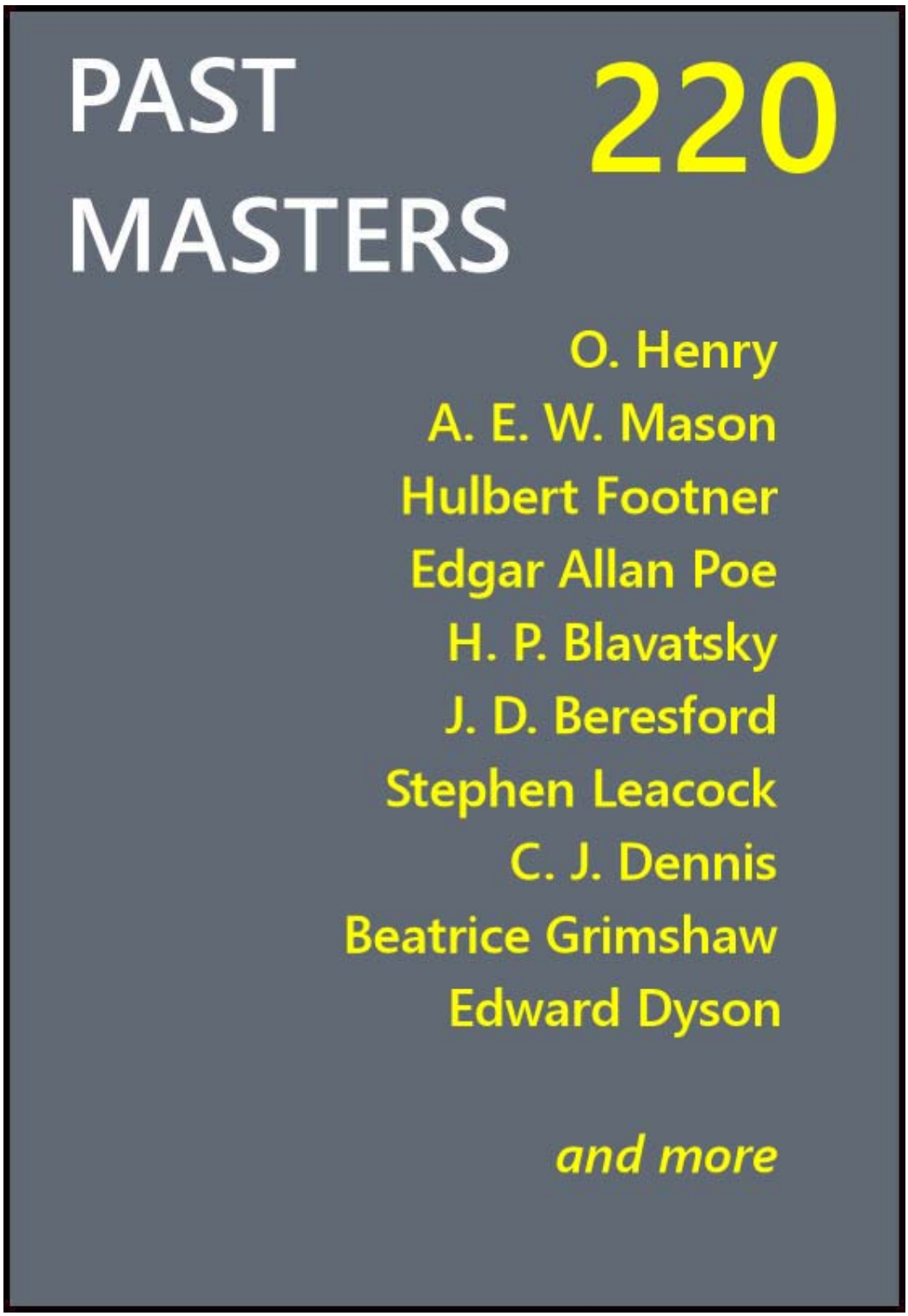
PAST
MASTERS
220
O. Henry
A. E. W. Mason
Hulbert Footner
Edgar Allan Poe
H. P. Blavatsky
J. D. Beresford
Stephen Leacock
C. J. Dennis
Beatrice Grimshaw
Edward Dyson
and more

PAST MASTERS 220

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

22 May 2025

Contents

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1: Poet and Peasant

Warwick Deeping

1877-1950

The Story-Teller, Oct 1929

Collected in: *The Short Stories of Warwick Deeping*, 1930

IT HAPPENED in the days before short skirts, and it happened to three people who were considered rather eccentric by the conventionalists of that epoch.

Sanchia painted pictures and rented a bungalow on Chudleigh Moor. Her pictures were approaching the pose of the purple and orange school, and she was one of the first persons to indulge in black ceilings and white floors. Sanchia's attitude to life was such that if she saw a vase or a convention standing right way up, she was impelled to turn it upside down. Incidentally, a bungalow on Chudleigh Moor in January was a reversal of the seasons in their sanity, more especially so when a little flat in Chelsea offered her a hot bath that was neither of the hip-bath order nor filled by the aid of cans.

Oscar wrote poetry. He was fat and flaccid and sallow, and wore his very black hair plastered like a Dutch doll's, a sort of art-cretonne of a man, and of an amazing and drawling insolence. He wore flame-coloured dressing-gowns, and cultivated an odour of decadence. Also, he cultivated Sanchia, because he thought her thin and fierce, and farouche, a sort of beggar wench who could scratch like a cat. Oscar liked to write poems— he called them "pomes"— about gutter-ladies and cocottes and amateur Madame Bovaries, and be-drugged French artists, and he had added Sanchia to the collection, which— of course— was an insult to Sanchia; but Oscar posed and prospered upon his impertinences.

John neither posed nor painted. He was a rather shaggy, large, blue-eyed creature who strode through the world in rough tweeds. He had a cottage on the Moor; he had had cottages and shacks all over the world. He was a tramping naturalist of the Hudson school, with a passion for birds, a private income of a few hundreds a year, and a public that purchased his books by the dozen. He was a somewhat silent person, perhaps because he had spent so much of his life in open spaces, listening and watching and lying under hedges and bushes and in heather and long grass. Sanchia described him as "having hay in his hair."

Early in the January of that year Oscar came down to stay with the Careys of Lee Manor. It was a strange thing of Oscar to do in January, for the Careys were dull people; but the weather was mild, and Lee Manor was only four miles from Sanchia's bungalow. Also, the Careys had a car, and to Oscar— who never walked more than a mile— a car was a necessity. He borrowed it, as he borrowed everything, with the air of conferring a favour.

"You had better keep that car, Carey. You can tell people that Oscar Flack once sat in it."

He was a flaneur, but he took his poetry very seriously, and John, arriving at Sanchia's bungalow about tea-time, and dreaming himself into a tête-à-tête with Sanchia before the fire, completed the new triangle.

Martha, Sanchia's indispensable, met him and took his hat. She approved of John.

"There's another gentleman here, sir."

John's blue eyes stared.

"Oh, well, that's all right."

He was ushered in, and his arrival interrupted Oscar's reading of a little thing of his on "Orange Pulp in Covent Garden."

They had not met before. Sanchia introduced them, and it occurred to her to think that they might be rather amusing together. Oscar, remaining seated on the tuffet, presented John with a first finger to shake.

"How de do."

John, holding the finger, and looking surprised and not knowing what to do with it, was suddenly moved to give that fat finger a twist, but he refrained. He was mute. He sat down in a chair and displayed his big boots and thick grey stockings. He seemed to smell of the heather.

There should have been the silence of embarrassment, but silence and Oscar never cohabited. As a conversationalist he was what they called in those days "utterly utter." He did utter. He talked while tea was coming in, and while it was being poured out, and while it was being consumed. He got hold of bits of buttered toast with his fat white fingers, and managed to talk and toast himself simultaneously. He talked about Debussy, and "poor old Tom Hardy and his poetical pomposities," and the last thing in Grand Guignol. He knew that he was annoying John, and he went on annoying him. He was like a griffon yapping at a St. Bernard.

John sat malevolently still, and ate buttered toast, or as much of it as Oscar chose to leave him. And Sanchia, at her ease on the hearthrug, with her arms clasping her knees, thought John's solemn face infinitely funny. Almost he looked as though Oscar was a bad cheese.

But she did try to drag John into the conversation. She liked John. She told him to light his pipe, and she mentioned to Oscar that John was interested in birds.

Oscar tried a quip.

"My dear sir, do you keep canaries? I once had a canary."

"Indeed," said John; "did you?"

"The most Victorian bird. It must have been a she. It used to tweet— 'Albert— Albert.' "

John plugged tobacco in his pipe.

"I see, quite lyrical. These things are catching."

And then they looked at each other slantwise as men will, and knew that there could be murder between them, though in John's hands Oscar would have been less than a sack of stale flour.

Now when Oscar was annoying anybody he felt his sleekest and his happiest, and if he could combine impertinencies towards Mrs. Grundy with a mild intrigue with some attractive woman, then the situation was flawless. For to Oscar, John symbolized the British Constitution, and the lions in Trafalgar Square, and St. Paul's Cathedral, and a public that could go dotty over a novel like "Lorna Doone." Oscar, being Irish, was always making terrible fun of the English, and John was so very English. It was easy to twist his tail.

At least, it appeared so, and Oscar sat him out at Sanchia's on two successive afternoons, and treated John like an overgrown boy, and had the best of the fire, and apparently the best of Sanchia. He absorbed so much of the fire that Sanchia was moved towards playfulness.

"Martha tells me that we are down to the last hundredweight."

"Of what, dear lady?"

"Coal."

"A shortage of coal! But surely there are coal merchants in Devon, as well as Drakes and noble fellows."

"My coal comes seven miles by road. I have two tons on order."

Oscar spread his hands.

"Oh, God will provide."

He looked at John.

"Besides, here we have Master Ridd who looks as though he could carry a sack of coal or a sheep."

John brooded.

"Yes, I might manage to dispose of a sheep."

Meanwhile a most strange conglomeration of circumstances combined to produce an unexpected situation. The weather changed suddenly; it grew cold; it banked up masses of blue-grey cloud; the dry bracken shivered in a north-east wind.

Martha's mother fell sick in a distant village, and Martha begged a day off and disappeared to catch the carrier's van which would take her into Boon Tracey.

Sanchia's coal had not arrived, though it was supposed to be on the road.

The Careys' car brought Oscar to Sanchia's bungalow, but Oscar had been told that the car could not wait for him and that he would have to walk back. The Careys might be dull people, but they were growing a little tired of Oscar,

and of being listed on life's store-list under the heading of "Poets, people for the use of, Mark Three."

The north-east wind set its teeth. The sky grew more and more ominous.

When John walked over the moor he knew what was coming, and Oscar should have known; but to Oscar snow was about as real as sugar icing on a cake, and when John arrived at Sanchia's cottage he found the poet and Sanchia sitting in front of a very small fire. Oscar was not feeling poetical; he was feeling the cold, and that in spite of all the white blubber that he carried. Sanchia looked both a little worried and amused. She rose to make tea.

"Martha's had to go to Tedworthy."

"Oh," said John, with an air of being profoundly wise about something.

"You did not see my coal-cart anywhere?"

"No. Nothing but one old crow."

They had tea, they sat, they smoked, they talked, though Oscar did most of the talking, and from time to time, being next to the coal-box, he would extract a lump of coal with the tongs and place it on the fire. He kept most of the heat from John, just as he contrived to keep him out of the conversation. But the moment arrived when Oscar groped for the last time in the coal-box.

"Do be careful. That's my last scuttle."

Oscar looked blandly amused.

"Dear lady, is that so? For it seems that I have fished out the last lump."

He chuckled faintly. Really, the joke was against Sanchia, for he was walking back to Lee Manor where there was plenty of coal.

"Subject for a picture. The last cartridge! Obviously, Sanchie, you will have to go to bed, and be Miss Moody till the coal comes."

Almost he winked at John who was filling a second pipe and staring at the diminishing fire. And suddenly John asked him a question.

"Ever been down a mine?"

"Dear sir— I should get so dirty."

And John smiled, a quiet sort of smile. It was as though he could hear the snow falling outside Sanchia's bungalow, a veritable blizzard, banking up against walls and doors, clogging windows, effacing roads, and piling drifts on Chudleigh Moor. He smiled and lit his pipe. Yes, this fat and flabby ass could go on talking, while the snow came down, and turned Chudleigh Moor into a primitive wilderness.

Sanchia was looking a little anxious. Also, the room was growing very cold, and Martha had not returned.

"I think it must be snowing."

John got up slowly and went to the window and drew back the edge of a curtain.

"Oh, just a few flakes, nothing much."

He wanted Oscar to go on talking, for when Oscar's interior warned him that dinner at Lee Manor was at seven-thirty, and that he had an hour's walk before him, the snow might have some surprises for this conceited ass; so John listened with an air of interest to Oscar's views upon the poetical genius of Yeats. Meanwhile the fire grew less and less, and Sanchia began to hunch her shoulders and to indulge in little suggestive shivers. Really, the situation was growing serious, for the log-box was as empty as the scuttle, and on Chudleigh Moor gas stoves and electric heaters did not exist. Certainly there was a small oil stove in the kitchen, but Sanchia did not know how much oil might be left in the five gallon drum that stood in the scullery. Yes, the situation was ominous. Supposing it snowed hard during the night and the roads became blocked? Oscar's dissertation upon the poetic genius of Mr. Yeats became impertinent and superfluous.

She looked at the clock.

"My lad, it's five minutes past six."

"Five past six! The minstrel and the winter wind. They are most disgustingly punctual at the Manor."

Sanchia rose. She was not worrying about Oscar's winter walk; she was wondering why Martha had not arrived, and what would happen to the evening meal. Oscar was putting on his overcoat, and John lighting a third pipe. He had the air of a man who was waiting for the fun to begin.

Sanchia went to the door. John heard her open it, utter a sudden exclamation, and close the door hurriedly.

"Good heavens! It's an absolute blizzard."

She came back into the light. A snowflake had settled on her hair, and others on her dress.

"It's an absolute blizzard. How utterly surreptitious of it."

She looked at John as though she expected him to do something, but John sat smoking his pipe.

"Yes, it happens rather suddenly up here, at times."

He glanced at Oscar.

"You had better push off before it gets too thick. I'll see you as far as the lane."

He got up and put on his cap, took his ash stick, and opened the door. A whirl of white flakes drifted in, and Oscar, who was thinking of his dinner and the fires at Lee Manor, stood and stared at the unexpectedness of the winter night.

"By Jove— I can't go out in that. It's too—"

John turned and looked at him.

"Oh, yes, you can. You have only got to follow the road. No use hanging about. Good night, Sanchia."

He edged Oscar out into the snow, and closed the door, and found Oscar's black shape blocking the path.

"I say— I can't see—"

"Come on. I'll put you in the lane. You have only to follow the lane."

He took Oscar by the arm and shepherded him down the path and out of the gate. He was most unsympathetic.

"You turn left— I turn right. I should make tracks if I were you. It's getting rather thick. Good night."

John stood there until he had convinced himself that Oscar was making a sincere attempt to walk to Lee Manor, and then he turned to the right, and made for his cottage. It was less than a quarter of a mile away, but when he reached it he was like a snow man. He stamped his feet and shook himself in the porch. He gave way to inward laughter. It was a nice situation. Possibly it might teach Sanchia a thing or two, and prove to the poet that a winter night on Chudleigh Moor was not a mere cream meringue.

Though, as a matter of fact, the situation was developing on lines that were unforeseen by John. He had supposed that Oscar would get about as far as The Green Yaffle down by Stone Bridge, and take refuge there for the night. It would not be a very comfortable night, and John was glad.

But Oscar did not get as far as the inn. He fell into a young snowdrift and was considerably frightened. He was not made of the stuff which goes to the creating of Arctic explorers.

Sanchia was investigating the contents of the paraffin drum in the scullery. It contained a little less than a pint of oil, and in transferring it to the stove's container she spilt quite a lot of it over one foot.

"Oh, damn!"

She did not like paraffin or paraffin stoves. Messy things! But she might be able to warm up something on the stove. Also, the bungalow was beginning to feel like a flimsy cricket pavilion on the top of a mountain. No coal, no Martha, and John had gone and left her in the lurch. She felt very much peeved.

And then she heard a knocking, and gave inward thanks. It would be Martha or the coal, and she hurried to the bungalow's door and opened it and let in a swirl of snow, and discovered Oscar.

"You!"

There was no joy in her voice, and there was no joy in Oscar. He wore a white plaster all over him. He was not quoting poetry.

"Sanchie. Quite impossible. Awful night. I should have got lost."

She said:

"But you can't come in here."

He stared. What a shock to be met on such a night by the creature of convention in the person of his Isoult of the Moor.

"Can't?"

"Of course not. You must go on to John's."

Almost he whimpered.

"But I don't know where John lives. Besides—"

The snow was drifting in and she let him into the passage, and half-closed the door, and when she had done it she realized that probably he would stay in. Also, she had a feeling that Oscar was rather a mean creature. He was like a fat and selfish boy who would snivel, and then burst into nasty giggles when the crisis had passed.

She said:

"Why haven't we a telephone! It's perfectly— I'd better take you up to John's."

But he was removing his coat. He gave way to an incipient shiver.

"Can't be done, Sanchie. You've no idea what the night's like."

She began to have new ideas of Oscar as a man.

"Oh— very well. Do you mean to stay the night?"

"Well— really! Do you expect me to—?"

"There's no bed for you."

"No bed?"

"Of course not. I'm not going to give you Martha's."

With characteristic casualness he hung his caked coat over a chair which was covered by a beloved piece of Japanese embroidery, and Sanchia exclaimed:

"Take that thing off. It will ruin—"

He stared, and removed it. Yes, certainly Sanchia was rather touchy.

"I can sleep on the sofa."

He suggested it with an air of magnanimity, and she turned to go back to the kitchen.

"Perhaps. I'll see."

ABOUT EIGHT O'CLOCK in the morning, John, having had his early cup of tea, lit a pipe, and went out upon the day's adventure. Sanchia might need rescuing; though, cunning watcher of birds that he was, he had found wisdom in leaving her to discover what Chudleigh Moor was like when the snow came down. He ploughed through it. The day was gorgeous, but bitterly cold, with the sun shining on a white world, and a little crisp, icy breeze blowing from the north.

John approached the bungalow, and avoiding the door, went round to the sitting-room window. He flattened himself against the wall and looked in. He was presented with the most unexpected of tableaux. Sanchia was on her knees in front of the grate, trying to make some sort of fire out of the remains of a sugar-box and last night's cinders. Oscar sat huddled on the sofa with his back to the window, wrapped up in a blue eiderdown, and looking as blue as the quilt.

John's eyebrows bristled.

"So you sneaked back, did you!"

He drew away towards the bungalow's porch. He stood and considered the situation. Now, how exactly should it be handled? He had left a hearty fire leaping up the cottage chimney, and a frying-pan ready for bacon and eggs. He smiled. He knocked at Sanchia's door.

She opened it. Her hands were black, her little nose pinched, and John met her breezily.

"Well, how's life?"

She was in a temper near to tears. Things had been sufficiently exasperating without having a helpless mass of fat like Oscar sitting shivering on the sofa.

"John, it's simply too awful."

"What— the weather?"

"Oh, yes, that. But we're simply frozen, and the oil stove has given out."

"We? Has Martha come back?"

She lowered her voice. She glanced malevolently over her shoulder, and then went and shut the inner door.

"He— sneaked back!"

"What, Oscar?"

"He's about as useless as— I let him sleep on the sofa. He expects me— somehow— to produce a breakfast. There's not going to be any breakfast."

John wanted to laugh, but he appeared immensely grave.

"I say, Sanchia, you don't mean to say that fellow spent the night—"

"Oh, don't be silly. Do you think I wanted him?"

She rubbed her hands together; her little nose was like ivory, and John noticed that she had buttoned herself up in a Scotch tweed coat. His inspiration was upon him.

"Look here, I've got a fire up at my place, and plenty of coal, and bacon and eggs, my dear, and hot tea."

Almost she moistened her cold lips with her tongue. She looked at the snow.

"Could I walk? And what about Oscar?"

"Oh, damn Oscar! Besides—"

And suddenly he caught her up and held her like a baby.

"No need to walk. Rather deep in places. You leave it to me."

Her astonishment hesitated between anger and delight.

"Bacon and eggs, John?"

"Yes."

"How lovely."

He carried her down the path into the lane, the deep snow muffling the sound of his footsteps; and Oscar, who had gone down on his knees and was puffing at a little wad of paper that he had lit under Sanchia's pile of box wood,

remained in ignorance of this act of brigandage. He blew sedulously at the timid flames.

And Sanchia was laughing, and looking strangely into John's face.

"You— are— strong. I wonder what Oscar will do?"

John smiled.

"That's his problem. Let him solve it."

But for the moment Oscar was absorbed in making that small fire burn, even if it should not burn for very long. He wanted to impress Sanchia; he had more than a suspicion that he had lacked impressiveness, and that an unshaven chin did not suit him. Confound the snow! It was a barbarous business, and he had neither razor nor hair brushes, and his hands felt like two lumps of cold fat. Just like a couple of women to leave ordering in fresh coal until there was none left in the house. But what was Sanchia doing? He had fancied that he had heard John's voice, but he was not going to show himself to that bucolic person. He wanted Sanchia to come in so that he could say: "Look at the fire I've made," and no Sanchia reappeared.

He grew suspicious. He called to her:

"Sanchie! Hallo, come and look at the fire."

