consequence, of course," replied the old gentleman, evidently perturbed at seeing that the lady showed signs of resentment. "I merely asked out of curiosity."

Mrs. Williams appeared, from her manner to resent Mr. Crump's enquiry as insinuating some doubt upon the accuracy of her statement, but, fortunately, the return of the cashier with her money caused a welcome diversion. While she was stowing away the notes and gold in her purse, the cashier looked at me and said:

"There is a cab at the door, sir. Shall I ask the porter to carry the box down?"

"I think I can manage it; it is not heavy," I replied, as I prepared to lift it.

"I've been thinking, Mr. Perkins," said Mrs. Williams, reflectively, while putting her purse away, "that perhaps it would be wiser to leave the box here for a day or two till I return to Gateshead. That is," she added, turning to the old gentleman with her pleasantest smile, "if Mr. Crump will kindly allow me?"

"You are welcome to leave it, madam— at your own risk, of course," replied Mr. Crump, a little stiffly.

"You see, I have nowhere to keep it while I am in town," the lady explained. "It would be safer here."

"It is a little irregular, as you are no longer a customer," said Mr. Crump; "but still—"

"Oh! But if I find I can afford it I shall probably come to live in London, and in that case I should certainly keep my account here," interrupted Mrs. Williams, graciously.

"In any case I am very pleased to oblige you, madam," said the old gentleman more politely.

Though surprised that Mrs. Williams was able to restrain her curiosity about the contents of the box, it was obvious that her suggestion was prudent, and, therefore, we left the box in charge of the bank. Mr. Crump bowed us out of his room very civilly, and the porter ushered us to the street door, in front of which was a four-wheeled cab. Just as we reached it the old grey-bearded beggar man, whom I had before noticed, rushed forward and obsequiously turned the handle. Mrs. Williams sprang lightly into the vehicle, and again, I thought, she glanced nervously at the cadging old rascal.

"Here, you be off, my man," I said to him, sharply.

"No, no! Here, my poor fellow, is something for you," said Mrs. Williams, and before I could prevent her she put her hand over my shoulder and gave the beggar a sixpence.

"You shouldn't be so foolish," I said, laughing, as the old fellow shuffled off with his prize.

"Think of my good luck, Mr. Perkins," laughed the widow.

I gave the cabman the address of Elvira House, and lifted my hat to Mrs. Williams from the pavement as she drove away, little imagining that she would have left London before I returned in the evening. But so it happened, for when I reached Elvira House at the end of the day, I learnt that the widow had received a telegram an hour or so previously summoning her down to Bath on account of the illness of her mother.

"She left many kind messages for you," added Mrs. Nix, when she gave me the information. "She said she would write to you in the course of a day or two. She was dreadfully upset, poor thing, at the sad news."

"I did not even know she had a mother living," I remarked.

"You were the only person she confided in," said Mrs. Nix, playfully.

"I suppose the little girl has gone too?" I observed, a trifle abashed.

"Yes. A sweet child. Everyone is so sorry to lose them. Mrs. Williams was a universal favourite," said Mrs. Nix.

This was evidently the case, to judge from the expressions of regret which were uttered at the dinner-table when her departure became generally known. We had rather a reduced company that evening, there being several vacant places. The Major had gone to attend some races at York, whither Mr. Booth was understood to have accompanied him; and two or three of our guests were dining out. I was surprised to hear of my friend having yielded to the Major's persuasions, for when the latter had broached the subject of the expedition in the smoking-room on the previous evening, Mr. Booth had flatly refused the invitation. But horse-racing was a form of sport which seemed to possess extraordinary attractions for him; and I supposed he had been partly influenced by the desire to keep his companion out of mischief.

I must confess that I felt a little depressed at the widow's unexpected absence. It was quite untrue that I admired her, but her confidences had heightened my platonic regard, and her personality undoubtedly attracted me. I therefore awaited the promised letter with some impatience, and she was good enough not to leave me long in suspense, for by the next evening's post I received from her the following epistle, dated from Lower Pultenay Street, Bath.

My Dear Mr. Perkins,

Alas! My poor dear mother is dying! So shocking, and so totally unexpected! Of course I must remain by her side till the end, and she may yet linger for some weeks, the doctor says!

I hope Mrs. Nix gave you my message. I can never thank you sufficiently for all your kindness dear Mr. Perkins, and yet I have a further favour to ask of you!

You know what sick people are! I told my dear mother, who is perfectly conscious, about the box at the bank. Nothing will satisfy her but to know what it contains, as she is anxious to be assured that my little girl and I are sufficiently provided for.

How I regret that I did not examine the contents that day at the bank! And now, what am I to do? I dare not leave my poor mother, even for an hour. I wonder whether you would undertake a journey here and bring the box with you?I know it is too much to ask, yet I have ventured to write to the bank to say that you might call. I am sure your kind heart with prompt you to do this if you possibly can.

Yours most faithfully and sincerely, Dear Mr. Perkins,

Amelia Williams

I was rather startled by this request and yet— well, in short, I decided to comply with it. I wonder at myself now; most of us have experienced similar astonishment at past foolish actions.