No one answered. He grew anxious, anxious about all sorts of things, his breakfast, his dignity, but when he discovered those footmarks in the snow he forgot his dignity. Actually he blundered out into the lane and saw those deep impressions full of shadow stippling the white surface and disappearing over the hill. They puzzled him, for there appeared to be only one set of tracks, and Sanchia could not have made those huge hoofmarks.

Angry and depressed, he went in to forage some sort of breakfast. He found half a cold tongue in the larder, and the remains of yesterday's milk, and bread and butter. Hopefully he tried to warm up the kettle on that decrepit fire, and the fire gave up the ghost under that chilly weight of metal and cold water.

Oscar sat down and ate cold tongue and bread and butter, but the food did not seem to warm him. The room grew more and more of an ice-house. He gloomed; he wrapped the quilt round him. He had a feeling that somehow Sanchia had played him a dirty trick. Oh, damn the cold! His pride began to shiver.

Up at John's cottage things were otherwise. A fire blazed, and Sanchia, on two cushions, unfolded herself like a flower. A kettle steamed on the hob, and that practical person of a John was cracking eggs and dropping them neatly into the frying pan.

"Here you are, Sanchia, you fry while I lay the table."

"What a joke!"

"Rather, isn't it."

"Just lovely. I wonder what Oscar's doing?"

She laughed so that the eggs shook.

"Did you see him?"

"I did. Rolled up in a quilt."

"A blue quilt. And his hair! Oscar doesn't look nice in the morning, especially with a beard."

John was laying the table.

"Be careful with that pan, young woman. I don't like my eggs broken."

"You— are— a tyrant."

"Perhaps."

Cold tongue and bread and butter lay heavy on Oscar's stomach. Oh, for a warm drink! And that flimsy bungalow seemed to grow colder and colder. He worked up a rage, a humiliated heat, he put on his coat and dared the snow. He floundered up hill in the direction of John's cottage, following those huge depressions. He came to John's cottage, and saw smoke ascending from the chimney. So there was a fire.

His pride oozed out of his boots. Hot tea! And perhaps that fellow would lend him a razor, and allow him a jug of hot water. But he, too, went to peer through a window, and there in front of the fire he saw two people seated upon cushions. John was smoking a pipe, and had an arm round Sanchia, and in Sanchia's mouth there was a cigarette. On the table lay the tantalizing relics of a hot breakfast.

And Oscar felt grieved, disillusioned. He despaired of the world.

"Selfish beggars."

But he tapped at the window.

"Hallo, you two."

Incredible selfishness! John got up and deliberately pulled down the blind!

———————

2: People of the Fourth Dimension

S.B.H. Hurst

1876-1937

Adventure, 3 Sep, 1921

"BUT does my lord really love me?"

Sesson, striving for eloquence, became feverishly inarticulate, after the manner of men more accustomed to the silences of vast spaces than the babble of crowds.

The girl, who was fifteen in age but ancient in wisdom and with a subtle understanding of life which few Western women can hope to attain, laid a bangled arm about the man's neck and drew his face down gently. The greatest of sculptors, banished again to earth, might have carved her out of old ivory, giving form and existence to the memory of his spirit love, lest he forget and the wonder of her be lost forever.

"And the old one," she whispered, simulating an easy indifference to disguise a burning curiosity, "what does he say?"

"Er, well—" Sesson fought his limited bump of language. "You see, light of the world, men of my race do not talk to one another about their love affairs."

"So. But of course I know you forget all about me when you leave my house."

With the lack of originality of men of all races, Sesson tried to tell her that he could not forget, that she was never out of his mind. Listening, she suddenly realized that her smile was betraying her feelings and she began to laugh playfully.

"But is my lord— who is so big and strong— afraid to tell the old Sinclair sahib about his home with me?"

"No, not afraid— but what good would it do?

Besides, I don't want— I mean I— that is—"

"It is, my lord, and I am proud you hold me so sacred." Coming into the wind easily, she shot off on another tack, without Sesson, who had been a sailor, being at all aware of her evolution.

They sat in the cool of the evening on the top of the house Sesson had rented for the girl with all the care and secrecy at his command. He knew only too well how news travels among the natives of India, and he had no desire to have his love affair become a joke in the bazaars.

Rising and falling, the roar of Calcutta flowed beneath them like a river; and in the still air the smoke of cooking fires lazily waved. The early bats were beginning their evening's gambol. Hanging like the sign of the girl's faith, the faintest crescent of a moon seemed more like an ornament than a satellite, and there were no stars.

"Looks as if the monsoon were about to break," Sesson remarked irrelevantly.

"Thinkest thou of the weather when with me?" she chided.

"It was but my tongue speaking," he apologized.

"My soul is dumb in thy presence— like a devout in the temple of a goddess."

"Very good, my Sesson," she applauded. "Give me more. I like it, for it is good talk."

He did his best and while she listened she wondered; coming to the conclusion that she loved him as well as she could allow herself to love any man— but, after all, what was love? Besides, when one is young and lovely love is an easy thing to get. When one grows old, money is very useful. When she was old she might be fat. She shuddered slightly and Sesson, thinking she was cold, drew a shawl about her.

"Yes," she thought, "and he will marry some *mem sahib*, anyway, so what matters it? Still, if I could only be sure. Bah, one is sure only of old age and death."

"My Sesson," she roused herself with sudden decision, "didst thou ever look into the ink pool?"

"Of course not."

"Why not?"

"Oh, because it's silly, I suppose."

"So is all play, if you will. But I like to stare into the ink. Sometimes I see all sorts of things.

Besides, I always look to see if thou art true to me."

And she laughed lightly.

"Why?" Sesson was lovingly indignant. "How can you doubt me?"

"Did I say I doubted thee?"

"No. But you said you looked into the ink to see if I were faithful."

"Does that not prove I love thee? If I didn't care, would I trouble to be jealous? How little dost thou understand a woman, my lord!" And there was just enough of plaintiveness in her voice to make Sesson ashamed of himself. "Let us play, then," she suggested.

Sesson hesitated. While not exactly a clever man, he had had certain experiences which had taught him much. Also, he had one of the best teachers in the world, for his employer, Sinclair, knew the native as few men had ever done, without consideration of race or creed. Therefore, he hesitated, although he cursed himself— knowing his hesitation implied a doubt of the girl. Queer things have happened to those who have stared into the saucer of ink. But the girl loved him— she would rather die than do him an injury.

"All right— perhaps I will— some time," he parried weakly.

The women of India have a certain birdlike quality which is only faintly approximated by women of other lands. They can also rise gracefully from cushions laid on a flat roof. Doing this, the girl reminded Sesson for all the world of a small and very indignant canary.

"I go to look into the ink— perchance I may discover in what way I have caused my lord to doubt my faith."

"Did I say that I doubted?"

Sesson also rose from the cushions, but no one would have accused him of doing it gracefully.

"There is no need to say."

"But— But—" Sesson attempted to put his arms round her.

"Let not my lord touch one so unworthy— he may contaminate himself." She avoided him disdainfully.

"Oh, well, I'll look into the— ink."

"There is no— ink. But such as it is thou shalt not look into it."

"Eh?"

She had gone too far— intentionally. Now she played her winning card— throwing herself into his arms, sobbing so violently that she scared him, as well as making him thoroughly ashamed of himself.

"It is always thus," she panted. "A woman gives herself to a man and worships him as a god, while he but regards her as a toy. This is bad, but when a woman loves a man with her whole soul and then finds he does not trust her— that is too bad to be borne. I will die!"

"Come, come." Sesson did his best to soothe her.

"Why— why didst thou fear the ink? Did my lord think that I, his slave, would play him some trick?" This was exactly the suspicion that had been in Sesson's mind, although it had not quite risen to the surface where words would have given it form.

Thus, being an intangible thing, the girl's distress had blown it away, leaving in its place a feeling that he had treated her brutally. Besides, he knew that while he looked upon ink and crystal-gazing as merely aids to auto-hypnosis, methods of reflecting pictures in the subconscious and thus bringing them into conscious view, the girl considered everything so revealed as objective truths— believed them to be glimpses into the future, warnings, divine messages, and what not.

That is, the average girl of her sort did so believe, and he had no reason to think that Laulee was different from her species. All this being so, Sesson was in the unhappy situation of one who sneers at or doubts the religious belief of his sweetheart; while he had betrayed a doubt of her fidelity to himself.

"LIGHT of my life," he whispered fondly to the trembling bundle of white linen, bangles and emotion, "I did but jest with thee."

A long-forgotten story came to his aid.

"Thou knowest that whither thou goest I will go, and whatsoever thou takest pleasure in will surely be my delight. Let us together look for pictures in the ink. I promise thee that thou wilt see nothing but thine own sweet face in my dreams."

She disengaged herself, clapping her hands like a delighted child.

"Oh, my Sesson, thou art a poet," she chirped.

This he doubted, annoyingly conscious of being a fool. At the same time the shadow of a fear, a premonition of danger obtruded itself into his emotions. Manlike, however, he felt committed to his promise— in addition to disappointing Laulee, it would be dishonorable if he did not stare into the ink.

"But," he joked tenderly as they descended from the housetop, "what, if when we look into the ink, I should see all the men who have loved thee?"

"*Ai*, and if thou didst! Such a mob! You would think it an army— of fools. Would it not be more interesting to thee to see a picture of every man I have loved— which is very different?"

"Would that be an army, too?" he retorted with ready jealousy.

"Ay, my lord. Indeed, a host in himself. And that"— she lighted the lamp— "you may see without ink. Behold!" She laughed saucily and pointed to his photograph. "You may say the ink can lie, but I have heard that the camera cannot."

Sesson grinned, contented and comfortable.

Here, in this house, he was as absolute as some feudal baron. The outer door was barred and no one could enter without fighting the old soldier, his gatekeeper. For privacy in India is sacred. What a crank he had been to make a fuss about the ink. As if any harm could come to him in such a sanctuary, even if the girl did not love him; and he felt sure she did. Why shouldn't she?

Lighting a pipe, he sank lazily into a soft couch and watched Laulee making ready for the experiment. To the dimming of the light he made no objection, nor yet to the preparations which told him he would be compelled to sit more upright; but he did complain when the girl decided it was necessary to stop the electric fan— a modern usurpation of the age-old punkah which made for greater privacy, and relished even by those who considered a punkah coolie as being merely furniture— because its spinning would irritate the placid surface of the ink saucer. But the girl soothed his objections with a pretty authority, finally surveying her arrangements with complacent satisfaction.

"Now, my lord, all things being in readiness, wilt thou condescend to allow the gods to open the veil?"

"So the gods have charge of this business, eh?" asked Sesson as he took up the position assigned to him.

"Who knows, sahib?"

"Don't call me *sahib*," he protested.

"Don't make fun of what I do, then," she retorted.

"I am all obedience," he avoided the argument.

"You must not," she protested as he slipped an arm about her waist. "This matter must be approached without any idea of levity."

"Wherein is the levity?" He imitated a reproved schoolboy, and sat very straight.

"Nay," she begged, "please, my Sesson, do thou fall into my mood. Who knows what will happen?"

"If I don't fall asleep, I will keep on staring at a pool of ink until you grow tired of watching me do it— that's what will happen. Now!" And Sesson, to please Laulee, imitated her every move— or, rather, lack of movement.

For some minutes they stared, and Sesson was conscious of nothing more than an overwhelming desire to blink his eyes. Presently, this passed and he became sleepy. Then, suddenly, he stared intently— very wide awake! For, deep in the ink apparently— so deep that it seemed impossible that the saucer held less than an inch of the liquid, he saw!

What he saw at first were certain things he did not like to look at. Events in his life about which he could never think without a shudder of disgust, of shame— the skeletons which every man keeps hidden from the world and as far as is possible from himself. He rubbed his eyes, hoping that what he saw had no objective existence and would disappear. But it persisted. He saw himself, deep in the ink, doing again what he wished he had never done.

It was exactly as if some unseen moving-picture camera had recorded his every move— years before; and with a rare feeling of horror Sesson lifted his eyes from the damning record of his past to look at Laulee. Was she, too, witnessing the same scene?

She was not. In that small saucer of ink, she was seeing very different pictures, and the incidents of Sesson's life which he had seen were hidden from her. This he knew in a glance. For the girl's face was flushed with delight. She hardly breathed. Whatever she saw, it was entrancing. Relieved and lured by a horrible fascination, Sesson stared again at the ink.

But the unpleasant picture of his past was no longer there to trouble him. There was nothing there, but the placid pool of ink; and warned by his previous experience Sesson felt that it would be the wiser part to stare no more with intentness. Laulee would be none the wiser if he pretended to look deep.

As a matter of fact, she was so absorbed in her visions that she had apparently forgotten he existed.

If she asked him afterward what he had seen, he could invent something. To tell her the truth, as far as his experience had gone, would be impossible.

It was curious, very curious— this seeing the record of one's past. Of course he had heard of such experiences, but he had never experimented.

In a vague way he understood why he could not see what the girl saw, and vice versa. He began to theorize on the how and why of the visions— his eyes still fixed on the saucer, so that if Laulee happened to look at him she would be deceived into believing he was seeing things.

CURIOUS stuff— ink! In some way it caught all the light in the room. Of course, the light was dim— Laulee had seen to that— just enough to see the ink properly. That, no doubt, was the reason the ink had changed both in color and appearance. That cloudy, steamy, vapory stuff, now rising like a fog over a marsh-that must be due to some chemical peculiarity of ink.

Sesson's knowledge of chemistry was trifling, but he gravely tried to explain to himself why he no longer saw a saucer of ink. As a matter of fact, he hadn't the remotest idea what he saw; but what he did see reminded him of the interior of a tunnel, just after a train has gone through it.

That was it. He remembered now. Funny why he had had any difficulty. Simple, when you knew how to figure it out! But, now he came to think of it, it was strange his being able to stand in the way of an express train without getting hurt. He must have been standing in its way, because the train had just gone through the tunnel, and there was only one set of rails.

No, it wasn't so strange, after all. Very dimly, but nevertheless positively, he remembered that, for many, many years, nothing had been able to hurt him— that is, hurt him physically. He could, also, fly. That, as a matter of fact, was his natural gait.

He moved his legs something like walking, swinging his arms ever so little— much less than when swimming. And, by Jove, the air held him up much better than water did. How perfectly delightful this easy motion through space. He felt like a bird. No, not a bird, exactly. What did he feel like? Oh, well, it didn't matter. He could decide some other time.

It was lonely, though. And where was he? With a great effort, Sesson took hold of himself, as one can sometimes do in a dream, and realized that something exceedingly curious had happened to him.

He was not dreaming— in some way he was sure about that— but he certainly was not where he ought to be. But, where was that? Where should he be?

For what seemed like several centuries, Sesson struggled desperately to remember where he should be— where he had been before he found himself floating like a feather in a silent void. It was no use— he knew he was himself,

but what that self was he did not know; and where he had come from was equally inexplicable.

The fear and horror peculiar to nightmare began to assail him and the only answer to all his questioning was that he was lost, utterly lost, in limitless space.

He struggled to awake, illogically because he still felt he was not dreaming, but it was the only course of action he could think of. He believed himself to be screaming, praying, begging. Then something deep in his consciousness told him to open his eyes. This he did, easily and naturally, finding, to his utter astonishment, that he was sitting where he had been before his awful experience, before the saucer of ink, while Laulee was still staring into the pool, with the same ecstatic smile. She, evidently, had had no such unpleasant experience.

"No more for me," he exclaimed involuntarily.

As if pulled by some invisible hand, the girl's head jerked back from its attitude of staring. She frowned at him.

"Why didst thou waken me? See, there is nothing— all is gone. Oh, why didst thou do it?"

"Don't blame me," he said contritely. "What I saw caused me to yell out loud. It was not my fault."

"Oh, yes it was," she answered with some asperity. "For if there is no evil in our memories, no evil thing can happen to us in the ink. In all the universe there is nothing that can harm the good."

With one of her rapid changes of mood she began to pet and soothe him.

"Poor boy, did all the bad devils of thy past rise up to haunt thee? It had to be, but next time maybe the good spirits will take thy hand and lead thee to Paradise instead of Jehannum."

Whether the girl's explanation was correct or otherwise, Sesson was deeply moved by his experience. It was altogether different from anything he had ever known. Of course, one may dream of time and space, and feel that years are passing; but when one wakes one realizes that it was but a dream and probably lasted only a few seconds. The experience can then be dismissed, as not being real.

But, to his surprise, Sesson found that he could not so casually dismiss the effects of his inkgazing. On one hand, he felt certain that he had never moved from the place where he had been sitting; on the other, to believe that he had not moved seemed absurd. The experience, the sense of motion-all this had been too real, too tangible.

Indeed, compared with the events of everyday, Sesson was compelled to admit that one was as real as the other.

If what had happened to him while he apparently sat by Laulee's side had not been real, then he had not eaten his dinner that evening. Yet, logically, this

conclusion was absurd. Thinking, the puzzled sailor remembered the words of an old fakir: "There is a realm where logic is transcended, where things are real."

Naturally, then, Sesson wanted advice. The experience had scared him. Could a man leave his body and go wandering, without regard to what we call time, and careless of what we call space? But who was there to advise him? Laulee? Hardly! And yet, why not? Was it the egoism of the male, hesitating to seek advice from the female?

No. Truthfully, Sesson could answer "no" to that. Then did he not feel confident; did he doubt her knowledge? That was better, but, still, not the whole truth. He felt that he might as well own up to it— that he wished thoroughly to understand the girl, but could not. Men in love feel this bafflement.

And the need of consulting someone was pressing. Calling himself a baby that could not keep its mouth shut failed to ease the urge. To talk, to confess, if you will, to someone, he must. And who was there but Sinclair?

Yet, he balked. To tell Sinclair about his adventure in the ink meant at least hinting about Laulee; and while he knew that the elder man would not ask questions and would never even dream of trying to supervise his morals, he hated to mention that his extraordinary experience had taken place while apparently in the presence of a woman.

Troubled this way he put off speaking to Sinclair; but the weight on his mind was so pressing that he went about his duties like a man in a dream and everyone he met knew he was bothered.

This of course he knew and because his confounded experience came between his work and himself, he worried the more. That he should worry at all was another problem and a weighty one. But how should Sesson know that he had dipped into the immeasurable sea?

In the end he developed a fixed idea— he wanted to tell Sinclair, but he would not. He would fight the wish. But "the suppressed wish" is the fulcrum of psychology and its effects are known to men of far less wisdom than Sinclair, the unofficial guardian of India. Being what he was, he disliked to question Sesson. Thus he compromised, one morning, with:

"You are not looking yourself— better take a few weeks' leave. Go up to Darjeeling, or some place where its cooler."

And Sesson, who was forty years the younger, blurted out the whole tale and felt better when he had blurted.

AS HE told it, he did not look at Sinclair and when he did look up he was startled by the expression of gravity on the face of the elder man, who said:

"It's too late to ask you why you stared, and I won't. You are living in a country where queer things happen, I mean, things which would be called queer in England, but which are everyday events in India."

He paused for a few minutes, then continued:

"In my many years here, to quote Newton, I have felt myself, as it were, walking by the shore of a boundless sea, picking up small pebbles. Each pebble means so much more knowledge— but what is a ton of such to all the knowledge hidden by the sea? It appears that you, unwittingly, have taken a plunge into the sea itself. Once, and only once, I myself wet my hand in it. Well, whatever their reason, they did not allow it for mere amusement."

And Sinclair finished speaking almost as if he were talking to himself.

"Who," Sesson stammered, "who do you mean by they?"

"I do not know," said Sinclair very simply.

"Eh?" Sesson might well be surprised.

"No. I have discovered society after society. I found the gang which wishes to hypnotize the world, and may, because the silly world does not believe it possible! As if the western world knew anything about hypnotism! Yes, I have unearthed clique after clique— knowing all the time that behind all these manifestations lurked a power, a power which seemed as far beyond my reach as the fourth dimension, a power beyond me, which I was almost content to admit as my master. I believe that power is interested in you."

Sesson was dumb. Not because he had heard about a mysterious power, which appeared to be interested in himself, but because Sinclair had admitted there was something in India which he was content to let alone, if not consider his superior. This was more than extraordinary; it was hardly believable.

"My explanation may be miles from being correct," Sinclair continued, as if soliloquizing, "but it's the best I have been able to build up in all these years. To make my idea easier of understanding, suppose we call this they who appear to be interested in you, 'The People of the Fourth Dimension.' Then, remember how almost everything pertaining to the so-called 'Occult' has its origin in India.

"Sect after sect has arisen, book after book has been written, mahatma after mahatma— so-called— has said his little say and passed on. But all of these were perhaps but the echo of the they I speak of: the sects, the wise men, the books were maybe but gropings for the truth of this mysterious people, although, being human, these gropers pretended to have the truth, and lived by peddling it.

"Few of them knew more than you do today— everyone was trying to explain, and is trying to explain an experience similar to your own. That is why India is the home of occultism— because it seems to be the home of this unseen people of fourth dimensional space.

"I am a materialist, but not in the narrow sense in which the term is generally understood. I am so because the material is constantly showing us new wonders and until we are certain that the marvels of the material are exhausted— which will never be—I see no reason to speak of the spiritual. For what we call spiritual is only matter refined. Therefore, this unseen people are as physical as you and me. They are invisible to us because they occupy four dimensions of space instead of three.

"Even if we admit a common evolutionary basis— I speak, of course, of some basis of which undifferentiated protoplasm is a product— why should not one branch of life have evolved in a space of four dimensions, while our branch evolved in three? If we admit the possibility of this— and I see no reason and no consistency in denying it— then the evolution of man in fourth-dimensional space must have resulted in a super-being, a being who grew beyond us for millions of years, in the ratio of as four is to three, with all the added possibilities of that added space.

"That we can not see them is to be expected, since we can not even imagine fourth space, verbally intelligible though it may be. But the theory is big. That these people exist you will, I think, soon have greater proof than I have. I suggest that you go on with your ink experiments, and if you tell the lady what I have told you, she will be apt to confirm it. If she doesn't, you will have an inexhaustible source of argument. But perhaps you had better not tell her that you confided in me.

"Every native is suspicious of me, and will close up like an oyster if my name is mentioned.

"But, remember— for this is serious— that you are playing with something far too powerful for you to control. Nevertheless, I should like you to go through with the thing. We may learn something tangible— that is, if you are not afraid of the consequences to yourself?"

Naturally, this suggestion made Sesson all the more anxious to continue his ink experiments; if only to show Sinclair that he was not afraid of even the inhabitants of fourth-dimensional space. Yet no doubt he would have gone on without the dare— the lure of the thing being easily understood by anyone.

And so, that twilight, going to the house, he was conscious of two pulls. There was, of course, the charm of the girl; but Sesson paused in the narrow street, to wonder if, after all, the bugle call, crying "fight," were not the more alluring. The something to be done was beginning to thrill.

His devotion to Sinclair was stronger than that of son to father, more overpowering than the subject's loyalty to his queen or king. It was a subtle fealty, born of kindness and nurtured in friendship and understanding. And to risk himself, body and soul, to aid, in his weak way, Sinclair's researches, to

assist the great man to solve what appeared to be his one unsolved problem! Why?

"To crush the Moslem in his pride" could not have more greatly stirred a crusader to action.

But the task would need all of his not tooremarkable intelligence. For Sesson was under no delusions concerning his mental status. His was the average mind of the average ship's officer, and he had the bulldog courage of the breed. And that type is neither introspective nor fond of dallying with abstraction; neither is cold logic a hobby. To dare and do his best was a conviction more soul-binding than a religion. And to do this for Sinclair carried the additional force of an emotional stimulus.

The mind of the sailor set itself, as he stood between the high, old walls of the street. Just as years before it would have set itself to the task of squaring the yards had the wind drawn aft.

Automatically he again walked slowly. Haste is agitating and this thing must be approached calmly and with unwinded lungs— no hurting pantings when the clash came, be that clash weird beyond a mortal's imagining. It was a fight to be fought. He must be at his best. To think about the end would be folly, weakness. To fight, and do his best— this must be his one continual mental picture. The man in his fine determination was doing himself an injustice. He needed no such mental reminder.

LAULEE was fascinatingly melting. Her loving was of the custard-apple sort, which she knew to be Sesson's favorite fruit. So overwhelmingly subtle is mind of woman when it wishes to be. To have played the mango, with its wonderful taste but hard center, would have been a mistake. That girl could become things, and she instinctively knew the correct thing to imitate.

All the core, the jarring center of their last meeting, had been changed into lusciousness. In that sweetness he could feel that her love was real, was abandonment. And surely, if there were any doubt of her, wise old Sinclair would have warned him.

She was a mere child, playing, through the ink, with the underlying occultism of India. And she did not know the danger of her toy. So, they were only lovers again and the world was a wealth of sweetbriar in late Spring.

They went up to the roof and, like two children, tried to count the flying foxes crossing the low moon. Like children, they pretended to quarrel about their counting. And both were very happy. So it was Sesson, feeling the call to self-abnegation, the urge to do what seemed his duty, who suggested, playfully, that they again seek pictures in the ink. Laulee was surprised, puzzled, but her answering laugh was light and lilting.

"Why, my Sesson, wouldst thou become a holy man and live in rags and with his beggar's bowl?"

He laughed back:

"No, my sweet one, I crave no fakir's austerity. To be strictly truthful, I hope, in the ink, to see thee— when thou dost not know me to be watching!"

He looked at her long and silently, put in doubt by her words and the hidden sparkle in her eyes.

Her answer was the answer of the woman of India. Men, reputed wise men, have wrangled over the possibility of telepathy; yet only an ignorant fool denies the power of suggestion. The two are one and the same, made slightly variant by the distance bridged. Whosoever does not believe this— from the lips of an agnostic— let him stain his face and body, learn language, and live as a native of India with the natives— if he has the wit not to be discovered— for twelve months. Chances are he will become as superstitious as a devotee of juju.

Again the preparations, the lowering of the light— protracted tonight, however, almost as if the actors were late and the stage and curtain must be kept back for them, by loving interruptions, which Sesson found very soothing. He even asked for more, but the lady became suddenly firm, smiled, pointed to the ink, pouting delightfully.

"Seek me there as thou didst tell me."

And Sesson— feeling like a boy caught in a lie— stared, pretending his best, after a long kiss.

Hardly had he concentrated upon the saucer, when his eyes closed and he believed himself elsewhere, and he found it very pleasant. His sensations were those of lying upon a bank of flowers, by a small stream in that delightfully lazy condition only possible to healthy tiredness, perfect nerves. Besides, he was content to let the voice talk to him. It was a fascinating voice, which rose and fell with the strangely soul-stirring sounds of an aeolian harp. As a chorus, there was the faint sob of the wind among the trees, with the whispered comments of the birds.

But, presently, Sesson knew that the voice was telling him something important— was not merely entertaining him with its beauty. So he listened carefully until, among the music of the many sounds, he came to distinguish what was meant for him. It thrilled him with memories and echoes of religion. And the theme was obedience.

But no man had ever preached or written upon obedience in the wonderfully alluring manner in which the subject was now imparted to Sesson. His soul seemed to become in tune with the voice and to answer back with emotional fervor that obedience was the whole duty of a man. In his ecstasy, it never occurred to Sesson to ask whom he should so utterly obey. It was enough

for him, then, to absorb with intense enjoyment the lesson— obey, and all things thou delightest in and seekest shall be given unto thee.

Surely, he thought, the voice must be that of some old prophet of the Bible. He became imbued with religious enthusiasm to which he had ever before been a stranger. To obey! What a wonderful, soul-entrancing Creed! To obey, obey, obey, obey.

He sat up on the flowers, anxious to begin the path of obedience. He tried to hear more, but the voice was failing. Into the scenery about him he stared, seeking the owner of the voice. He used his eyes as he would have done picking up a buoy on a dark night at sea, and— saw Laulee staring at him, her lips parted.

His experience he told to Sinclair in detail, not forgetting to mention his standing in the narrow street with the call to fight coming over him and his decision to go through with the thing, "like having trouble with the crowd forward."

But at this Sinclair frowned and shook his head.

"That's like you, of course, and I admire it. But you cannot approach this affair in that frame of mind. Think! How can you? Imagine wrestling with a being who occupied four-dimensional space. Try to picture your efforts to get a toehold on him! Won't do! Impossible. No, there is only one way for you to go into this thing, and if that way dismays or annoys you, why, we will drop the whole affair.

"The way is— as in your last experience— absolute and entire obedience. You must subjugate your will to their intentions, or nothing worthwhile will happen. You must become a mere automaton in their hands, or there will be no result. I know it sounds unattractive, if not worse; but I can promise you that you will suffer no injury. You may be somewhat inconvenienced, but only for a few days, or so. Permanent effect there will not be. You know me and can trust me. I am banking on a natural law.

Will you go through with it on these terms?"

For the first time since he had known the man, Sesson was aware of what was nothing else but a pleading note in his voice. This was remarkable.

Why was Sinclair so tremendously interested in this vague people? Sesson gave it up. It was beyond him. But Sinclair pleading! That was unnecessary.

Of course he would go through with the thing. To oblige Sinclair he would go to hell.

He did not say this. That, also, was not necessary. The men parted in full understanding.

But Sinclair spent most of the night making plans.

The matter involved great consequences and not a single inch of the track must be allowed to be out of line.

NEXT evening, Laulee's greeting savored of irony.

"My high priest of the ink must thou to thy duties at once— *ek dum*— or hast thou a tiny moment to waste on such utter uselessness as I?"

Veiling his eyes with a smile, Sesson studied her as keenly as he could; in reality, for the first time. From some hitherto nebulous intuitive faculty a truth came to him, cold and solid as a steel bar.

Or, again, it may have been the sudden repulsing of an atavism. Leaving the argument, he knew with a stinging clarity that an ironical woman is worse than dangerous, passes understanding and is false.

Love cannot stoop to irony— that is, and mean it.

But, did she mean it?

"Lady of my life," his voice had never been more lover-like, "if it pleases thee, thy slave will never again stare into ink but will spend every moment of his hours away from his work— and he needs must work, for thee— in proving to thee his utter and changeless devotion."

This, of course, in Hindustani, which he spoke well, while Laulee caught her breath. Then, before she meant to answer— emotion-driven— "But I would not ask thee to give up thy amusements, my lord."

"Thou art more to me than any play, any reward-more indeed, than my honor! What a small thing is it for me to cease to stare into ink which seems to displease thee."

"Nay, my Sesson—"

He interrupted, with a careless gesture— "Hush, sweet one, let us forget such little things, for what is a dish of black fluid?"

He was surprised at himself. Could that be Sesson, talking so incisively to Laulee? A doubt dragged him from the heights. He loved her, too greatly. Reaction came, and he felt almost as if he had struck her. With one of her lightning-like flashes— she was cobra-like in her rapidity and singleness of purpose— she struck back, one small, bare foot indicating indignation with a single stamp.

"So, that is it!" Her eyes met his, flashing venom. "In the first play thou didst doubt me, fearing I would do thee some small meanness. Then thou didst pretend to play. Now thou tirest of this pretense. It is all of a part. Thou hast all along believed me faithless. Maybe the old one told thee and like a calf thou didst bleat belief! And now, careless, thou hast as good as called me traitor!"

Her voice trailed off into heartrending plaintiveness.

"When, my lord, all I wanted in my little game was thy strengthening presence by my side."

She was in his arms, sobbing like a child wakening from nightmare.

A very cold-blooded, logical, perhaps inhuman, man might have resisted Laulee in that moment, provided he had not the slightest interest in her, did not love her. But, what chance had Sesson, pulsing passion, with five million reds, the normal bloodcount of a healthy man— and the girl's willing slave? He forgot everything; the doubt so recently roused vanished like a jet of steam. Besides, Sinclair had asked him to go through with this thing. Sesson became slightly bewildered. So the affair progressed.

But the molding was slow, and Sesson became irritated at the lack of tangibility in his inkexperiences. Nothing now but voices in a void reiterating lessons he felt he knew. This for a month. What was it all about? Why didn't something happen? The man began to doubt, but kept it to himself, that there was anything behind these weak manifestations— that it was all self-induced hypnosis. Yet Sinclair, who could not make mistakes, had asked him to go through with it? Laulee was a dear girl, who did not know what she was playing with.

The tangibility came with an overwhelming suddenness.

During the usual preparations, he found himself thinking that Laulee must have penetrated his reason for this nightly performance. Then he dismissed this thought— she, with the patient, eternal curiosity of her sex and India, was willing to continue seeking ink— truths all her life. And she did but ask his nearness as a sort of support. She had never asked him a question regarding his experiences. Remembering this last, he felt sure of her and comforted. Why comforted he did not seek to know.

OF COURSE by this time Sesson had merely to look at the ink with a momentary intentness to drift off into dreams or whatever his condition was.

This night was no exception, but hardly had he reached his usual void, when the voice said loudly and with certainty— spoke in such a way that Sesson never even thought of doubting what it told him— "Sinclair has been murdered!"

In that state, with every faculty and emotion suspended and waiting to be influenced, the words— to Sesson as truthful as if from the lips of God— swung every fiber of the man into frantic, clamoring, revengefulness. Sinclair murdered!

Then there was only one thing in life for Sesson to do, and that was to get the murderer. Further, the law should throw no protecting mantle over him.

Neither would he have the easy death of hanging.

But at this the voice protested. The murderer was too clever. He had even impersonated Sinclair, deceiving, for that day, even Sesson himself, the stout *babu*, Sinclair's personal servant, the Sikh gatekeeper. If Sesson tried long-drawn-out killing, he would fail. Thinking he had gone mad, Sinclair's men would

grapple with him. Revenged he should be, but caution must be the mother of success.

His consuming anger was natural and admirable, as for a murdered father, but a clever villain must be beaten by cleverness. No other way could win. The voice was as greatly angered as Sesson, but knew better than to act rashly.

But Sesson was in the throes of a man bound, who sees all he loves violated. He struggled to free himself, to reach, in some way, that murderer.

But a month of suggestion— the work of a master— had made Sesson pliable, obedient. The murder must be at once avenged but there must be no chance of failure. A revolver, a shot at close quarters— the only sure way. Sesson was only vaguely conscious of his surroundings. He was steady enough on his legs, but his brain— swayed and guided by the voice, by the man he felt was his friend, who held his arm— groped, as if under the influence of some powerful drug.

He knew he was leaving the house with this friend, but it never occurred to him that no man but himself had any right in the privacy of that room.

And this was not only due to the utter confidence he placed in the vague figure by his side— white or black, native or European, was something Sesson never considered— but to his having lost all interest in life, except to avenge Sinclair.

He neither saw nor thought of Laulee who, wrapped in a whirl of conflicting emotions, crouched in a corner, watching. Neither was he conscious of guiding his friend to that carefully hidden house. Yet here, he felt that, his friend knew the house, but needed Sesson's presence to gain admission. (The student of this subject will note conflicting theories, impossible of discussion here).

If his volition, if his "free-thought" had been dammed and diverted, as is a stream, there was still the ever-living effort to burst through and again flow free. And Sesson felt his right hand on the automatic in the pocket of his coat. The Sikh gatekeeper admitted them, acting as if he neither saw nor sensed anything unusual, and as Sesson and his companion walked slowly across the small compound, the keeper of the gate closed his charge and turned to watch the two men, clearly visible in a streak of moonlight. Out of the forest of hair covering his face his teeth showed whitely for an instant, in what might have been a grin or a snarl.

Then a scratching, a feeble knocking on the gate drew his attention.

He switched on the powerful light which showed what was outside and opened the lookout.

What he saw brought again the show of teeth, but this time there was no mistaking the snarl.

"So, it is thee, hellcat!" And he turned aside, to spit loudly.

"Water-buffalo!" Laulee's intense emotion had lifted her above any sort of fear or thought of self. "No doubt thou thinkest thyself a brave and clever man, and at times that may be true. But I am all that can save my *sahib* and thy *sahib* this night! Let me in, big man. Surely thou art not afraid of a woman, and such a little one?"

With her usual cleverness, the girl had made no appeal based on Sesson's love for her. But the Sikh knew of that fact, and he thought the world of Sesson. Also, he had his country's idea of women.

Their place in the scheme of things was the place of toys. They belonged to the lower side of life. Yet a Sikh or a high-caste Hindu often adores his mother! They were neither to be trusted nor treated as responsible beings. But to hurt the woman a man loves is like taking cubs from a tigress. And Sesson *sahib* was a man.

"Come in, spawn of Satan," he announced blandly, opening the gate a trifle.

As the girl slipped through, he gripped her, hurtfully. Then he closed and barred the gate.

"About thee? Is it a knife, a gun, or maybe a trained sister of thine— another snake?" he asked.

For a moment she twisted in his grip, then she gave up, and bore it.

"A knife!" She produced a curved, deadly blade.

"Hum! Keep it! Because of the honor I bear my Sesson *sahib*, neither will I search thee. Think not that this is due to any honor of thee! But, try to be the traitor thou art, and thy head falls— very swiftly!"

He drew his sword significantly.

"And while thou swellest thy chest, mouthing the brave things thou wilt do to a child, thou art preventing me from saving my sahib."

The Sikh laughed softly.

"Thinkest thou this is a hive of fools?"

Nevertheless, with his hand on her arm, he went with her towards the door of the house— sufficiently believing to leave his gate without authority.

They entered quietly. All seemed quiet. The small elevator was not running. A tiny light in a red globe showed the stairs. Against his wish, the urging of the girl caused the Sikh to hasten.

Making no more sound than two drifting feathers, they began swiftly to climb the wide staircase. They reached the first landing. Into the quiet— startling even the Sikh— the noise of a shot broke. Although he grabbed at her with the rapidity of a wrestler, and even cut at her flying legs with his sword, the girl squirmed out of his grip and fled like a streak of white up the last stairs soundless, for Laulee had left all her many bangles at home. So swiftly had she moved that it seemed to the Sikh that the noise of breaking glass came to him after she had gone!

Flashes of half-light, shadows, trick of circumstance, the unexpected, the unguessable tide of human emotion, the touch of self-denial, the craving for the thing loved, the carefully planning mind of a great man-and chance.

WHAT Laulee glimpsed through her haze of feeling, at the open door of that curiously light-dark room, was, first, Sesson standing alone, staring vacantly at what seemed to be the shattered remainder of a large mirror, his empty hands hanging at his side— an attitude that was half terror, half not understanding. In the unbreakable grasp of the two ex-dacoits, whom Sinclair employed for rough work, stood the "voice," the "friend."

But Laulee, also, saw something else and to her distraught soul the hideous danger to Sesson was magnified a thousandfold. If she made any sound at all, it was a hiss. Then she sprang, as the panther springs, at the back of the "friend," plunging the knife deeply into vital parts.

The unexpected shock of her spring loosened the dacoits' grip. Clinging, even with her teeth, to the writhing body of the "voice," her added weight dragged him from the astonished Burmans, and as she fell to the floor with her enemy she did her utmost to make the stab of the knife more deeply piercing and mortally wounding.

All this in moments. Then, as the astonished and maddened dacoits plunged again to hold the struggling but dying "friend," that person managed to scratch lightly the girl's throat with a large ring on his first finger. In a dialect understood by Sinclair alone he shrieked out some words. When the Burmans gripped him, there was no longer need of their gripping.

Sesson— feeling like a man emerging from a partial anesthetic, during which he has been helpless but always on the verge of complete consciousness— sank weakly on a couch. Laulee, gropingly but surely, crawled to his knees— upward, until he grasped her in his arms, and careless of onlookers held her head to his breast.

She sighed like a tired child, content.

In the doorway stood the Sikh, observing all things with complete understanding.

Sinclair's voice spoke from the gloom. The Burmans removed the dead "friend." The Sikh and others of Sinclair's men left the room, shutting the door. Laulee and Sesson were alone with Sinclair.

She was afraid of only one thing— that she might not be able to speak what she wished so wildly to say. And she was very tired, growing weak, and the humility of India's women was upon her.

"My boy," Sinclair's voice was very gentle. "I was sorry to put you to all this, but I saw no other course. I spoke truly when I told you that this matter was my only problem and that I did not know with whom you were dealing. Now I do

know— the words my enemy spoke as he died having told me— told me what I never guessed at, would not have credited.

"For some years I have felt an obstacle in my work and gradually it came to me, partly by intuition, that this unknown obstacle was a very clever man, or men, with but one object in life— my death. Far too cunning to chance a shot at me in the street or to employ any of the usual methods of the assassin, this obstacle was always near and I knew that some day he, or they, would find what appeared a sure way of killing me.

"It was not so much the danger of death that annoyed me— it was the eternal nuisance of having to take this obstacle into account whenever I planned anything at all. Before undertaking any task I had carefully to guard against the sudden cessation of all my work.

"If I could have obtained a tangible sign, the evidence of a single overt act, I felt capable of grappling with the man. But there was nothing I could come to grips with. The entire danger was as vague as the fourth dimension.

"I admit it began to get on my nerves, for I am not a young man. With all the power— no slight power, as you know— I command, I began to institute counter-measures against this unseen, unknown enemy, but as I said, it was like trying to put handcuffs on a mathematical X. Then, to my intense surprise— for, as you also know, I never allow any reports to be brought to me concerning the private affairs of my friends— you told me of your weird experience. Then, relieved, I knew that at last the battle was opening. I felt easily capable of winning.

"Much as I disliked doing so, I had to trick you with my 'people of the fourth dimension.' Since the enemy was keeping your mind from the truth I was compelled to take the same stand. You can see why.

"To use you against me was the best card he could have played. And it was all so subtly clever. He knew of my deafness to all reports of your acts when not actually on duty. When on duty it is necessary to know what you are doing, in the event of your needing sudden support. He banked on my knowing nothing of, er, the lady. I didn't know until you told me.

"Then he knew our racial horror of discussing such a private matter. He had reasons for feeling quite safe. It was hardly to be expected that you would say anything to me. But a certain distrust of— never mind the name— nullified the early suggestion given you. You have forgotten, but you were ordered, when 'in the ink,' not to mention either the ink or the lady to me. You broke through this inhibition— an unusual feat— and told me.

"You were no doubt asked seemingly light questions in the beginning. Had you spoken to Sinclair?

"Slowly he became sure of you and of his revenge. The thing had to be gone through with to the bitter end An old arrangement of mirrors— don't you

remember the living woman, showed in little theaters when you were a boy, whose existence apparently ended at her waist? All mirrors, cleverly arranged, made it appear that I lay facing you when he whom you believed to be your friend ordered you to shoot— to avenge me, likely as not?"

Sesson groaned an affirmative.

"Don't let it trouble you. It's all over and I am in your debt. You sacrificed yourself and your pride to help me. It was a big brave thing to do.

And, oh yes, as he died he told me— Back to the Mutiny this thing goes. Years ago, as you know, I found where the British women and children had been incarcerated— underground Calcutta.