My chief objection, at the time, was that I could not very well get away from the office. However, on consulting a railway timetable, I found that Bath was a much more accessible place than I had imagined. A half-holiday would be all that I required, for I could travel down there and return the same evening. The next day was a Saturday, so that all the indulgence I need ask of my employers was a single hour in order that I might get to the bank before two o'clock to obtain the box.

I therefore wrote immediately to Mrs. Williams to say that I would travel down by the train which left Paddington at 3 o'clock, arriving at Bath at 5.15, and that I should return by the express which would bring me back to town about nine. I had no reason for remaining at Bath, and I thought I might accomplish my journey before Mr. Booth came back. I think I must have had a vague idea of keeping my trip a secret, both from him and from the other guests, for I was a little sensitive of remarks which had been made about my attentions to the widow.

I duly carried out my programme; the box was handed over to me at the bank without the slightest demur, in consequence of a letter they had received from Mrs. Williams; and I arrived at Bath punctually at the time named. I hired a fly, and drove straight to the widow's address in Lower Pultenay Street, but the servant who opened the door said, to my surprise, that the lady was out, and handed to me a brief pencilled note from her, saying that she had been called away unexpectedly owing to her mother's condition, and asking me to leave the box.

"The poor old lady is not in the house, then," I remarked, casually.

"What old lady, sir?" enquired the girl, opening her eyes.

"Mrs. Williams' mother. Do you know where she lives?"

"No, sir, I don't. Never heard her mention she had a mother here, in Bath, sir," added the girl.

"But Mrs. Williams is in constant attendance upon her mother, who is dying," I exclaimed.

"Mrs. Williams has hardly left the house since she has been here, sir," said the girl, evidently struck by my surprise. "She and her little girl went for a drive in a fly about an hour ago. I don't know where they went to. She said if a gentleman came and left a tin box, I was to take great care of it."

"Did Mrs. Williams say when she would return?" I enquired, with an uneasy feeling.

"She said I was to have tea ready at six o'clock sir," replied the girl, glancing back at the clock.

"I will come in and wait," I said, with sudden resolution, as I stepped inside the hall.

The servant, whose good faith was manifest, ushered me into a neat parlour, and then left me, after again asseverating, in answer to pressing enquiries, that Mrs. Williams was certainly not in attendance on an invalid. Indeed, it was impossible to doubt, from the girl's detailed account of the widow's movements since her arrival in Bath, that the story of the dying mother was a complete fiction.

I felt very much like a person who has unexpectedly received a douche of cold water. At first sight it seemed as though the story had been merely a device to work upon my feelings in order to induce me to bring the box down to Bath. Even so, however, it was extraordinary behaviour on Mrs. Williams' part to absent herself just at the hour of my arrival. She had evidently counted upon my leaving the box, and returning at once to London, as I had planned; but why this sudden reluctance to meet me, to say nothing of the ungrateful discourtesy?

I grimly resolved to await an explanation, and when I recalled to mind that Mrs. Williams had given the alleged illness of her mother as an excuse for a hurried departure from Elvira House, my mystification increased. The repeated warnings of Mr. Booth rose unpleasantly to my mind, and I had worked myself into a state of mingled indignation and resentment, when a ring at the street door bell announced, as I imagined, the return of Mrs. Williams.I awaited her with considerable trepidation, for I felt that my position was both painful and embarrassing. I heard the servant respond to the summons, and the next moment the room door was thrown open, and who should walk in but— Mr. Booth!

I started, and stared at him as though I had seen a ghost; while he seemed equally surprised at seeing me, though he recovered himself quickly. He glanced at the box on the table, and his eyes twinkled.

"Hullo! I thought you were at York!" I gasped.

"And I thought you were in London," he said, smiling at my astonishment.

"I'm waiting to see Mrs. Williams," I explained.

"She's a very clever little woman," he said emphatically. "You came down by the 5.15 train, I suppose, with that?"

"Yes."

"While she, to put me off the scent, seeks to lead me a wild goose chase, so as to leave the coast clear," he added, nodding his head.

"I found a note from her asking me to leave the box," I said resentfully.

"Yes. She didn't mean to be impolite to you," said Mr. Booth, slyly. "The fact is, she has been so closely shadowed that if she had stayed at home for you, your arrival with the box would have been noticed. I suspected a trick, though I must own that my calling here in her absence was nothing short of an inspiration," he added with great satisfaction.

"Perhaps you'll kindly explain it all," I exclaimed, with a show of indignation which was intended to disguise my increasing confusion.

"Not now," he said, coolly taking possession of the box, "unless you want an awkward scene with the woman which might end in my having to call in the police. In that case, my friend, you would figure somewhat unpleasantly before the public, as an innocent accomplice in an awkward affair. We had better clear out before she returns."

"But the box belongs to Mrs. Williams!" I exclaimed, horrified.

"Well, it does and it doesn't! I'll explain going along. Meanwhile, possession is nine points of the law," he said, putting the box under his arm and moving to the door.

I was scared by the suggestion of a public scandal, and I had complete faith in my friend. I, therefore, put on my hat and followed him, and by rushing through the streets until we met a fly which drove us at full speed to the station, we just contrived to catch the 6.5 train back to town as it was beginning to move away.