"We smashed that den, and as I believed caught every person affiliated with its rulers, in every city in India. But one man escaped us and I did not know it. He hated everything British with a hatred we can not understand. Eh, well— was he responsible? I doubt it. I think this tells you all. Boy, we touched history tonight, and the breed will trouble us no more.

"That dead man, as well as hating me for what I was and what I have done and am doing, had further cause for vindictiveness. He was the only living son of Nana Sahib!"

At this Sesson stiffened suddenly, and Laulee gave a little cry.

"If there is something you wish to tell her," Sinclair spoke even more gently than before, "I will leave the room, while there is time."

"Eh?" Sesson voiced his lack of understanding.

THEN the girl spoke, her voice faltering:

"Do not go, *burra sahib*, for how can my lord mind kissing me goodbye in thy presence? Art thou not his father and his mother? And I want to tell you all. For in thy great wisdom it may seem well to thee, during the years that are yet to come, to tell my lord and my love that I was not all a traitor."

"Traitor?" Sesson held her more closely, not troubling to wonder why he knew so clearly that her one desire in life had always been for his love, for him.

"Little one, if it tasks thee, do not strain to tell. I think I know, and-I will tell."

"Nay, wise *sahib*, it were better for me to tell. Remember this lies heavy on my soul and it has such a little while to clean itself."

She sighed and nestled, still graceful.

"It began— my lord remembers— such a wonderful love. I was never bought! We saw, we loved— there was nothing else required. If sometimes I found myself fearing age, his tiring of me, his finding a woman of the white-log and making her his wife— all this I would forget in his arms!

"Like a girl I had played with the ink and the ink began to whisper to me— 'He will grow tired; thou wilt grow old, maybe fat; he will leave thee, forget thee and marry one of his own kind.' This, I swear by Allah, I did not believe at first.

But, as thou knowest, *burra sahib*, such fancies grow like weeds after rain. Money, much money, was offered to me— rupees for my age, when there would be no longer any love, no longer my Sesson. But I loved, and money was not enough.

"*Ai*, I was tempted, but I would not. I fell, but dared to deny my promise. But the ink-the-ink, sahib— it makes one worse than drunk! Then was offered me love— for all my life— love and my Sesson, for all mine own, forever! What woman, loving, would have refused a small deceit— coaxing to the ink— for such as that? For it was told me that there was a *sahib* whom all *sahibs* knew for an evil man, whom every *sahib* wished to see dead, but who was protected by the *sahibs*' law, which The People of the Fourth Dimension protects evil and good alike.

"It was told that the *sahib* who killed this evil one would be a hero and benefiter of all *sahibs*. But because of the law he would have to hide. He will be brave, sacrificing himself for his own kind; but he will have to flee from his own and become one of us— a native. His face stained, he will live safely among us, with money secretly given by the *sahibs*. Never able to leave us. Never to speak to the *mem-log*! Dost thou not see, little sparrow, that he will be thine all thy life? Is such love, for all thy life, not worth so small a matter with great deeds in hand?

"That was why I— foolish, love-dazed, thoughtless— became what seems like a traitor, *burra sahib*— and oh, my lord, my love, my life!"

She sobbed weakly.

"I would not call thee traitor"— Sinclair's voice was husky— "neither will thy Sesson. I would say that thou hadst loved too greatly for thy soul's peace."

"To love my lord too greatly were not possible!" An echo of the old, audacious lilt crept into her voice. "But, I must end. This night, being a woman who loved, I suspected treachery and, thank Allah, followed. Before the gate was reached I knew and felt the knife in my bosom speak to me. *Burra sahib*, didst thou not see that that dead spawn of Shitan was wearing boots?"

"I saw, and guessed the poison needle at his toes: But, loyal little lady, had he lifted a foot to scratch he would not have reached thy Sahib. Nevertheless, in what thou didst do, thou didst show thyself a princess, a woman worthy of all love."

She tried to laugh.

"A little fool even in my dying," she gasped and choked slightly.

"Nay, but a great lady who gave her life to save her love. We honor such an one above all others!"

"Then"— she could scarcely whisper— "I die content."

There had been no suggestion of a doctor, of an antidote. Both Sinclair and Sesson knew the futility of such, knew that any attempt to save life would only

make life's last moments more unhappy. Had there been pain, Sinclair had an anodyne at hand.

But the poison was as painless as it was deadly— a poison unknown to Western toxicology.

There was silence in the room. Sesson could not speak; Sinclair did not wish to. The younger man could only hold Laulee as tightly yet as gently as he could as if feeling that all he loved were slipping away from him, he would try to prevent the going.

"My lord, I was and am unworthy. Forget me and find a woman of thine own race to be the mother of thy children. Yet," her voice trailed off until Sesson had to bend his ear to her lips, "yet— yet— my love— and my lord— for this last moment— love me and forget the mem-log— and kiss me— a long kiss— farewell."

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3: The Cave of the Echoes

H. P. Blavatsky

1831-1891

In collection: *Nightmare Tales*, 1892

IN one of the distant governments of the Russian empire, in a small town on the borders of Siberia, a mysterious tragedy occurred more than thirty years ago. About six versts from the little town of P——, famous for the wild beauty of its scenery, and for the wealth of its inhabitants— generally proprietors of mines and of iron foundries— stood an aristocratic mansion. Its household consisted of the master, a rich old bachelor and his brother, who was a widower and the father of two sons and three daughters. It was known that the proprietor, Mr. Izvertzoff, had adopted his brother's children, and, having formed an especial attachment for his eldest nephew, Nicolas, lie had made him the sole heir of his numerous estates.

Time rolled on. The uncle was getting old, the nephew was coming of age. Days and years had passed in monotonous serenity, when, on the hitherto clear horizon of the quiet family, appeared a cloud. On an unlucky day one of the nieces took it into her head to study the zither. The instrument being of purely Teutonic origin, and no teacher of it residing in the neighbourhood, the indulgent uncle sent to St. Petersburg for both. After diligent search only one Professor could be found willing to trust himself in such close proximity to Siberia. It was an old German artist, who, sharing his affections equally between his instrument and a pretty blonde daughter, would part with neither. And thus it came to pass that, one fine morning, the old Professor arrived at the mansion, with his music box under one arm and his fair München leaning on the other.

From that day the little cloud began growing rapidly; for every vibration of the melodious instrument found a responsive echo in the old bachelor's heart. Music awakens love, they say, and the work begun by the zither was completed by München's blue eyes. At the expiration of six months the niece had become an expert zither player, and the uncle was desperately in love.

One morning, gathering his adopted family around him, he embraced them all very tenderly, promised to remember them in his will, and wound up by declaring his unalterable resolution to marry the blue-eyed München. After this he fell upon their necks, and wept in silent rapture. The family, understanding that they were cheated out of the inheritance, also wept; but it was for another cause. Having thus wept, they consoled themselves and tried to rejoice, for the old gentleman was sincerely beloved by all. Not all of them rejoiced, though. Nicolas, who had himself been smitten to the heart by the pretty German, and who found himself defrauded at once of his belle and of his uncle's money, neither rejoiced nor consoled himself, but disappeared for a whole day.

Meanwhile, Mr. Izvertzoff had given orders to prepare his travelling carriage on the following day, and it was whispered that he was going to the chief town of the district, at some distance from his home, with the intention of altering his will. Though very wealthy, he had no superintendant on his estate, but kept his books himself. The same evening after supper, he was heard in his room, angrily scolding his servant, who had been in his service for over thirty years. This man, Ivan, was a native of northern Asia, from Kamschatka; he had been brought up by the family in the Christian religion, and was thought to be very much attached to his master. A few days later, when the first tragic circumstance I am about to relate had brought all the police force to the spot, it was remembered that on that night Ivan was drunk; that his master, who had a horror of this vice, had paternally thrashed him, and turned him out of his room, and that Ivan had been seen reeling out of the door, and had been heard to mutter threats.

On the vast domain of Mr. Izvertzoff there was a curious cavern, which excited the curiosity of all who visited it. It exists to this day, and is well known to every inhabitant of P——. A pine forest, commencing a few feet from the garden gate, climbs in steep terraces up a long range of rocky hills, which it covers with a broad belt of impenetrable vegetation. The grotto leading into the cavern, which is known as the "Cave of the Echoes," is situated about half a mile from the site of the mansion, from which it appears as a small excavation in the hill-side, almost hidden by luxuriant plants, but not so completely as to prevent any person entering it from being readily seen from the terrace in front of the house. Entering the grotto, the explorer finds at the rear a narrow cleft; having passed through which he emerges into a lofty cavern, feebly lighted through fissures in the vaulted roof, fifty feet from the ground. The cavern itself is immense, and would easily hold between two and three thousand people. A part of it, in the days of Mr. Izvertzoff, was paved with flagstones, and was often used in the summer as a ball-room by picnic parties. Of an irregular oval, it gradually narrows into a broad corridor, which runs for several miles underground, opening here and there into other chambers, as large and lofty as the ball-room, but, unlike this, impassable otherwise than in a boat, as they are always full of water. These natural basins have the reputation of being unfathomable.

On the margin of the first of these is a small platform, with several mossy rustic seats arranged on it, and it is from this spot that the phenomenal echoes, which give the cavern its name, are heard in all their weirdness. A word pronounced in a whisper, or even a sigh, is caught up by endless mocking voices, and instead of diminishing in volume, as honest echoes do, the sound grows louder and louder at every successive repetition, until at last it bursts forth like the repercussion of a pistol shot, and recedes in a plaintive wail down the corridor.

On the day in question, Mr. Izvertzoff had mentioned his intention of having a dancing party in this cave on his wedding day, which he had fixed for an early date. On the following morning, while preparing for his drive, he was seen by his family entering the grotto, accompanied only by his Siberian servant. Half-an-hour later, Ivan returned to the mansion for a snuff-box, which his master had forgotten in his room, and went back with it to the cave. An hour later the whole house was startled by his loud cries. Pale and dripping with water, Ivan rushed in like a madman, and declared that Mr. Izvertzoff was nowhere to be found in the cave. Thinking he had fallen into the lake, he had dived into the first basin in search of him and was nearly drowned himself.

The day passed in vain attempts to find the body. The police filled the house, and louder than the rest in his despair was Nicolas, the nephew, who had returned home only to meet the sad tidings.

A dark suspicion fell upon Ivan, the Siberian. He had been struck by his master the night before, and had been heard to swear revenge. He had accompanied him alone to the cave, and when his room was searched, a box full of rich family jewellery, known to have been carefully kept in Mr. Izvertzoff's apartment, was found under Ivan's bedding. Vainly did the serf call God to witness that the box had been given to him in charge by his master himself, just before they proceeded to the cave; that it was the latter's purpose to have the jewellery reset, as he intended it for a wedding present to his bride; and that he, Ivan, would willingly give his own life to recall that of his master, if he knew him to be dead. No heed was paid to him, however, and he was arrested and thrown into prison upon a charge of murder. There he was left, for under the Russian law a criminal cannot— at any rate, he could not in those days— be sentenced for a crime, however conclusive the circumstantial evidence, unless he confessed his guilt.

After a week had passed in useless search, the family arrayed themselves in deep mourning; and, as the will originally drawn remained without a codicil, the whole of the property passed into the hands of the nephew. The old teacher and his daughter bore this sudden reverse of fortune with true Germanic phlegm, and prepared to depart. Taking again his zither under one arm, the old man was about to lead away his München by the other, when the nephew stopped him by offering himself as the fair damsel's husband in the place of his departed uncle. The change was found to be an agreeable one, and, without much ado, the young people were married.

TEN YEARS rolled away, and we meet the happy family once more at the beginning of 1859. The fair München had grown fat and vulgar. From the day of the old man's disappearance, Nicolas had become morose and retired in his habits, and many wondered at the change in him, for now he was never seen to

smile. It seemed as if his only aim in life were to find out his uncle's murderer, or rather to bring Ivan to confess his guilt. But the man still persisted that he was innocent.

An only son had been born to the young couple, and a strange child it was. Small, delicate, and ever ailing, his frail life seemed to hang by a thread. When his features were in repose, his resemblance to his uncle was so striking that the members of the family often shrank from him in terror. It was the pale shrivelled face of a man of sixty upon the shoulders of a child nine years old. He was never seen either to laugh or to play, but, perched in his high chair, would gravely sit there, folding his arms in a way peculiar to the late Mr. Izvertzoff; and thus he would remain for hours, drowsy and motionless. His nurses were often seen furtively crossing themselves at night, upon approaching him, and not one of them would consent to sleep alone with him in the nursery. His father's behaviour towards him was still more strange. He seemed to love him passionately, and at the same time to hate him bitterly. He seldom embraced or caressed the child, but, with livid cheek and staring eye, he would pass long hours watching him, as the child sat quietly in his corner, in his goblin-like, old-fashioned way.

The child had never left the estate, and few outside the family knew of his existence.

About the middle of July, a tall Hungarian traveller, preceded by a great reputation for eccentricity, wealth and mysterious powers, arrived at the town of P—— from the North, where, it was said, he had resided for many years. He settled in the little town, in company with a Shaman or South Siberian magician, on whom he was said to make mesmeric experiments. He gave dinners and parties, and invariably exhibited his Shaman, of whom he felt very proud, for the amusement of his guests. One day the notables of P—— made an unexpected invasion of the domains of Nicolas Izvertzoff, and requested the loan of his cave for an evening entertainment. Nicolas consented with great reluctance, and only after still greater hesitancy was he prevailed upon to join the party.

The first cavern and the platform beside the bottomless lake glittered with lights. Hundreds of flickering candles and torches, stuck in the clefts of the rocks, illuminated the place and drove the shadows from the mossy nooks and corners, where they had crouched undisturbed for many years. The stalactites on the walls sparkled brightly, and the sleeping echoes were suddenly awakened by a joyous confusion of laughter and conversation. The Shaman, who was never lost sight of by his friend and patron, sat in a corner, entranced as usual. Crouched on a projecting rock, about midway between the entrance and the water, with his lemon yellow, wrinkled face, flat nose, and thin beard, he looked more like an ugly stone idol than a human being. Many of the company pressed around

him and received correct answers to their questions, the Hungarian cheerfully submitting his mesmerized " subject " to cross-examination. eyes.

Suddenly one of the party, a lady, remarked that it was in that very cave that old Mr. Izvertzoff had so unaccountably disappeared ten years before. The foreigner appeared interested, and desired to learn more of the circumstances, so Nicolas was sought amid the crowd and led before the eager group. He was the host and he found it impossible to refuse the demanded narrative. He repeated the sad tale in a trembling voice, with a pallid cheek, and tears were seen glittering in his feverish The company were greatly affected, and encomiums upon the behaviour of the loving nephew in honouring the memory of his uncle and benefactor were freely circulating in whispers, when suddenly the voice of Nicolas became choked, his eyes started from their sockets, and, with a suppressed groan, he staggered back. Every eye in the crowd followed with curiosity his haggard look, as it fell and remained riveted upon a weazened little face, that peeped from behind the back of the Hungarian.

"Where do you come from? Who brought you here, child?" gasped out Nicolas, as pale as death.

"I was in bed, papa; this man came to me, and brought me here in his arms," answered the boy simply, pointing to the Shaman, beside whom he stood upon the rock, and who, with his eyes closed, kept swaying himself to and fro like a living pendulum.

"That is very strange," remarked one of the guests, for the man has never moved from his place."

"Good God! what an extraordinary resemblance!" muttered an old resident of the town, a friend of the lost man.

"You lie, child!" fiercely exclaimed the father. "Go to bed; this is no place for you."

"Come, come," interposed the Hungarian, with a strange expression on his face, and encircling with his arm the slender childish figure; "the little fellow has seen the double of my Shaman, which roams sometimes far away from his body, and has mistaken the phantom for the man himself. Let him remain with us for a while."

At these strange words the guests stared at each other in mute surprise, while some piously made the sign of the cross, spitting aside, presumably at the devil and all his works.

"By-the-bye," continued the Hungarian with a peculiar firmness of accent, and addressing the company rather than any one in particular; "why should we not try, with the help of my Shaman, to unravel the mystery hanging over the tragedy? Is the suspected party still lying in prison? What? he has not confessed up to now? This is surely very strange. But now we will learn the truth in a few minutes! Let all keep silent!"

He then approached the Tehuktchene, and immediately began his performance without so much as asking the consent of the master of the place. The latter stood rooted to the spot, as if petrified with horror, and unable to articulate a word. The suggestion met with general approbation, save from him; and the police inspector, Col. S——, especially approved of the idea.

"Ladies and gentlemen,'' said the mesmerizer in' soft tones, " allow me for this once to proceed otherwise than in my general fashion. I will employ the method of native magic. It is more appropriate to this wild place, and far more effective as you will find, than our European method of mesmerization."

Without waiting for an answer, he drew from a bag that never left his person, first a small drum, and then two little phials— one full of fluid, the other empty. With the contents of the former he sprinkled the Shaman, who fell to trembling and nodding more violently than ever. The air was filled with the perfume of spicy odours, and the atmosphere itself seemed to become clearer. Then, to the horror of those present, he approached the Tibetan, and taking a miniature stiletto from his pocket, he plunged the sharp steel into the man's forearm, and drew blood from it, which he caught in the empty phial. When it was half filled, he pressed the orifice of the wound with his thumb, and stopped the flow of blood as easily as if he had corked a bottle, after which he sprinkled the blood over the little boy's head. He then suspended the drum from his neck, and, with two ivory drum-sticks, which were covered with magic signs and letters, he began beating a sort of reveille, to drum up the spirits, as he said.

The bystanders, half-shocked and half-terrified by these extraordinary proceedings, eagerly crowded round him, and for a few moments a dead silence reigned throughout the lofty cavern. Nicolas, with his face livid and corpse-like, stood speechless as before. The mesmerizer had placed himself between the Shaman and the platform, when he began slowly drumming. The first notes were muffled, and vibrated so softly in the air that they awakened no echo, but the Shaman quickened his pendulum-like motion and the child became restless. The drummer then began a slow chant, low, impressive and solemn.

As the unknown words issued from his lips, the flames of the candles and torches wavered and flickered, until they began dancing in rhythm with the chant. A cold wind came wheezing from the dark corridors beyond the water, leaving a plaintive echo in its trail. Then a sort of nebulous vapour, seeming to ooze from the rocky ground and walls, gathered about the Shaman and the boy. Around the latter the aura was silvery and transparent, but the cloud which enveloped the former was red and sinister. Approaching nearer to the platform the magician beat a louder roll upon the drum, and this time the echo caught it up with terrific effect! It reverberated near and far in incessant peals; one wail followed another, louder and louder, until the thundering roar seemed the chorus of a thousand demon voices rising from the fathomless depths of the

lake. The water itself, whose surface, illuminated by many lights, had previously been smooth as a sheet of glass, became suddenly agitated, as if a powerful gust of wind had swept over its unruffled face.

Another chant, and a roll of the drum, and the mountain trembled to its foundation with the cannon-like peals which rolled through the dark and distant corridors. The Shaman's body rose two yards in the air, and nodding and swaying, sat, self-suspended like an apparition. But the transformation which now occurred in the boy chilled everyone, as they speechlessly watched the scene. The silvery cloud about the boy now seemed to lift him, too, into the air; but, unlike the Shaman, his feet never left the ground. The child began to grow, as though the work of years was miraculously accomplished in a few seconds. He became tall and large, and his senile features grew older with the ageing of his body. A few more seconds, and the youthful form had entirely disappeared. It was totally absorbed in another individuality, and, to the horror of those present who had been familiar with his appearance, this individuality was that of old Mr. Izvertzoff, and on his temple was a large gaping wound, from which trickled great drops of blood.

This phantom moved towards Nicolas, till it stood directly in front of him, while he, with his hair standing erect, with the look of a madman gazed at his own son, transformed into his uncle. The sepulchral silence was broken by the Hungarian, who, addressing the child phantom, asked him, in solemn voice: "In the name of the great Master, of Him who has all power, answer the truth, and nothing but the truth. Restless spirit, hast thou been lost by accident, or foully murdered?"

The spectre's lips moved, but it was the echo which answered for them in lugubrious shouts: "Murdered! murdered!! mur-der-ed!!!"

"Where? How? By whom?" asked the conjuror.

The appartition pointed a finger at Nicolas and, without removing its gaze or lowering its arm, retreated backwards slowly towards the lake. At every step it took, the younger Izvertzoff, as if compelled by some irresistible fascination, advanced a step towards it, until the phantom reached the lake, and the next moment was seen gliding on its surface. It was a fearful, ghostly scene!

When he had come within two steps of the brink of the watery abyss, a violent convulsion ran through the frame of the guilty man. Flinging himself upon his knees, he clung to one of the rustic seats with a desperate clutch, and staring wildly, uttered a long piercing cry of agony. The phantom now remained motionless on the water, and bending its extended finger, slowly beckoned him to come. Crouched in abject terror, the wretched man shrieked until the cavern rang again and again: "I did not... No, I did not murder you!"

Then came a splash, and now it was the boy who was in the dark water, struggling for his life, in the middle of the lake, with the same motionless stern apparition brooding over him.

"Papa! papa ! Save me... I am drowning!" cried a piteous little voice amid the uproar of the mocking echoes.

"My boy!" shrieked Nicolas, in the accents of a maniac, springing to his feet. "My boy! Save him! Oh, save him!... Yes, I confess... I am the murderer.... It is I who killed him!"

Another splash, and the phantom disappeared. With a cry of horror the company rushed towards the platform; but their feet were suddenly rooted to the ground, as they saw amid the swirling eddies a whitish shapeless mass holding the murderer and the boy in tight embrace, and slowly sinking into the bottomless lake....

On the morning after these occurrences, when, after a sleepless night, some of the party visited the residence of the Hungarian gentleman, they found it closed and deserted. He and the Shaman had disappeared. Many are among the old inhabitants of P—— who remember him; the Police Inspector, Col. S——, dying a few years ago in the full assurance that the noble traveller was the devil. To add to the general consternation the Izvertzoff mansion took fire on that same night and was completely destroyed. The Archbishop performed the ceremony of exorcism, but the locality is considered accursed to this day. The Government investigated the facts, and— ordered silence.

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4: Personal Adventures in the Spirit World

Stephen Leacock

1869-1944

In: *Frenzied Fiction*, 1918

I DO NOT write what follows with the expectation of convincing or converting anybody. We Spiritualists, or Spiritists— we call ourselves both, or either— never ask anybody to believe us. If they do, well and good. If not, all right. Our attitude simply is that facts are facts. There they are; believe them or not as you like. As I said the other night, in conversation with Aristotle and John Bunyan and George Washington and a few others, why should anybody believe us? Aristotle, I recollect, said that all that he wished was that everybody should know how happy he was; and Washington said that for his part, if people only knew how bright and beautiful it all was where he was, they would willingly, indeed gladly, pay the mere dollar— itself only a nominal fee— that it cost to talk to him. Bunyan, I remember, added that he himself was quite happy.

But, as I say, I never ask anybody to believe me; the more so as I was once an absolute sceptic myself. As I see it now, I was prejudiced. The mere fact that spiritual seances and the services of a medium involved the payment of money condemned the whole thing in my eyes. I did not realize, as I do now, that these *medii*, like anybody else, have got to live; otherwise they would die and become spirits.

Nor would I now place these disclosures before the public eyes were if not that I think that in the present crisis they will prove of value to the Allied cause.

But let me begin at the beginning. My own conversion to spiritualism came about, like that of so many others, through the more or less casual remark of a Friend.

Noticing me one day gloomy and depressed, this Friend remarked to me:

"Have you any belief in Spiritualism?"

Had it come from anyone else, I should have turned the question aside with a sneer. But it so happens that I owe a great deal of gratitude to this particular Friend. It was he who, at a time when I was so afflicted with rheumatism that I could scarcely leap five feet into the air without pain, said to me one day quite casually: "Have you ever tried pyro for your rheumatism?" One month later I could leap ten feet in the air— had I been able to— without the slightest malaise. The same man, I may add, hearing me one day exclaiming to myself: "Oh, if there were anything that would remove the stains from my clothes!" said to me very simply and quietly: "Have you ever washed them in luxo?" It was he, too, who, noticing a haggard look on my face after breakfast one morning, inquired immediately what I had been eating for breakfast; after which, with a

simplicity and directness which I shall never forget, he said: "Why not eat humpo?"

Nor can I ever forget my feeling on another occasion when, hearing me exclaim aloud: "Oh, if there were only something invented for removing the proteins and amygdaloids from a carbonized diet and leaving only the pure nitrogenous life-giving elements!" seized my hand in his, and said in a voice thrilled with emotion: "There is! It has!"

The reader will understand, therefore, that a question, or query, from such a Friend was not to be put lightly aside. When he asked if I believed in Spiritualism I answered with perfect courtesy:

"To be quite frank, I do not."

There was silence between us for a time, and then my Friend said:

"Have you ever given it a trial?"

I paused a moment, as the idea was a novel one.

"No," I answered, "to be quite candid, I have not."

Neither of us spoke for perhaps twenty minutes after this, when my Friend said:

"Have you anything against it?"

I thought awhile and then I said:

"Yes, I have."

My Friend remained silent for perhaps half an hour. Then he asked:

"What?"

I meditated for some time. Then I said:

"This— it seems to me that the whole thing is done for money. How utterly unnatural it is to call up the dead— one's great-grandfather, let us say— and pay money for talking to him."

"Precisely," said my Friend without a moment's pause. "I thought so. Now suppose I could bring you into contact with the spirit world through a medium, or through different *medii*, without there being any question of money, other than a merely nominal fee, the money being, as it were, left out of count, and regarded as only, so to speak, nominal, something given merely *pro forma* and *ad interim*. Under these circumstances, will you try the experiment?"

I rose and took my Friend's hand.

"My dear fellow," I said, "I not only will, but I shall."

From this conversation dated my connection with Spiritualism, which has since opened for me a new world.

It would be out of place for me to indicate the particular address or the particular methods employed by the agency to which my Friend introduced me. I am anxious to avoid anything approaching a commercial tinge in what I write. Moreover, their advertisement can be seen along with many others— all, I am sure, just as honourable and just as trustworthy— in the columns of any daily

newspaper. As everybody knows, many methods are employed. The tapping of a table, the movement of a ouija board, or the voice of a trance medium, are only a few among the many devices by which the spirits now enter into communication with us. But in my own case the method used was not only simplicity itself, but was so framed as to carry with it the proof of its own genuineness. One had merely to speak into the receiver of a telephone, and the voice of the spirit was heard through the transmitter as in an ordinary telephone conversation.

It was only natural, after the scoffing remark that I had made, that I should begin with my great-grandfather. Nor can I ever forget the peculiar thrill that went through me when I was informed by the head of the agency that a tracer was being sent out for Great-grandfather to call him to the phone.

Great-grandfather— let me do him this justice— was prompt. He was there in three minutes. Whatever his line of business was in the spirit world— and I was never able to learn it— he must have left it immediately and hurried to the telephone. Whatever later dissatisfaction I may have had with Great-grandfather, let me state it fairly and honestly, he is at least a punctual man. Every time I called he came right away without delay. Let those who are inclined to cavil at the methods of the Spiritualists reflect how impossible it would be to secure such punctuality on anything but a basis of absolute honesty.

In my first conversation with Great-grandfather, I found myself so absurdly nervous at the thought of the vast gulf of space and time across which we were speaking that I perhaps framed my questions somewhat too crudely.

"How are you, great-grandfather?" I asked.

His voice came back to me as distinctly as if he were in the next room:

"I am happy, very happy. Please tell everybody that I am *happy*."

"Great-grandfather," I said. "I will. I'll see that everybody knows it. Where are you, great-grandfather?"

"Here," he answered, "beyond."

"Beyond what?"

"Here on the other side."

"Side of which?" I asked.

"Of the great vastness," he answered. "The other end of the Illimitable."

"Oh, I see," I said, "that's where you are."

We were silent for some time. It is amazing how difficult it is to find things to talk about with one's great-grandfather. For the life of me I could think of nothing better than:

"What sort of weather have you been having?"

"There is no weather here," said Great-grandfather. "It's all bright and beautiful all the time."

"You mean bright sunshine?" I said.

"There is no sun here," said Great-grandfather.

"Then how do you mean—" I began.

But at this moment the head of the agency tapped me on the shoulder to remind me that the two minutes' conversation for which I had deposited, as a nominal fee, five dollars, had expired. The agency was courteous enough to inform me that for five dollars more Great-grandfather would talk another two minutes.

But I thought it preferable to stop for the moment.

Now I do not wish to say a word against my own great-grandfather. Yet in the conversations which followed on successive days I found him— how shall I put it?— unsatisfactory. He had been, when on this side— to use the term we Spiritualists prefer— a singularly able man, an English judge; so at least I have always been given to understand. But somehow Great-grandfather's brain, on the other side, seemed to have got badly damaged. My own theory is that, living always in the bright sunshine, he had got sunstroke. But I may wrong him. Perhaps it was locomotor ataxy that he had. That he was very, very happy where he was is beyond all doubt. He said so at every conversation. But I have noticed that feeble-minded people are often happy. He said, too, that he was glad to be where he was; and on the whole I felt glad that he was too. Once or twice I thought that possibly Great-grandfather felt so happy because he had been drinking: his voice, even across the great gulf, seemed somehow to suggest it. But on being questioned he told me that where he was there was no drink and no thirst, because it was all so bright and beautiful. I asked him if he meant that it was "bone-dry" like Kansas, or whether the rich could still get it? But he didn't answer.

Our intercourse ended in a quarrel. No doubt it was my fault. But it *did* seem to me that Great-grandfather, who had been one of the greatest English lawyers of his day, might have handed out an opinion.

The matter came up thus: I had had an argument— it was in the middle of last winter— with some men at my club about the legal interpretation of the Adamson Law. The dispute grew bitter.

"I'm right," I said, "and I'll prove it if you give me time to consult the authorities."

"Consult your great-grandfather!" sneered one of the men.

"All right," I said, "I will."

I walked straight across the room to the telephone and called up the agency.

"Give me my great-grandfather," I said. "I want him right away."

He was there. Good, punctual old soul, I'll say that for him. He was there.

"Great-grandfather," I said, "I'm in a discussion here about the constitutionality of the Adamson Law, involving the power of Congress under

the Constitution. Now, you remember the Constitution when they made it. Is the law all right?"

There was silence.

"How does it stand, great-grandfather?" I said. "Will it hold water?"

Then he spoke.

"Over here," he said, "there are no laws, no members of Congress and no Adamsons; it's all bright and beautiful and—"

"Great-grandfather," I said, as I hung up the receiver in disgust, "you are a Mutt!"

I never spoke to him again. Yet I feel sorry for him, feeble old soul, flitting about in the Illimitable, and always so punctual to hurry to the telephone, so happy, so feeble-witted and courteous; a better man, perhaps, take it all in all, than he was in life; lonely, too, it may be, out there in the Vastness. Yet I never called him up again. He is happy. Let him stay.

Indeed, my acquaintance with the spirit world might have ended at that point but for the good offices, once more, of my Friend.

"You find your great-grandfather a little slow, a little dull?" he said. "Well, then, if you want brains, power, energy, why not call up some of the spirits of the great men, some of the leading men, for instance, of your great-grandfather's time?"

"You've said it!" I exclaimed. "I'll call up Napoleon Bonaparte."

I hurried to the agency.

"Is it possible," I asked, "for me to call up the Emperor Napoleon and talk to him?"

Possible? Certainly. It appeared that nothing was easier. In the case of Napoleon Bonaparte the nominal fee had to be ten dollars in place of five; but it seemed to me that, if Great-grandfather cost five, Napoleon Bonaparte at ten was cheapness itself.

"Will it take long to get him?" I asked anxiously.

"We'll send out a tracer for him right away," they said.

Like Great-grandfather, Napoleon was punctual. That I will say for him. If in any way I think less of Napoleon Bonaparte now than I did, let me at least admit that a more punctual, obliging, willing man I never talked with.

He came in two minutes.

"He's on the line now," they said.

I took up the receiver, trembling.

"Hello!" I called. "*Est-ce que c'est l'Empereur Napoleon a qui j'ai l'honneur de parler*?"

"How's that?" said Napoleon.

"*Je demande si je suis en communication avec l'Empereur Napoleon*—"

"Oh," said Napoleon, "that's all right; speak English."

"What!" I said in surprise. "You know English? I always thought you couldn't speak a word of it."

He was silent for a minute. Then he said:

"I picked it up over here. It's all right. Go right ahead."

"Well," I continued, "I've always admired you so much, your wonderful brain and genius, that I felt I wanted to speak to you and ask you how you are."

"Happy," said Napoleon, "very happy."

"That's good," I said. "That's fine! And how is it out there? All bright and beautiful, eh?"

"Very beautiful," said the Emperor.

"And just where are you?" I continued. "Somewhere out in the Unspeakable, I suppose, eh?"

"Yes," he answered, "out here beyond."

"That's good," I said. "Pretty happy, eh?"

"Very happy," said Napoleon. "Tell everybody how happy I am."

"I know," I answered. "I'll tell them all. But just now I've a particular thing to ask. We've got a big war on, pretty well the whole world in it, and I thought perhaps a few pointers from a man like you—"

But at this point the attendant touched me on the shoulder. "Your time is up," he said.

I was about to offer to pay at once for two minutes more when a better idea struck me. Talk with Napoleon? I'd do better than that. I'd call a whole War Council of great spirits, lay the war crisis before them and get the biggest brains that the world ever produced to work on how to win the war.

Who should I have? Let me see! Napoleon himself, of course. I'd bring him back. And for the sea business, the submarine problem, I'd have Nelson. George Washington, naturally, for the American end; for politics, say, good old Ben Franklin, the wisest old head that ever walked on American legs, and witty too; yes, Franklin certainly, if only for his wit to keep the council from getting gloomy; Lincoln— honest old Abe— him certainly I must have. Those and perhaps a few others.

I reckoned that a consultation at ten dollars apiece with spirits of that class was cheap to the verge of the ludicrous. Their advice ought to be worth millions— yes, billions— to the cause.

The agency got them for me without trouble. There is no doubt they are a punctual crowd, over there beyond in the Unthinkable.

I gathered them all in and talked to them, all and severally, the payment, a merely nominal matter, being made, *pro forma*, in advance.

I have in front of me in my rough notes the result of their advice. When properly drafted it will be, I feel sure, one of the most important state documents produced in the war.

In the personal sense— I have to admit it— I found them just a trifle disappointing. Franklin, poor fellow, has apparently lost his wit. The spirit of Lincoln seemed to me to have none of that homely wisdom that he used to have. And it appears that we were quite mistaken in thinking Disraeli a brilliant man; it is clear to me now that he was dull— just about as dull as Great-grandfather, I should say. Washington, too, is not at all the kind of man we thought him.

Still, these are only personal impressions. They detract nothing from the extraordinary value of the advice given, which seems to me to settle once and for ever any lingering doubt about the value of communications with the Other Side.

My draft of their advice runs in part as follows:

The Spirit of Nelson, on being questioned on the submarine problem, holds that if all the men on the submarines were where he is everything would be bright and happy. This seems to me an invaluable hint. There is nothing needed now except to put them there.

The advice of the Spirit of Napoleon about the campaign on land seemed to me, if possible, of lower value than that of Nelson on the campaign at sea. It is hardly conceivable that Napoleon has forgotten where the Marne is. But it may have changed since his day. At any rate, he says that, if ever the Russians cross the Marne, all is over. Coming from such a master-strategist, this ought to be attended to.

Franklin, on being asked whether the United States had done right in going into the war, said "Yes"; asked whether the country could with honour have stayed out, he said "No." There is guidance here for thinking men of all ranks.

Lincoln is very happy where he is. So, too, I was amazed to find, is Disraeli. In fact, it was most gratifying to learn that all of the great spirits consulted are very happy, and want everybody to know how happy they are. Where they are, I may say, it is all bright and beautiful.

Fear of trespassing on their time prevented me from questioning each of them up to the full limit of the period contracted for.

I understand that I have still to my credit at the agency five minutes' talk with Napoleon, available at any time, and similarly five minutes each with Franklin and Washington, to say nothing of ten minutes' unexpired time with Great-grandfather.

All of these opportunities I am willing to dispose of at a reduced rate to anyone still sceptical of the reality of the spirit world.

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5: The Imperturbable Duchess

J. D. Beresford

1873-1947

The Harpers Monthly, Aug 1913.

WHILE it is difficult to defend Cunningham Black, his conduct needs no explanation. That *diablerie* which spices all his writing is characteristic of the man himself; there is more than a hint of the satyr about him. The two waves of hair on each side of his forehead inevitably suggest horns, and the set of His eyes, the half-whimsical cynicism of his expression, are all in keeping with the popular conception of the hoofed devil. Lastly, his extraordinary thinness, which is emphasized by his prim, neat dress; his narrow, bony hands and feet, the curious squareness of his little shoulders, all heighten the impish effect of him.

As to the origin of the long campaign— that, too, is easily explained, Cunningham Black was the son of a bookseller, and although he had made himself acceptable to society by his cleverness and his wonderful adaptability, he was always a little over-assertive. He had not forgotten the bookseller's shop, and he continually persuaded himself into a contempt for those who moved so easily in ways which he had studied with long effort. Doubtless he tried very earnestly to despise these people with whom he loved to be seen.

Everyone now knows the other protagonist. The unhappy Valetta, Duchess of Tottenham, has attained a celebrity she neither desired nor deserved. Her very tricks of manner and speech are familiar to the general public. Unhappy she certainly is, and for no fault of her own.

There were no less than three Duchesses of Tottenham when the trouble began, and was the younger of the two dowagers. She was, in fact, quite terribly poor for her position, and she cannot be blamed for staying with the Davidsons, or with any other people in whose, houses she could really economize. Meanness in the matter of tipping the servants was excusable in a duchess.

Black was not in an unusually bad temper when the incident happened. He had lunched on the corridor-train, not to his complete satisfaction, hut still sufficiently, and when he had found a first-class smoking-carriage on the branch line and settled himself down to a very decent cigar, he was probably in a fairly comfortable humor. Then, just as the train was starting, Valetta was ushered with some ceremony into his empty compartment.

Black did not know that it was the Duchess ; he did nut know that the Duchess was going to the Davidsons. He only knew that a thin, middle-aged, rather expensively dressed woman in a pince-nez had been thrust upon him, and he resented it. He realized, too, the fact that she was treated with much deference by the attendant guard. There was an innate radicalism in Black which was always up in arms against this show of deference to the upper classes.

He had put up his long, thin feet on the cushion of the opposite seat, and he withdrew them very deliberately when he found that the intruding woman intended to enter that compartment and no other.

The train started immediately; the Duchess, already affronted, took her seat in the corner by the farther door, and Black put his feet up again and continued his cigar.

The Duchess coughed and let down the window. She had her back to the engine; Black was facing it, and he was immediately conscious of a draught. He scowled at his companion and turned up the collar of his overcoat,.

The Duchess coughed again— a cough which perfectly expressed her dislike of the cigar and the smoker of it.

Black was exasperated. "Why travel in a smoking-carriage, madam, if you object to the smell of smoke?" he asked, acidly. "The train is not full."

"I did not notice," said Valetta, and put her head a little back to stare at this impossible fellow-traveler of hers. It was a trick of hers; she had put her head back in precisely the same way when she was a spectacled school-girl of fourteen, long before she had any hope of becoming a duchess.

Black put her pose down to aristocratic intolerance. He shrugged his shoulders, looked at the ground- glass legend on the window and then at his cigar.

"You can change at the nest station," he said.

"Insufferable!" said Valetta, addressing the window on her own side of the carriage. She was quite cool, and she spoke with perfect, distinctness.

That word roused all that was worst in Black, but it immediately cooled his temper. This was a declaration of war, and he was far too clever to fight when he was angry.

He opened the window beside him and threw away his less than half-smoked cigar, put down his feet, tossed his hat onto the rack, and so prepared the ground to give battle on even terms.

"Under these new conditions," he said, "may I be allowed to close that window?"

Valetta gave a slight inclination of her head, and continued to take an absorbing interest in the landscape.

Black got up and closed the window, quite politely.

When he had returned to his seat, he said calmly, with something of a judicial air, "I shall change compartments at the next station, but I should like to point out that it is you who owe an apology, not myself."

Valetta turned and looked at him with the same lift of the head, smiled faintly, and turned away again.

Black was badly nettled, but he controlled his voice. "I don't press the point of the apology," he said. "Put it, if you like, that I am elaborating my own

defense. I am aggrieved. You seriously interfere with my comfort, presume beyond all limits on the privileges of your sex, and then calmly assume that I am in the wrong throughout. I resent your attitude, your calm assumption of superiority. I analyze the situation from a purely detached point of view, and I can find no excuse for your attitude."

Valetta had a grave failing. She lacked any sense of humor. That sense would have saved the situation, but she failed completely to appreciate that this scene was pure comedy. Her only refuge was dignity. No one could deny that she had dignity.

She turned to Black, lifted her pince-nez, and held it, somewhat after the manner of a lorgnette, a little in front, of her eyes— she had always suffered from bad sight. She studied him for a moment, and then, as the train was already slackening speed, she said, "If you will kindly open the door for me, I will change carriages."

"I have said that I will save you the necessity," returned Black.

The train stopped, and Valetta, who was on the platform side, held up a hand to some official visible on the station. The official— it chanced to be the stationmaster— leaped to open the door for her. She made a regal exit, leaving her new-found vassal to collect such small belongings as she had brought with her and transfer them to another carriage.

Black was left to light another cigar and ponder the things he ought to have said. He was conscious of a distinct feeling of regret that he would in all probability never have an opportunity of saying any of those things to the person whom they concerned. That regret was soon wiped away.

When he arrived at the station for the Davidsons' place, he had some difficulty in finding a porter. There was only one, and he and the station-master were both engaged on behalf of Black's late traveling companion ; they were giving their whole attention to the instructions of the Duchess's maid. Valetta sailed straight out of the station and entered the Davidson motor. When Black at last received attention, ho found that he would share the Davidson omnibus with the Duchess's maid and the Duchess's luggage.

He had quite grasped the situation, and he had plenty of time during his eight-mile drive behind the third best pair of carriage-horses to consider his plan of campaign. Whatever Black's failings, he had courage and confidence.

They met within ten minutes of Black's arrival.

Valetta had spent the interval in the rooms set. apart for her, and had done her best without maid or heavy luggage to make herself presentable. Her best was little enough, and she had not, taken off her hat when she came into the drawing-room for tea.

Black had just sat down; he was in the Duchess's direct path toward her hostess, and he got up gracefully and moved to one side. He was always at home among furniture, never in the least embarrassed, gauche, or clumsy.

Introductions were not the rule at the Davidsons, but the Duchess was outside all ordinary rules. Other visitors were not introduced to her; they were presented.