"Well?" I enquired eagerly, as soon as I had recovered my breath.

We had, fortunately, and quite by chance, secured an empty first-class compartment. Mr. Boot was leaning back with an air of calm triumph, lighting a cigar, with his feet resting on the tin box.

"Mrs. Williams," he said quietly, "is the wife of an accomplished forger and swell-mobsman, who is at present undergoing the felicity of fourteen years penal servitude."

"The wife!" I gasped.

"Yes; his real name is Bolton, but he called himself Williams among other aliases. In that name he opened an account at Drake's Bank, and deposited the box, a few months before he was arrested."

"It was her husband's property then?" I exclaimed, slightly relieved.

"It contains the proceeds of a very ingenious robbery in Hatton Garden. He was known to have hidden a good bit away somewhere, but he kept his mouth shut, and the police were non-plussed. So was his clever little wife, whose ingenuity and pluck I can't help admiring."

"Didn't he tell her?" I enquired, interested in spite of my unenviable feelings.

"Yes; but she couldn't get at it. It was lodged at the bank in the name of Williams for safety, and she dared not claim it. But she bided her time, and at length she heard of the death of a Mr. John Williams at Gateshead, which showed her husband's prudence in having adopted a common name. Of course, this was her opportunity. The dead man, a complete stranger, was made to represent the actual depositor, and Mrs. Williams pretended to be the widow."

"How did she get hold of the probate of another man's will?" I asked.

"Probably bribed the clerk of the solicitor who had the custody of it. You see, probates are no good when once an estate is wound up. This one was probably kicking about the office, and wouldn't be missed."

"What of the real Mrs. Williams of Gateshead?"

"She is dead."

"And the advertisements said to have been inserted in the papers?"

"All a lie. There were no advertisement. My dear fellow, she made you serve her purpose beautifully," laughed Mr. Booth.

"It was very unfriendly of you not to have given me a hint," I exclaimed, furiously indignant.

"My dear Perkins, didn't I warn you over and over again?"

"Yes, but you didn't tell me what you knew."

"Because at first I knew absolutely nothing. I simply mistrusted her from a kind of instinct. But when you told me the woman's story I went round to Scotland Yard, where I have a friend," said Mr. Booth, delicately flicking the ash from his cigar with his little finger, "and was shown some photographs. That same evening you told me you had been to the bank on her behalf. You may remember that I was annoyed with you?"

"Even then you might have been more explicit," I replied angrily.

"Well, the fact is, my dear Perkins, as you had already committed yourself, I couldn't resist the temptation of undertaking this little coup. You played into my hands as it were. But there is no harm done," he added, laughing at my discomfiture. "It is entirely a private venture of my own, carried out single-handed."

"Why didn't she take the box away from the bank that day?" I enquired, after a sulky silence.

"Because she discovered she was being watched," replied Mr. Booth, with imperturbable good-humour. "Do you remember an old grey-bearded man?"

"Yes."

"She spotted him, and that sent her out of London."

"You followed, I suppose?"

"Yes; I knew she would contrive to get the box sent down to her. I thought she would probably have it brought down by one of the bank messengers. I never thought she would have the cheek to—" Mr. Booth checked himself abruptly, evidently out of consideration for my feelings; then, after puffing at his cigar for a few moments, he added in a conciliatory tone, "You mustn't mind, my dear fellow. Only two people besides yourself will ever have even a suspicion of how it has all come about. I shan't tell, and you may be sure she won't."

"You forget the grey-bearded man," I groaned despondently.

"True! Yes, I forgot him," said Mr. Booth, smiling; "but I'll answer for his discretion as I would for my own."

"I wouldn't have had it happen for a thousand pounds!" I exclaimed in deep dejection, after we had travelled for twenty miles in complete silence.

Mr. Booth looked at me for a few moments with friendly concern; then he leant forward and touched me lightly on the arm.

"My dear fellow, since it has happened, I can offer you half the sum you mention as compensation."

"What do you mean?"

"The owner of the property in this box will no doubt be glad to pay me £500 as a reward. I am sufficiently repaid by the satisfaction of having accomplished a very neat job, entirely off my own bat. As a matter of fact, I owe my success entirely to you."

"Thanks, no! I'm not a detective," I interrupted, more rudely I dare say than I was conscious of.

"At least let me offer you a little memento to hang on your watch chain," he said, wincing at the rebuff but not the least resenting it.He produced as he spoke, from his pocket, a six-penny piece, and handed it to me.

"What is this?" I asked.

"The identical coin which the fair widow bestowed upon the grey-bearded beggar," he replied.

"How did you come by it, then?" I asked.

But Mr. Booth only smiled, and I then recollected how he had boasted that he had managed his part of the business single-handed.

I have only to add that though my friend always declared that the "widow" did not entertain the least suspicion of his identity, she never came to Elvira House again, nor even wrote a line of remonstrance or enquiry to me; and as I have heard nothing whatever from that day to this, I conclude she made no complaint but accepted philosophically her bitter disappointment, probably considering herself lucky to have escaped worse consequences.

End