Little Mrs. Davidson cast a quick glance round the members of her house-party in search of strangers, and noted Claude Greening, the brilliant young member for Brittleworth, and Cunningham Black. She gave Greening the preference.

"Oh, Duchess," said Mrs. Davidson, "may I? I don't think Mr. Greening is known to you— for Brittleworth, you remember; and Mr. Cunningham Black— the writer, you know."

Greening- bowed, a shade too formally. Black smiled, and gave a faint inclination of the head. " Curiously enough," he said, "the Duchess and I traveled part of the way down together, and though quite unknown to each other, of course, we had quite an interesting discussion on the feminist question."

Mrs. Davidson beamed— dear Mr. Black was such a help; he was always so amusing and interesting. She caught her breath with a gasp — a curious little way she had before speaking, as if she had just finished a deflating laugh— but before she could begin, the Duchess took up the conversation.

Valetta 's eye had rested for one moment upon Black, and then had wandered away from him as if he were some negligible little animal that had brought upon itself a moment's undeserved attention.

"So interested in your speeches, Mr. Greening," she said, "so— so— er — interesting I found them." She was not in the least discomposed, but she wan characteristically unable to put a sentence together or to give utterance to any remark that was not platitudinous or in some way banal. She had never even posed as a clever woman.

Greening bowed again, muttered something about being highly complimented, then pulled himself together, cleared his throat, and said, "Reporters make rather a hash of one, though," and proceeded to tell a story of a reporter's, or printer's, error in the rendering of one of his own efforts.

It was rather a dull story, but the Duchess gave it most nattering attention. At its conclusion she caught at the word "misrepresent," which Greening had used, and said, "You must find it very annoying when you are— they misrepresent you like that; it must be so annoying,"

"Extremely," replied Greening, and cleared his throat again, but Mrs. Davidson and Black both rushed in to head off any further stories of the same type. Mrs. Davidson's gasp gave Black the lead.

"One may be misrepresented without being reported," he remarked. He raised his voice slightly and gathered in the attention of other groups which, temporarily alienated by Greening, had fallen into private discussions.

"Personally," he went on, "I find it rather amusing; I suppose it is only the very earnest, sincere people like politicians and other professions beginning with a "p," like popular preachers and philanthropists and public prosecutors, who simply can't bear to be misconstrued. I've been fortunate in being consistently misunderstood; if any one bad ever taken me seriously, I should hove been living in an attic now, like all the other writers with a purpose*"

Valetta tried to change the topic, but she could not think of any remark to make. She never took the initiative in conversation; she had a way of permitting other people to speak to her, and she was out of practice. She did begin by saying, "Er— ahem!" but as no more interesting continuation suggested itself— she was bewilderedly trying to think of something that began with a "p"— she repeated her opening in a different tone, giving it a bronchial inflection which suggested some misguided cake-crumb in the ducal and always magnificently dignified throat. Valetta could have choked with dignity.

Black had the game all to himself. He had a whimsical manner which always gave interest to his conversation. If the things he said were not actually funny, his expression and gestures made them appear so.

"As an instance," he said, "of how one may be misunderstood. I was in the train a few days ago, just recovering from a railway lunch. Had to change onto a branch line and got a smoking-carriage all to myself, making myself really comfortable, when a dignified lady in a pince-nez got in just as the train was starting. It wasn't, a corridor; no escape for either of us. Her magnificence— philanthropist probably, certainly one of the people who begin with a capital "P"; might have been a peeress— anyway, she objected to smoking. Didn't say anything, you understand, hut looked and coughed and opened the window; very dignified all the time."

Black's expression conveyed an impression of the lady's dignity so well that even the foot-man who was handing the tea had to fetch cakes from a side-table. Black had his audience well in hand. He shrugged his shoulders and continued: "What could I do? I threw away my just- lighted cigar, I took my feet off the cushions, I even took off my cap— still the lady looked affronted. Then— a mistake, I admit— I tried to defend myself. I put it quite politely that I was not the aggressive party. I said I would change compartments at the nest station, but that I could not bear to be misunderstood. I wanted to make it plain that I had had no idea when I took my seat that this was the particular compartment in which she always traveled, I was humble and, I hope, delicately apologetic. But, no! I received no sign of forgiveness."

"What a weird person," interpolated one of Black's listeners.

Black held up his hand, "Ah! Put I have a theory," he said. "Is it possible that this lady could have been a princess, traveling incognita, some very elect person who was unable to recognize my right to exist in the same compartment?"

A chorus of incredulity greeted this theory, but before Black could get a hearing Valetta very distinctly "er— ahemmed" again. She had thought of a remark.

"How are the pheasants doing this year?" she asked, addressing Mrs. Davidson, and Black got no further chance to claim the general attention. The point of his theory was lost. Every one gave way to the Duchess.

Black had all the qualities that go to the making of success, and chief among them was that which in a statesman or a general might be dignified as an iron will. In the present case it may he spoken of as pertinacity. He was thirty-five, and twenty years incessant attention to various problems had not only made his name familiar to a large reading public, but had also raised him to Such an assured position in literature that his books received long reviews on the day of publication. And had not his assiduity and genius received even greater rewards than these ? Was he not to be found, a welcome guest, in a house-party that included a duchess? But this very gift for persistence, newly combining with that radical flaw in him which can only be traced to an hereditary taint, was working now to doubtful ends. He had such confidence in his position that he was determined to humiliate Valetta, Duchess of Tottenham. She was a stupid woman; she had nothing but her dignity; she should be taught that the brains of a genius were worth more than an hereditary title, however magnificent. Cunningham Black was piqued, and he had pertinacity.

He begun his reasoned campaign at dinner that evening. He sat a long way from Valetta at the table, hut that very fact gave him an opportunity.

The dinner began badly. For some reason there was a slight atmosphere of constraint. People seemed bored with one another, and none of them made the least attempt to claim the general attention. In vain did Mrs. Davidson gasp and bubble, speak to Mr. Greening across two intervening guests, and to Professor Barrett across four, in the endeavor to draw some interesting topic from them. Most vainly did she throw a beseeching glance at Cunningham Black; he was deliberately glum; he recognized that the whole party was flat, and he meant it to remain flat until he exerted his power; he meant to prove his capacity and value later. Mrs. Davidson relapsed into conversation with her dull partner, Lord Graves; she was export hostess enough to know when her victors wanted to be let alone.

Then, somewhere about the sixth course. Black exerted himself. In his own dry, excellently restrained way, he began to exercise his wit. He aroused a ripple of laughter; one by one he collected hearers from remote corners of the table; he evoked discussion; and when the dessert was set and the servants had left

the room, he began a story to which every one listened except the Duchess and Davidson; and Davidson would have listened if he had been permitted.

But as Black told his story he was giving all his attention to the far end of the table, however much he appeared to be addressing the company at large. He was keeping his story going and awaiting his opportunity. Out of the corner of his eye he could see Valetta deeply pondering some remark to recall the attention of the erring Davidson, who had been unsuccessfully endeavoring to keep up a conversation with his apparently deeply interested partner while he tried to catch the point of the story that was creating so much amusement.

Black was nearing the climax when he suddenly held up his hand and leaned forward. The laughter subsided, an expectant silence fell over the whole table, and precisely at that moment of breathless suspense the voice o£ Valetta was heard to say very clearly, "Er— ahem! How are the pheasants doing this year?"

Some silly ingénue tittered, and even the most diplomatic were unable to refrain from a glance toward the head of the table.

By all Black's calculation the Duchess should have looked extremely foolish, but, Valetta put her head back slightly, looked down the table with a gentle smile of tolerant approval, and turned to receive her host's answer.

It was certainly not Valetta who was covered with confusion, but many others of the Davidsons' guests had a curious feeling that they had been betrayed into a breach of good manners, and later they sought opportunities of amusing the Duchess, and it was noticeable that Black was not quite a success. It almost seemed that the avoidance of Black was a recommendation to favor in the eyes of the Duchess. Greening, for instance, was plainly in the ducal good books, although he was most distinctly a bore. Uncharitable people said that Valetta's slight deafness accounted for her favor of Greening— she did not hear half he said.

It was not Black's fault, so much was tacitly agreed. He was not responsible for that contretemps of the dinner-table. He happened to be unlucky, that was all, but unlucky people were not in vogue with those who sought the honor of aristocratic recognition.

Black himself was peculiarly sensitive to atmospheres, and he saw very clearly that he must play his game with great caution. In that house it would be fatal to whisper any insinuation against the Duchess— her slight deafness, her stupidity, her silly little mannerisms were all covered with the glamour that surrounds the ducal coronet. At the back of his mind he was quite conscious that, despite those twenty assiduous years, he had not overcome the reproach of the bookseller's shop. Valetta might be rude, might commit almost any solecism, and at the worst her rudeness might be attributed to eccentricity. Let Cunningham Black make one mistake in breeding, and it would he brought

against him as a damning accusation; it would be a *faux pas*; it would be evidence of his up-bringing.

So he walked very warily at the Davidsons', and, afraid to make new opportunity, waited for one to be presented. But when such opportunity came it was too slight to afford him any real satisfaction, and never did Valetta lose for one instant her personal dignity.

Defeated but not disheartened, Black undertook to solve the problem as he had solved so many others. Its very difficulty attracted him. But in this house his handicap was too great. He left the Davidsons' three days earlier than he had originally intended, and returned to London to begin his great campaign.

The opening shot fired three months later was a more rocket to attract attention. A story of Black's appeared in a well-known magazine, and told as a piece of pure comedy the incident of the railway carriage. He made a good story out of it, distorted the facts and introduced some kind of a plot. It attracted more attention than short stories generally do, because It was in Black's best manner, and was particularly well-finished and witty, Its chief charm, however, was the remarkable character sketch of the woman who intruded into the smoking-compartment. She was not a duchess in the story, but the wife of a retired merchant; but everybody who was personally acquainted with the younger dowager Duchess of Tottenham smiled as they read, and said, "How very like Valetta!" and either told their friends to read the story or sent the magazine to them by post. There was, indeed, some quality about that character sketch which impressed itself on the public mind.

The story was followed within a month by the production of Black's comedy, *Madam Dignity*.

The play had been written and accepted under another title before Black paid his epoch-making; visit to the Davidsons, but when he returned to town he had completely rewritten it, despite the urgent remonstrances of the act or manager, who had pledged himself to its production in the following spring. Originally there had been a countess in the play, the kind of part of which Miss Compton might have made a success, but this part was now altered and expanded until it was second only to that of the actor-manager's. Black stage-managed the play himself, and in addition to his work at the theater he devoted many patient hours to Miss Moira Greville, who, it will be remembered, made such a sensation in the part of Lady Freake.

Madam Dignity was unquestionably a brilliant comedy, but it is doubtful if it would have run for eighteen months had it not been for the interest which was awakened in this part of lady Freake. On the first night there were, perhaps, a dozen people in the theater who recognized that this was not a caricature so much as a portrait of one of the three Duchesses of Tottenham.

Lord Graves grew very warm on the subject. He said that it was scandalous that a playwright should be allowed to draw the character of such a well-known figure, or an actress be permitted to mimic a duchess. He said that Black and Miss Greville and the manager could be had up for libel. He was so disturbed about it all— remembering, perhaps, that he, too, had been one of the Davidsons' house-party, and might also be portrayed on the stage— that he talked about it to every one he knew, and the advance booking broke all records.

Valetta herself went to see the play, and smiled sweetly through the performance. Her only comment on it was that it was "quite amusing,"

It may have been due to the actor- manager's press-agent, or it may have been an accident, that the secret became known to the general public. If the disclosure was the work of the press-agent, he can hardly be blamed. Pit, gallery, and upper boxes have to be filled, as well as dress-circle and stalls. The agent's knowledge of human nature was profound. Once the secret was known, the cheaper parts of the house were crammed every night and at each of the three matinees which soon became necessary. The woman in the street was no longer to be put off by the imaginary portraits of the aristocracy which had hitherto satisfied her. In *Madam Dignity* she saw, if not an actual duchess, so good a representation of one that she could recognize the original in the Park or at the Palace Gates on the occasion of a drawing-room.

That possibility drew crowds to Hyde Park on Sunday mornings, and when, at the beginning of the season, Valetta drove round In her shabby hired landau, a wave of emotion passed over the ring of sight-seers. Anybody who was anybody could not fail to point an excited finger and whisper: "That's her, That's the Duchess of Tottenham.''

Valetta had to cease driving in the Park.

So far Black had merely drawn a strikingly true portrait of Valetta; he had not laughed at her and pointed the finger of scorn. His plan was deep and far-seeing; he desired the public to become familiar with the person he intended to ridicule. When that object had been achieved, he started the Mrs. Scroggins vogue.

Mrs. Scroggins was a charwoman of doubtful antecedents and uncertain honesty, who first appeared as a subsidiary character in Black's novel, *Little Frailties*. She spoke lodging-house English, she was stupid and a little deaf, but she overcame the doubts and questions of all her employers by her extraordinary dignity. All Black's best work was in the portrait of Mrs. Scroggins, and such was his genius in depicting her that the character carried conviction; the enormous public which read *Little Frailties* realized for the first time how far personal dignity will cover a multitude of minor defects. And no one who had seen *Madam Dignity* could doubt for a moment that Mrs. Scroggins was, in

another sphere of life, none other than Valetta, Duchess of Tottenham. Everybody, of course, *had* seen *Madam Dignity* by that autumn (there were five companies out; the three matinees were still necessary at the West End Theater), and the editors and reviewers, who all gave Black a column on the day of publication, made one or two covert remarks which would have given the show away, even if that portrait had not been obvious.

It was evident that Mrs. Scroggins was too good to wither as a subsidiary character in a novel. Two months after the publication of the novel she appeared as the heroine of a series of short stories (each complete in itself, according to the advertisement) in a new and enterprising magazine. The business manager of that magazine made the most of his opportunity. The hoardings of London and the provinces blared Mrs. Scroggins at every passer-by; she was better known than Sherlock Holmes or Captain Kettle; and the poster artist, either by accident or under Black's tuition, had achieved under the rusty bonnet of Mrs. Scroggins a very passable likeness of Valetta, Duchess of Tottenham.

It is doubtful whether, at this point an action for libel could have been successful; the connecting-train was too long. Could a jury be asked to cast Black in damages because he had caricatured his own creation of Lady Freake in the person of this charwoman? Was it not, on the other hand, too late to bring an action on the grounds of the play which had now been running a year? Even Lord Graves was doubtful. In any case, no action was ever begun.

Black still moved in high society, and when he was questioned he always denied with great warmth and sincerity that he had founded his two celebrated characters on any living personality. *When Mrs. Scroggins* was published in book form after she had made the fortunes of the magazine, Black wrote to all the papers which made insinuations and asseverated with heat that Mrs. Scroggins was an entirely imaginary person. His attitude in this matter, indeed, appeared so disinterested that that summer— nearly two years after the Davidson affair— he was received into houses which had hitherto appeared almost impregnable. Black was the man of the moment that summer.

He did not, however, meet Valetta, Duchess of Tottenham. He probably would not have met Her in any ease, but, as a matter of fact, she had taken herself and her dignity to Bordighera. The *Scroggins* vogue had been a little too much for her.

Cunningham Black, despite his origin and his cleverness, was not a bad fellow at heart. He had in the first instance attacked a principle, if he had done it through a person. In the railway carriage in which he had first met the

Duchess he had wanted to defend himself. He had known in his heart that his feet should have come off the cushion and his cigar gone out of the window with great alacrity. He had known that the bookshop had been betrayed by his

resentment against the manner of the Duchess's intrusion. If he had been given opportunity, he might have made the *amende honorable*, but Valetta was certainly a little deaf, and possibly she had not heard him very well— it is often difficult to hear well in a train. Then when the. mischief had been done he had felt that he must vindicate himself at all costs. If he could have broken through Valetta's reserve of dignity so far as to be allowed to explain himself at the Davidsons', the affair would have gone no further. But confronted with that awful barrier, he could not let the matter rest; it had become an obsession with him to prove that cleverness was more than the air of the aristocrat.

Now, when he had succeeded in his long campaign, when he was at the height of his fame, and Valetta, over whom he had triumphed, was practically banished, Black was sincerely sorry. He discovered her address in Bordighera, and decided to make lull amends.

So he wrote a letter, a long and very tactful letter, in which he humbled himself, while disclaiming any past intention to bring pain to the Duchess, He admitted, nevertheless, that a foolish and altogether wrong-headed public had, in fact, misrepresented him, and he begged that the Duchess would forgive him, and promised that in the event of such forgiveness being graciously bestowed he would call in every copy of the book *Mrs. Scroggins*, and never permit the play to be revived.

He posted his letter and waited anxiously for, a reply, but no reply came.

He blamed the Continental postal system. He did not think it possible that the letter could have reached its destination, and though it was the height of the season and he would miss Ascot, he decided to go to Bordighera and make his amend in person.

He called at the address he had been given, the morning after his arrival, but he was told by the same English maid he had traveled with in the omnibus that the Duchess of Tottenham was not at home.

He left a card and called again in the afternoon, with no better luck.

But on the second morning he met Valetta in the Gardens. She was in a bath-chair— her health had not been good lately. Black lifted his hat gracefully, and requested the chair-man to stop,

"Forgive me— one moment, Duchess," he began, and continued, with some eloquence, to repeat the matter of his letter, he was quite humble and apologetic to this exiled aristocrat; he made no claim to have achieved any victory; the matter of his apology and the manner of its delivery were unimpeachable,

Valetta sat quite still, a faint smile on her lips, but she did not look at him until he had finished. Then she lifted her head with that gesture which had become so familiar to the great English public, her eyes rested on him for one brief moment, and passed him by.

"Insufferable!" she said, distinctly, addressing the back of the bath-chair-man.

The invalid-chair passed on with dignity and left Cunningham Black in the avenue. He was still bareheaded, and, curiously enough, he was thinking of the bookshop.

He remembered that, in the old, old days before he was famous, he had sometimes been cheeky to his father's customers.

6: The Secret Garden

G. K. Chesterton

1874-1936

The Saturday Evening Post, 3 Sep 1910, as "The Secret of the Sealed Garden"

Collected in: *The Innocence of Father Brown*, 1910

ARISTIDE VALENTIN, Chief of the Paris Police, was late for his dinner, and some of his guests began to arrive before him. These were, however, reassured by his confidential servant, Ivan, the old man with a scar, and a face almost as grey as his moustaches, who always sat at a table in the entrance hall— a hall hung with weapons. Valentin's house was perhaps as peculiar and celebrated as its master. It was an old house, with high walls and tall poplars almost overhanging the Seine; but the oddity— and perhaps the police value— of its architecture was this: that there was no ultimate exit at all except through this front door, which was guarded by Ivan and the armoury. The garden was large and elaborate, and there were many exits from the house into the garden. But there was no exit from the garden into the world outside; all round it ran a tall, smooth, unscalable wall with special spikes at the top; no bad garden, perhaps, for a man to reflect in whom some hundred criminals had sworn to kill.

As Ivan explained to the guests, their host had telephoned that he was detained for ten minutes. He was, in truth, making some last arrangements about executions and such ugly things; and though these duties were rootedly repulsive to him, he always performed them with precision. Ruthless in the pursuit of criminals, he was very mild about their punishment. Since he had been supreme over French— and largely over European— policial methods, his great influence had been honourably used for the mitigation of sentences and the purification of prisons. He was one of the great humanitarian French freethinkers; and the only thing wrong with them is that they make mercy even colder than justice.

When Valentin arrived he was already dressed in black clothes and the red rosette— an elegant figure, his dark beard already streaked with grey. He went straight through his house to his study, which opened on the grounds behind. The garden door of it was open, and after he had carefully locked his box in its official place, he stood for a few seconds at the open door looking out upon the garden. A sharp moon was fighting with the flying rags and tatters of a storm, and Valentin regarded it with a wistfulness unusual in such scientific natures as his. Perhaps such scientific natures have some psychic prevision of the most tremendous problem of their lives. From any such occult mood, at least, he quickly recovered, for he knew he was late, and that his guests had already begun to arrive. A glance at his drawing-room when he entered it was enough to make certain that his principal guest was not there, at any rate. He saw all the

other pillars of the little party; he saw Lord Galloway, the English Ambassador— a choleric old man with a russet face like an apple, wearing the blue ribbon of the Garter. He saw Lady Galloway, slim and threadlike, with silver hair and a face sensitive and superior.

He saw her daughter, Lady Margaret Graham, a pale and pretty girl with an elfish face and copper-coloured hair. He saw the Duchess of Mont St. Michel, black-eyed and opulent, and with her her two daughters, black-eyed and opulent also. He saw Dr. Simon, a typical French scientist, with glasses, a pointed brown beard, and a forehead barred with those parallel wrinkles which are the penalty of superciliousness, since they come through constantly elevating the eyebrows. He saw Father Brown, of Cobhole, in Essex, whom he had recently met in England. He saw— perhaps with more interest than any of these— a tall man in uniform, who had bowed to the Galloways without receiving any very hearty acknowledgment, and who now advanced alone to pay his respects to his host. This was Commandant O'Brien, of the French Foreign Legion. He was a slim yet somewhat swaggering figure, clean-shaven, dark-haired, and blue-eyed, and, as seemed natural in an officer of that famous regiment of victorious failures and successful suicides, he had an air at once dashing and melancholy. He was by birth an Irish gentleman, and in boyhood had known the Galloways— especially Margaret Graham. He had left his country after some crash of debts, and now expressed his complete freedom from British etiquette by swinging about in uniform, sabre and spurs. When he bowed to the Ambassador's family, Lord and Lady Galloway bent stiffly, and Lady Margaret looked away.

But for whatever old causes such people might be interested in each other, their distinguished host was not specially interested in them. No one of them at least was in his eyes the guest of the evening. Valentin was expecting, for special reasons, a man of world-wide fame, whose friendship he had secured during some of his great detective tours and triumphs in the United States. He was expecting Julius K. Brayne, that multi-millionaire whose colossal and even crushing endowments of small religions have occasioned so much easy sport and easier solemnity for the American and English papers. Nobody could quite make out whether Mr. Brayne was an atheist or a Mormon or a Christian Scientist; but he was ready to pour money into any intellectual vessel, so long as it was an untried vessel. One of his hobbies was to wait for the American Shakespeare— a hobby more patient than angling. He admired Walt Whitman, but thought that Luke P. Tanner, of Paris, Pa., was more "progressive" than Whitman any day. He liked anything that he thought "progressive." He thought Valentin "progressive," thereby doing him a grave injustice.

The solid appearance of Julius K. Brayne in the room was as decisive as a dinner bell. He had this great quality, which very few of us can claim, that his presence was as big as his absence. He was a huge fellow, as fat as he was tall,

clad in complete evening black, without so much relief as a watch-chain or a ring. His hair was white and well brushed back like a German's; his face was red, fierce and cherubic, with one dark tuft under the lower lip that threw up that otherwise infantile visage with an effect theatrical and even Mephistophelean. Not long, however, did that salon merely stare at the celebrated American; his lateness had already become a domestic problem, and he was sent with all speed into the dining-room with Lady Galloway on his arm.

Except on one point the Galloways were genial and casual enough. So long as Lady Margaret did not take the arm of that adventurer O'Brien, her father was quite satisfied; and she had not done so, she had decorously gone in with Dr. Simon. Nevertheless, old Lord Galloway was restless and almost rude. He was diplomatic enough during dinner, but when, over the cigars, three of the younger men— Simon the doctor, Brown the priest, and the detrimental O'Brien, the exile in a foreign uniform— all melted away to mix with the ladies or smoke in the conservatory, then the English diplomatist grew very undiplomatic indeed. He was stung every sixty seconds with the thought that the scamp O'Brien might be signalling to Margaret somehow; he did not attempt to imagine how. He was left over the coffee with Brayne, the hoary Yankee who believed in all religions, and Valentin, the grizzled Frenchman who believed in none. They could argue with each other, but neither could appeal to him. After a time this "progressive" logomachy had reached a crisis of tedium; Lord Galloway got up also and sought the drawing-room. He lost his way in long passages for some six or eight minutes: till he heard the high-pitched, didactic voice of the doctor, and then the dull voice of the priest, followed by general laughter. They also, he thought with a curse, were probably arguing about "science and religion." But the instant he opened the salon door he saw only one thing— he saw what was not there. He saw that Commandant O'Brien was absent, and that Lady Margaret was absent too.

Rising impatiently from the drawing-room, as he had from the dining-room, he stamped along the passage once more. His notion of protecting his daughter from the Irish-Algerian n'er-do-weel had become something central and even mad in his mind. As he went towards the back of the house, where was Valentin's study, he was surprised to meet his daughter, who swept past with a white, scornful face, which was a second enigma. If she had been with O'Brien, where was O'Brien! If she had not been with O'Brien, where had she been? With a sort of senile and passionate suspicion he groped his way to the dark back parts of the mansion, and eventually found a servants' entrance that opened on to the garden. The moon with her scimitar had now ripped up and rolled away all the storm-wrack. The argent light lit up all four corners of the garden. A tall figure in blue was striding across the lawn towards the study door; a glint of moonlit silver on his facings picked him out as Commandant O'Brien.

He vanished through the French windows into the house, leaving Lord Galloway in an indescribable temper, at once virulent and vague. The blue-and-silver garden, like a scene in a theatre, seemed to taunt him with all that tyrannic tenderness against which his worldly authority was at war. The length and grace of the Irishman's stride enraged him as if he were a rival instead of a father; the moonlight maddened him. He was trapped as if by magic into a garden of troubadours, a Watteau fairyland; and, willing to shake off such amorous imbecilities by speech, he stepped briskly after his enemy. As he did so he tripped over some tree or stone in the grass; looked down at it first with irritation and then a second time with curiosity. The next instant the moon and the tall poplars looked at an unusual sight— an elderly English diplomatist running hard and crying or bellowing as he ran.

His hoarse shouts brought a pale face to the study door, the beaming glasses and worried brow of Dr. Simon, who heard the nobleman's first clear words. Lord Galloway was crying: "A corpse in the grass— a blood-stained corpse." O'Brien at last had gone utterly out of his mind.

"We must tell Valentin at once," said the doctor, when the other had brokenly described all that he had dared to examine. "It is fortunate that he is here"; and even as he spoke the great detective entered the study, attracted by the cry. It was almost amusing to note his typical transformation; he had come with the common concern of a host and a gentleman, fearing that some guest or servant was ill. When he was told the gory fact, he turned with all his gravity instantly bright and businesslike; for this, however abrupt and awful, was his business.

"Strange, gentlemen," he said as they hurried out into the garden, "that I should have hunted mysteries all over the earth, and now one comes and settles in my own back-yard. But where is the place?" They crossed the lawn less easily, as a slight mist had begun to rise from the river; but under the guidance of the shaken Galloway they found the body sunken in deep grass— the body of a very tall and broad-shouldered man. He lay face downwards, so they could only see that his big shoulders were clad in black cloth, and that his big head was bald, except for a wisp or two of brown hair that clung to his skull like wet seaweed. A scarlet serpent of blood crawled from under his fallen face.

"At least," said Simon, with a deep and singular intonation, "he is none of our party."

"Examine him, doctor," cried Valentin rather sharply. "He may not be dead."

The doctor bent down. "He is not quite cold, but I am afraid he is dead enough," he answered. "Just help me to lift him up."

They lifted him carefully an inch from the ground, and all doubts as to his being really dead were settled at once and frightfully. The head fell away. It had been entirely sundered from the body; whoever had cut his throat had managed

to sever the neck as well. Even Valentin was slightly shocked. "He must have been as strong as a gorilla," he muttered.

Not without a shiver, though he was used to anatomical abortions, Dr. Simon lifted the head. It was slightly slashed about the neck and jaw, but the face was substantially unhurt. It was a ponderous, yellow face, at once sunken and swollen, with a hawk-like nose and heavy lids— a face of a wicked Roman emperor, with, perhaps, a distant touch of a Chinese emperor. All present seemed to look at it with the coldest eye of ignorance. Nothing else could be noted about the man except that, as they had lifted his body, they had seen underneath it the white gleam of a shirt-front defaced with a red gleam of blood. As Dr. Simon said, the man had never been of their party. But he might very well have been trying to join it, for he had come dressed for such an occasion.

Valentin went down on his hands and knees and examined with his closest professional attention the grass and ground for some twenty yards round the body, in which he was assisted less skillfully by the doctor, and quite vaguely by the English lord. Nothing rewarded their grovellings except a few twigs, snapped or chopped into very small lengths, which Valentin lifted for an instant's examination and then tossed away.

"Twigs," he said gravely; "twigs, and a total stranger with his head cut off; that is all there is on this lawn."

There was an almost creepy stillness, and then the unnerved Galloway called out sharply:

"Who's that! Who's that over there by the garden wall!"

A small figure with a foolishly large head drew waveringly near them in the moonlit haze; looked for an instant like a goblin, but turned out to be the harmless little priest whom they had left in the drawing-room.

"I say," he said meekly, "there are no gates to this garden, do you know."

Valentin's black brows had come together somewhat crossly, as they did on principle at the sight of the cassock. But he was far too just a man to deny the relevance of the remark. "You are right," he said. "Before we find out how he came to be killed, we may have to find out how he came to be here. Now listen to me, gentlemen. If it can be done without prejudice to my position and duty, we shall all agree that certain distinguished names might well be kept out of this. There are ladies, gentlemen, and there is a foreign ambassador. If we must mark it down as a crime, then it must be followed up as a crime. But till then I can use my own discretion. I am the head of the police; I am so public that I can afford to be private. Please Heaven, I will clear everyone of my own guests before I call in my men to look for anybody else. Gentlemen, upon your honour, you will none of you leave the house till tomorrow at noon; there are bedrooms for all. Simon, I think you know where to find my man, Ivan, in the front hall; he

is a confidential man. Tell him to leave another servant on guard and come to me at once. Lord Galloway, you are certainly the best person to tell the ladies what has happened, and prevent a panic. They also must stay. Father Brown and I will remain with the body."

When this spirit of the captain spoke in Valentin he was obeyed like a bugle. Dr. Simon went through to the armoury and routed out Ivan, the public detective's private detective. Galloway went to the drawing-room and told the terrible news tactfully enough, so that by the time the company assembled there the ladies were already startled and already soothed. Meanwhile the good priest and the good atheist stood at the head and foot of the dead man motionless in the moonlight, like symbolic statues of their two philosophies of death.

Ivan, the confidential man with the scar and the moustaches, came out of the house like a cannon ball, and came racing across the lawn to Valentin like a dog to his master. His livid face was quite lively with the glow of this domestic detective story, and it was with almost unpleasant eagerness that he asked his master's permission to examine the remains.

"Yes; look, if you like, Ivan," said Valentin, "but don't be long. We must go in and thrash this out in the house."

Ivan lifted the head, and then almost let it drop.

"Why," he gasped, "it's— no, it isn't; it can't be. Do you know this man, sir?"

"No," said Valentin indifferently; "we had better go inside."

Between them they carried the corpse to a sofa in the study, and then all made their way to the drawing-room.

The detective sat down at a desk quietly, and even without hesitation; but his eye was the iron eye of a judge at assize. He made a few rapid notes upon paper in front of him, and then said shortly: "Is everybody here?"

"Not Mr. Brayne," said the Duchess of Mont St. Michel, looking round.

"No," said Lord Galloway in a hoarse, harsh voice. "And not Mr. Neil O'Brien, I fancy. I saw that gentleman walking in the garden when the corpse was still warm."

"Ivan," said the detective, "go and fetch Commandant O'Brien and Mr. Brayne. Mr. Brayne, I know, is finishing a cigar in the dining-room; Commandant O'Brien, I think, is walking up and down the conservatory. I am not sure."

The faithful attendant flashed from the room, and before anyone could stir or speak Valentin went on with the same soldierly swiftness of exposition.

"Everyone here knows that a dead man has been found in the garden, his head cut clean from his body. Dr. Simon, you have examined it. Do you think that to cut a man's throat like that would need great force? Or, perhaps, only a very sharp knife?"

"I should say that it could not be done with a knife at all," said the pale doctor.

"Have you any thought," resumed Valentin, "of a tool with which it could be done?"

"Speaking within modern probabilities, I really haven't," said the doctor, arching his painful brows. "It's not easy to hack a neck through even clumsily, and this was a very clean cut. It could be done with a battle-axe or an old headsman's axe, or an old two-handed sword."

"But, good heavens!" cried the Duchess, almost in hysterics, "there aren't any two-handed swords and battle-axes round here."

Valentin was still busy with the paper in front of him. "Tell me," he said, still writing rapidly, "could it have been done with a long French cavalry sabre?"

A low knocking came at the door, which, for some unreasonable reason, curdled everyone's blood like the knocking in Macbeth. Amid that frozen silence Dr. Simon managed to say: "A sabre— yes, I suppose it could."

"Thank you," said Valentin. "Come in, Ivan."

The confidential Ivan opened the door and ushered in Commandant Neil O'Brien, whom he had found at last pacing the garden again.

The Irish officer stood up disordered and defiant on the threshold. "What do you want with me?" he cried.

"Please sit down," said Valentin in pleasant, level tones. "Why, you aren't wearing your sword. Where is it?"

"I left it on the library table," said O'Brien, his brogue deepening in his disturbed mood. "It was a nuisance, it was getting— "

"Ivan," said Valentin, "please go and get the Commandant's sword from the library." Then, as the servant vanished, "Lord Galloway says he saw you leaving the garden just before he found the corpse. What were you doing in the garden?"

The Commandant flung himself recklessly into a chair. "Oh," he cried in pure Irish, "admirin' the moon. Communing with Nature, me bhoy."

A heavy silence sank and endured, and at the end of it came again that trivial and terrible knocking. Ivan reappeared, carrying an empty steel scabbard. "This is all I can find," he said.

"Put it on the table," said Valentin, without looking up.

There was an inhuman silence in the room, like that sea of inhuman silence round the dock of the condemned murderer. The Duchess's weak exclamations had long ago died away. Lord Galloway's swollen hatred was satisfied and even sobered. The voice that came was quite unexpected.

"I think I can tell you," cried Lady Margaret, in that clear,

quivering voice with which a courageous woman speaks publicly. "I can tell you what Mr. O'Brien was doing in the garden, since he is bound to silence. He

was asking me to marry him. I refused; I said in my family circumstances I could give him nothing but my respect. He was a little angry at that; he did not seem to think much of my respect. I wonder," she added, with rather a wan smile, "if he will care at all for it now. For I offer it him now. I will swear anywhere that he never did a thing like this."

Lord Galloway had edged up to his daughter, and was intimidating her in what he imagined to be an undertone. "Hold your tongue, Maggie," he said in a thunderous whisper. "Why should you shield the fellow? Where's his sword? Where's his confounded cavalry—"

He stopped because of the singular stare with which his daughter was regarding him, a look that was indeed a lurid magnet for the whole group.

"You old fool!" she said in a low voice without pretence of piety, "what do you suppose you are trying to prove? I tell you this man was innocent while with me. But if he wasn't innocent, he was still with me. If he murdered a man in the garden, who was it who must have seen— who must at least have known? Do you hate Neil so much as to put your own daughter—"

Lady Galloway screamed. Everyone else sat tingling at the touch of those satanic tragedies that have been between lovers before now. They saw the proud, white face of the Scotch aristocrat and her lover, the Irish adventurer, like old portraits in a dark house. The long silence was full of formless historical memories of murdered husbands and poisonous paramours.

In the centre of this morbid silence an innocent voice said: "Was it a very long cigar?"

The change of thought was so sharp that they had to look round to see who had spoken.

"I mean," said little Father Brown, from the corner of the room, "I mean that cigar Mr. Brayne is finishing. It seems nearly as long as a walking-stick."

Despite the irrelevance there was assent as well as irritation in Valentin's face as he lifted his head.

"Quite right," he remarked sharply. "Ivan, go and see about Mr. Brayne again, and bring him here at once."

The instant the factotum had closed the door, Valentin addressed the girl with an entirely new earnestness.

"Lady Margaret," he said, "we all feel, I am sure, both gratitude and admiration for your act in rising above your lower dignity and explaining the Commandant's conduct. But there is a hiatus still. Lord Galloway, I understand, met you passing from the study to the drawing-room, and it was only some minutes afterwards that he found the garden and the Commandant still walking there."

"You have to remember," replied Margaret, with a faint irony in her voice, "that I had just refused him, so we should scarcely have come back arm in arm.

He is a gentleman, anyhow; and he loitered behind— and so got charged with murder."

"In those few moments," said Valentin gravely, "he might really—"

The knock came again, and Ivan put in his scarred face.

"Beg pardon, sir," he said, "but Mr. Brayne has left the house."

"Left!" cried Valentin, and rose for the first time to his feet.

"Gone. Scooted. Evaporated," replied Ivan in humorous French. "His hat and coat are gone, too, and I'll tell you something to cap it all. I ran outside the house to find any traces of him, and I found one, and a big trace, too."

"What do you mean?" asked Valentin.

"I'll show you," said his servant, and reappeared with a flashing naked cavalry sabre, streaked with blood about the point and edge. Everyone in the room eyed it as if it were a thunderbolt; but the experienced Ivan went on quite quietly:

"I found this," he said, "flung among the bushes fifty yards up the road to Paris. In other words, I found it just where your respectable Mr. Brayne threw it when he ran away."

There was again a silence, but of a new sort. Valentin took the sabre, examined it, reflected with unaffected concentration of thought, and then turned a respectful face to O'Brien. "Commandant," he said, "we trust you will always produce this weapon if it is wanted for police examination. Meanwhile," he added, slapping the steel back in the ringing scabbard, "let me return you your sword."

At the military symbolism of the action the audience could hardly refrain from applause.

For Neil O'Brien, indeed, that gesture was the turning-point of existence. By the time he was wandering in the mysterious garden again in the colours of the morning the tragic futility of his ordinary mien had fallen from him; he was a man with many reasons for happiness. Lord Galloway was a gentleman, and had offered him an apology. Lady Margaret was something better than a lady, a woman at least, and had perhaps given him something better than an apology, as they drifted among the old flowerbeds before breakfast. The whole company was more lighthearted and humane, for though the riddle of the death remained, the load of suspicion was lifted off them all, and sent flying off to Paris with the strange millionaire— a man they hardly knew. The devil was cast out of the house— he had cast himself out.

Still, the riddle remained; and when O'Brien threw himself on a garden seat beside Dr. Simon, that keenly scientific person at once resumed it. He did not get much talk out of O'Brien, whose thoughts were on pleasanter things.

"I can't say it interests me much," said the Irishman frankly, "especially as it seems pretty plain now. Apparently Brayne hated this stranger for some reason;

lured him into the garden, and killed him with my sword. Then he fled to the city, tossing the sword away as he went. By the way, Ivan tells me the dead man had a Yankee dollar in his pocket. So he was a countryman of Brayne's, and that seems to clinch it. I don't see any difficulties about the business."

"There are five colossal difficulties," said the doctor quietly; "like high walls within walls. Don't mistake me. I don't doubt that Brayne did it; his flight, I fancy, proves that. But as to how he did it. First difficulty: Why should a man kill another man with a great hulking sabre, when he can almost kill him with a pocket knife and put it back in his pocket? Second difficulty: Why was there no noise or outcry? Does a man commonly see another come up waving a scimitar and offer no remarks? Third difficulty: A servant watched the front door all the evening; and a rat cannot get into Valentin's garden anywhere. How did the dead man get into the garden? Fourth difficulty: Given the same conditions, how did Brayne get out of the garden?"

"And the fifth," said Neil, with eyes fixed on the English priest who was coming slowly up the path.

"Is a trifle, I suppose," said the doctor, "but I think an odd one. When I first saw how the head had been slashed, I supposed the assassin had struck more than once. But on examination I found many cuts across the truncated section; in other words, they were struck after the head was off. Did Brayne hate his foe so fiendishly that he stood sabring his body in the moonlight?"

"Horrible!" said O'Brien, and shuddered.

The little priest, Brown, had arrived while they were talking, and had waited, with characteristic shyness, till they had finished. Then he said awkwardly:

"I say, I'm sorry to interrupt. But I was sent to tell you the news!"

"News?" repeated Simon, and stared at him rather painfully through his glasses.

"Yes, I'm sorry," said Father Brown mildly. "There's been another murder, you know."

Both men on the seat sprang up, leaving it rocking.

"And, what's stranger still," continued the priest, with his dull eye on the rhododendrons, "it's the same disgusting sort; it's another beheading. They found the second head actually bleeding into the river, a few yards along Brayne's road to Paris; so they suppose that he—"

"Great Heaven!" cried O'Brien. "Is Brayne a monomaniac?"

"There are American vendettas," said the priest impassively. Then he added: "They want you to come to the library and see it."

Commandant O'Brien followed the others towards the inquest, feeling decidedly sick. As a soldier, he loathed all this secretive carnage; where were these extravagant amputations going to stop? First one head was hacked off, and then another; in this case (he told himself bitterly) it was not true that two

heads were better than one. As he crossed the study he almost staggered at a shocking coincidence. Upon Valentin's table lay the coloured picture of yet a third bleeding head; and it was the head of Valentin himself. A second glance showed him it was only a Nationalist paper, called The Guillotine, which every week showed one of its political opponents with rolling eyes and writhing features just after execution; for Valentin was an anti-clerical of some note. But O'Brien was an Irishman, with a kind of chastity even in his sins; and his gorge rose against that great brutality of the intellect which belongs only to France. He felt Paris as a whole, from the grotesques on the Gothic churches to the gross caricatures in the newspapers. He remembered the gigantic jests of the Revolution. He saw the whole city as one ugly energy, from the sanguinary sketch lying on Valentin's table up to where, above a mountain and forest of gargoyles, the great devil grins on Notre Dame.

The library was long, low, and dark; what light entered it shot from under low blinds and had still some of the ruddy tinge of morning. Valentin and his servant Ivan were waiting for them at the upper end of a long, slightly-sloping desk, on which lay the mortal remains, looking enormous in the twilight. The big black figure and yellow face of the man found in the garden confronted them essentially unchanged. The second head, which had been fished from among the river reeds that morning, lay streaming and dripping beside it; Valentin's men were still seeking to recover the rest of this second corpse, which was supposed to be afloat. Father Brown, who did not seem to share O'Brien's sensibilities in the least, went up to the second head and examined it with his blinking care. It was little more than a mop of wet white hair, fringed with silver fire in the red and level morning light; the face, which seemed of an ugly, empurpled and perhaps criminal type, had been much battered against trees or stones as it tossed in the water.

"Good morning, Commandant O'Brien," said Valentin, with quiet cordiality. "You have heard of Brayne's last experiment in butchery, I suppose?"

Father Brown was still bending over the head with white hair, and he said, without looking up:

"I suppose it is quite certain that Brayne cut off this head, too."

"Well, it seems common sense," said Valentin, with his hands in his pockets. "Killed in the same way as the other. Found within a few yards of the other. And sliced by the same weapon which we know he carried away."

"Yes, yes; I know," replied Father Brown submissively. "Yet, you know, I doubt whether Brayne could have cut off this head."

"Why not?" inquired Dr. Simon, with a rational stare.

"Well, doctor," said the priest, looking up blinking, "can a man cut off his own head? I don't know."

O'Brien felt an insane universe crashing about his ears; but the doctor sprang forward with impetuous practicality and pushed back the wet white hair.

"Oh, there's no doubt it's Brayne," said the priest quietly. "He had exactly that chip in the left ear."

The detective, who had been regarding the priest with steady and glittering eyes, opened his clenched mouth and said sharply: "You seem to know a lot about him, Father Brown."

"I do," said the little man simply. "I've been about with him for some weeks. He was thinking of joining our church."

The star of the fanatic sprang into Valentin's eyes; he strode towards the priest with clenched hands. "And, perhaps," he cried, with a blasting sneer, "perhaps he was also thinking of leaving all his money to your church."

"Perhaps he was," said Brown stolidly; "it is possible."

"In that case," cried Valentin, with a dreadful smile, "you may indeed know a great deal about him. About his life and about his—"

Commandant O'Brien laid a hand on Valentin's arm. "Drop that slanderous rubbish, Valentin," he said, "or there may be more swords yet."

But Valentin (under the steady, humble gaze of the priest) had already recovered himself. "Well," he said shortly, "people's private opinions can wait. You gentlemen are still bound by your promise to stay; you must enforce it on yourselves— and on each other. Ivan here will tell you anything more you want to know; I must get to business and write to the authorities. We can't keep this quiet any longer. I shall be writing in my study if there is any more news."

"Is there any more news, Ivan?" asked Dr. Simon, as the chief of police strode out of the room.

"Only one more thing, I think, sir," said Ivan, wrinkling up his grey old face, "but that's important, too, in its way. There's that old buffer you found on the lawn," and he pointed without pretence of reverence at the big black body with the yellow head. "We've found out who he is, anyhow."

"Indeed!" cried the astonished doctor, "and who is he?"

"His name was Arnold Becker," said the under-detective, "though he went by many aliases. He was a wandering sort of scamp, and is known to have been in America; so that was where Brayne got his knife into him. We didn't have much to do with him ourselves, for he worked mostly in Germany. We've communicated, of course, with the German police. But, oddly enough, there was a twin brother of his, named Louis Becker, whom we had a great deal to do with. In fact, we found it necessary to guillotine him only yesterday. Well, it's a rum thing, gentlemen, but when I saw that fellow flat on the lawn I had the greatest jump of my life. If I hadn't seen Louis Becker guillotined with my own eyes, I'd have sworn it was Louis Becker lying there in the grass. Then, of course, I remembered his twin brother in Germany, and following up the clue—"

The explanatory Ivan stopped, for the excellent reason that nobody was listening to him. The Commandant and the doctor were both staring at Father Brown, who had sprung stiffly to his feet, and was holding his temples tight like a man in sudden and violent pain.

"Stop, stop, stop!" he cried; "stop talking a minute, for I see half. Will God give me strength? Will my brain make the one jump and see all? Heaven help me! I used to be fairly good at thinking. I could paraphrase any page in Aquinas once. Will my head split— or will it see? I see half— I only see half."

He buried his head in his hands, and stood in a sort of rigid torture of thought or prayer, while the other three could only go on staring at this last prodigy of their wild twelve hours.

When Father Brown's hands fell they showed a face quite fresh and serious, like a child's. He heaved a huge sigh, and said: "Let us get this said and done with as quickly as possible. Look here, this will be the quickest way to convince you all of the truth." He turned to the doctor. "Dr. Simon," he said, "you have a strong head-piece, and I heard you this morning asking the five hardest questions about this business. Well, if you will ask them again, I will answer them."

Simon's pince-nez dropped from his nose in his doubt and wonder, but he answered at once. "Well, the first question, you know, is why a man should kill another with a clumsy sabre at all when a man can kill with a bodkin?"

"A man cannot behead with a bodkin," said Brown calmly, "and for this murder beheading was absolutely necessary."

"Why?" asked O'Brien, with interest.

"And the next question?" asked Father Brown.

"Well, why didn't the man cry out or anything?" asked the doctor; "sabres in gardens are certainly unusual."

"Twigs," said the priest gloomily, and turned to the window which looked on the scene of death. "No one saw the point of the twigs. Why should they lie on that lawn (look at it) so far from any tree? They were not snapped off; they were chopped off. The murderer occupied his enemy with some tricks with the sabre, showing how he could cut a branch in mid-air, or what-not. Then, while his enemy bent down to see the result, a silent slash, and the head fell."

"Well," said the doctor slowly, "that seems plausible enough. But my next two questions will stump anyone."

The priest still stood looking critically out of the window and waited.

"You know how all the garden was sealed up like an air-tight chamber," went on the doctor. "Well, how did the strange man get into the garden?"

Without turning round, the little priest answered: "There never was any strange man in the garden."

There was a silence, and then a sudden cackle of almost childish laughter relieved the strain. The absurdity of Brown's remark moved Ivan to open taunts.

"Oh!" he cried; "then we didn't lug a great fat corpse on to a sofa last night? He hadn't got into the garden, I suppose?"

"Got into the garden?" repeated Brown reflectively. "No, not entirely."

"Hang it all," cried Simon, "a man gets into a garden, or he doesn't."

"Not necessarily," said the priest, with a faint smile. "What is the nest question, doctor?"

"I fancy you're ill," exclaimed Dr. Simon sharply; "but I'll ask the next question if you like. How did Brayne get out of the garden?"

"He didn't get out of the garden," said the priest, still looking out of the window.

"Didn't get out of the garden?" exploded Simon.

"Not completely," said Father Brown.

Simon shook his fists in a frenzy of French logic. "A man gets out of a garden, or he doesn't," he cried.

"Not always," said Father Brown.

Dr. Simon sprang to his feet impatiently. "I have no time to spare on such senseless talk," he cried angrily. "If you can't understand a man being on one side of a wall or the other, I won't trouble you further."

"Doctor," said the cleric very gently, "we have always got on very pleasantly together. If only for the sake of old friendship, stop and tell me your fifth question."

The impatient Simon sank into a chair by the door and said briefly: "The head and shoulders were cut about in a queer way. It seemed to be done after death."

"Yes," said the motionless priest, "it was done so as to make you assume exactly the one simple falsehood that you did assume. It was done to make you take for granted that the head belonged to the body."

The borderland of the brain, where all the monsters are made, moved horribly in the Gaelic O'Brien. He felt the chaotic presence of all the horse-men and fish-women that man's unnatural fancy has begotten. A voice older than his first fathers seemed saying in his ear: "Keep out of the monstrous garden where grows the tree with double fruit. Avoid the evil garden where died the man with two heads." Yet, while these shameful symbolic shapes passed across the ancient mirror of his Irish soul, his Frenchified intellect was quite alert, and was watching the odd priest as closely and incredulously as all the rest.

Father Brown had turned round at last, and stood against the window, with his face in dense shadow; but even in that shadow they could see it was pale as ashes. Nevertheless, he spoke quite sensibly, as if there were no Gaelic souls on earth.

"Gentlemen," he said, "you did not find the strange body of Becker in the garden. You did not find any strange body in the garden. In face of Dr. Simon's rationalism, I still affirm that Becker was only partly present. Look here!" (pointing to the black bulk of the mysterious corpse) "you never saw that man in your lives. Did you ever see this man?"

He rapidly rolled away the bald, yellow head of the unknown, and put in its place the white-maned head beside it. And there, complete, unified, unmistakable, lay Julius K. Brayne.

"The murderer," went on Brown quietly, "hacked off his enemy's head and flung the sword far over the wall. But he was too clever to fling the sword only. He flung the head over the wall also. Then he had only to clap on another head to the corpse, and (as he insisted on a private inquest) you all imagined a totally new man."

"Clap on another head!" said O'Brien staring. "What other head? Heads don't grow on garden bushes, do they?"

"No," said Father Brown huskily, and looking at his boots; "there is only one place where they grow. They grow in the basket of the guillotine, beside which the chief of police, Aristide Valentin, was standing not an hour before the murder. Oh, my friends, hear me a minute more before you tear me in pieces. Valentin is an honest man, if being mad for an arguable cause is honesty. But did you never see in that cold, grey eye of his that he is mad! He would do anything, anything, to break what he calls the superstition of the Cross. He has fought for it and starved for it, and now he has murdered for it. Brayne's crazy millions had hitherto been scattered among so many sects that they did little to alter the balance of things. But Valentin heard a whisper that Brayne, like so many scatter-brained sceptics, was drifting to us; and that was quite a different thing. Brayne would pour supplies into the impoverished and pugnacious Church of France; he would support six Nationalist newspapers like *The Guillotine*. The battle was already balanced on a point, and the fanatic took flame at the risk. He resolved to destroy the millionaire, and he did it as one would expect the greatest of detectives to commit his only crime. He abstracted the severed head of Becker on some criminological excuse, and took it home in his official box. He had that last argument with Brayne, that Lord Galloway did not hear the end of; that failing, he led him out into the sealed garden, talked about swordsmanship, used twigs and a sabre for illustration, and—"

Ivan of the Scar sprang up. "You lunatic," he yelled; "you'll go to my master now, if I take you by—"

"Why, I was going there," said Brown heavily; "I must ask him to confess, and all that."

Driving the unhappy Brown before them like a hostage or sacrifice, they rushed together into the sudden stillness of Valentin's study.

The great detective sat at his desk apparently too occupied to hear their turbulent entrance. They paused a moment, and then something in the look of that upright and elegant back made the doctor run forward suddenly. A touch and a glance showed him that there was a small box of pills at Valentin's elbow, and that Valentin was dead in his chair; and on the blind face of the suicide was more than the pride of Cato.

7: The Pink Edge

Frank Froest and George Dilnot

1858-1930 and 1883-1951

The Novel Magazine May 1915, as "Pink Edged Notepaper"

In anthology: *101 Years Entertainment*, Ed. Ellery Queen, 1942

Froest was a former Scotland Yard detective; Dilnot a crime novelist.

ROCKWARD'S hand was shaking, and his strong, heavy face was quivering as he finished. Yet he was held by common repute a man completely beyond human emotion— a man whose soul was wrapped in the collection of millions.

"If it is blackmail, why haven't they demanded money in the letter? I'd have paid anything— anything rather than the girl should run the risk. Here's three days gone since she vanished." He was working himself into a petulant anger, unusual for a man of his temperament. "If your people had taken it in hand at the first you might have done something. As it is, I've employed two confounded agencies, and we're not an inch nearer finding her."

"I'm sorry, Mr. Rockward," said Barraclough. "If we had known when you first reported it that your daughter had been abducted we might have handled it. You see," he went on soothingly, "more than ten thousand people are reported missing to the police every year. Very few of them have committed any criminal offence, and in the majority of cases there is some perfectly natural explanation of why they went away. There'd be no end of trouble if the department went chasing after each one. All that can be done is to circulate a description and have men keep their eyes open. But you can rely that now we have something to go upon in Miss Rockward's case she will turn up safe and well in the end."

The millionaire proffered his cigar case.

"Forgive me, Mr. Barraclough. I'm a little overstrained. I know you will do your utmost, and if you want money, call upon me— never mind for how much."

Detective-Inspector Barraclough did not often smoke half-crown Havanas, and he took one now with gratitude. He could understand the millionaire's feeling in the circumstances and make allowances. But in spite of his professional optimism— a detective, like a doctor, is bound to have a surface optimism in dealing with outsiders— it was with a perplexed mind that he made his way back to headquarters to lay the matter before his chief.

"It's a bit out of the ordinary run, sir," he said in the privacy of the superintendent's room. "Rockward's half off his head, and I don't wonder. Miss Elsie Rockward's a young girl— she'll be nineteen next June— and the old man would have spoilt her if he could. That's nothing to the point, though. As a matter of fact, she went out, according to the servants, at eleven o'clock on

Monday morning— three days ago. She was believed to have been going to Regent Street. Anyhow, she's not been seen since. This morning Mr. Rockward had a letter. This is what it says." He produced from his pocket, and read: —

"Sir,— This is to inform you that your daughter is safe and well. She will be permitted to return to you unharmed in probably less than a week from to-day, provided you comply with a certain request which may be made to you, and which will cost you nothing. This is not blackmail. You will be wise to remain quiet and not approach the police.

"The letter is unsigned and in palpably disguised handwriting. It was posted at Winchmore Hill, and is postmarked midnight yesterday. That, of course, only means that the one place we're certain the writer will not be found is Winchmore Hill."

"There's more than one kind of blackmail," commented the chief. "In some City deals, for instance, if Rockward could be induced to throw his weight one way or the other it would tip the balance."

"Yes." Barraclough sucked in his lower lip. "Of course, I've not lost sight of that. I suppose I have a free hand."

"Entirely. Go ahead and good luck to you."

Barraclough went away to begin pulling the obvious wires necessary to an investigation. There was the already circulated description of Miss Rockward to be gone over, to see that nothing was omitted from the colour of her eyes to the texture of her stockings. Two photographs of the lady he sent down to have sufficient copies made to supply every divisional section of the Criminal Investigation Department, to say nothing of the more important provincial police forces.

In their little studio on the second storey the staff photographers were busy with the letter that had been sent to Rockward. One of the shirt-sleeved assistants came to tell Barraclough that all was ready. He followed the man up to a windowless room, at one end of which stood a square white screen. The photographer touched a switch and the screen alone remained illuminated. Then he inserted a slide in the magic lantern, and the letter, magnified enormously, leapt into being.

Very carefully Barraclough examined the enlargement, word by word and letter by letter. He had had the thing thrown on the screen, not because he had any definite idea as to what he was to look for, but on the general principle that it should be submitted to the minutest possible examination. At last he came to the final word and drew back.

"Thanks," he said. "It doesn't help much, but that isn't your fault. By the way, have you got the focus right? The edges of the letter seem to be in the shade."

The photographer switched on the light.

"That's not the focus, sir. That's on the letter itself. There's a kind of pinkish shade on the margin."

"Oh yes! I was forgetting," said Barraclough.

The tint around the margin of the letter had not escaped his notice, but it had not impressed him particularly. He went back to his own room and considered the original closely. There was a decided, uneven pink border, shading off irregularly into the cream colour of the paper itself. Moreover, the envelope showed the same peculiarity.

He called Cranley, the first-class detective-sergeant who was his invariable assistant in his investigations, and handed the sheet to him.

"Notepaper good— vellum, very best quality, I should say," commented Cranley. "It's an educated writing, though it's disguised. No fingerprints, sir? That's a pity. I imagine whoever wrote this is not an ordinary crook. Maybe one of Rockward's friends in the City."

"Oh, shut up!" said Barraclough irritably. "It may be the butler of one of Rockward's friends, or it may be the Lord Chancellor, but we don't know. You're a good chap, Cranley, but carrying deductions too far will bring you into trouble one day. An anchor tattooed on a man's hand doesn't prove that he is, or has been, a sailor, but it's a mark of identification."

All of which Cranley knew as well as Barraclough. Being a wise man, however, he recognised that he had laid himself open to rebuke, and apologised with a certain degree of humility.

"What we want," went on the inspector, "is something that'll save us guessing. I don't object to guessing when you can't do anything else, but if it's possible to kjiow, I prefer that. Who's a good paper manufacturing firm?"

"I'll go and find out," said Cranley.

He went away, and in a little returned with a ponderous directory. He planked it on the table, and with a stubby forefinger turned over the leaves till he came to the trade section.

"There's Rogerfelt's in Upper Thames Street," he said. "They're about the biggest people in the trade."

"Right you are. I'll go along to see them. You'd better stay on tap here till I come back. I may want you."

When Inspector Barraclough emerged from behind the yellow-stained partition which shielded off the sanctum of one of the departmental managers of Rogerfelt's from the common herd, his face betrayed a supreme content. The most hardened campaigner does not seek discomfort. If he can sleep on a bed instead of the bare ground he does so. Equally so a detective does not enjoy being baffled. He prefers to see his way as clearly as possible. He does not climb a fence if he can open a gate.

Barraclough knew that his quest was still far from simple. Nevertheless, he had at last something to go upon, something definite to unravel. He made his way to a public telephone call office and called up Cranley.

"Yes, it's me, Barraclough. I want you to get through to the divisions. Find out if they know of any wrong 'un who's been ill lately, or who's had illness in the place where he's staying— it doesn't matter what for. I can't tell you over the wire. Get on to it as soon as you can, sonny. Get some one to help you if you can. Me? Oh yes, oh yes, I'll be about! I'll either drop in or ring up. I've got a lot of business to do."

He hung up the receiver and wended his way eastwards. It was a warm day, and by the time he had reached the Convent and Garter off the Commercial Road he was glad to turn into the gilded and plated saloon. He ordered a lime juice and soda, and leant against the bar with the air of a man to whom nothing mattered. All the while his eyes were quietly searching the groups of customers. Presently he beckoned to a group of three, and they greeted him with deference. One would never have guessed from their joyous manner and their anxiety to pay for his drinks— which he would not permit— that they were each mentally checking off any secret exploit of theirs that might have excited the attention of a staff man from Scotland Yard.

Something of the same scene was enacted at Blackfriars, at Islington, Brixton, and half a dozen other districts of London. Barraclough was always genial, willing to buy drinks and talk over affairs. There was nothing of the stern, iron-handed, clumsy officer of police, beloved of the novelist, about him. Had he not strictly confined himself to non-intoxicating drinks it would have been a drunken man who reeled back to headquarters. As it was, disappointment and physical weariness were plain on his face when he dropped into his chair.

"If you offer me a drink, Cranley, I'll hit you," he said. "I'm full up to the lid with lime juice and ginger ale, and ten thousand other poisons. Who says we don't earn our pay?"

"Any luck, sir?" queried Cranley.

Barraclough shook his head.

"Not a ha'p'orth. How about you?"

His subordinate handed him a sheet of paper, which the inspector perused with wrinkled brows. Ultimately he crushed it up and, with a gesture of disgust, threw it into the waste paper basket.

"Not a bit of good," he declared. Then, as Cranley 's puzzled gaze met his: "I meant some infectious disease— I ought to have made that clear. Ah, well!" He yawned wearily and drew out his watch.

"Feel inclined to make a night of it, Cranley? It's eight o'clock. Let's have a bit of dinner and drop into the Alhambra and forget all about things for an hour."

At ten o'clock he and Cranley had commenced a fresh tour— this time of the supper rooms and restaurants of the West End. Cranley was puzzled— more puzzled than he would have cared to admit. He could have grasped it if they had been seeking some particular crook who could have given definite information. But apparently Barraclough was merely questing around in search of a scent. With the reticence which he sometimes displayed even to his most intimate colleagues, he would vouchsafe nothing beyond that he wanted to find a criminal who had recently been in some house where there was an infectious disease. For the life of him Cranley could not see how an infectious disease could be connected with the threatening letter that had been written to the millionaire.

But everything has an end. A string band was making an undercurrent of melody to the laughter and conversation of hundreds of men and women clustered in twos and threes about little tables under shaded lights, as they descended into the basement of one of the great supper rooms— where no one ever dreamt of taking supper.

"There's Big Billy sitting at the eighth table on your right," said Cranley.

"We'll go and have a talk with Billy," said Barraclough.

He picked his way along the tier of tables and dropped a hand heavily on the shoulder of the fat man who was seated with his back towards them.

Big Billy sprang to his feet with a start, and a liqueur glass tinkled in fragments on the carpet.

"Snakes!" he ejaculated. "Is it you, Mr. Barraclough? You shouldn't do that. You gave me the jumps."

"Sorry, Billy," said the detective penitently. "I'll be more careful another time." He sat down and indicated another chair for Cranley. "How's things? I haven't had a talk with you on business for a long time."

The twinkling little ferret eyes set in the heavy, broad face became a trifle apprehensive. Big Billy did not like the officer's tone.

"Business!" he said, with a laugh that ill concealed his nervousness. "I didn't know that you wanted to talk business with me or I'd have called on you before this."

Barraclough crossed his legs.

"Oh, it isn't exactly business, Billy. We spotted you just now, and we thought we'd like a talk over old times. I'm sure your lady friends will excuse us for ten minutes."

"Right you are. Run away for a little while, kids," said Billy.

"And now what'll you have?" said Barraclough.

"Absinthe will do me," said Billy. And as the detective gave the order: "Now, guv'nor, what's the lay?"

"Oh, nothing much, Billy." Barraclough lay idly back and began to toy with an empty glass. "Seen anything of Dongley Green lately?"

The fat man wrinkled his brows. "Dongley!" he repeated. "Why, Dongley went down at Nottingham for six years three months ago. Didn't you know that?"

"Come to think of it, so he did," said Barraclough. "It had slipped my mind. He always was unlucky, was Dongley. Do you remember that jewel business in Bond Street? You were on top then?"

The reminiscence was apparently not pleasing to Big Billy. He shot a malevolent glance at the detective. "He was a clumsy dog," he growled.

"Wasn't he in with Gwennie Lyne for a time?" queried Barraclough, with the air of one trying to keep up a languishing conversation.

Big Billy settled himself heavily.

"That old hag always seems to slide along, but any one who works with her seems to catch it," he growled. "There was Dongley. Now, poor old Brixton George is in for it. Kid Foster has been staying at her place down at Tooting, and he pretty well died of typhoid or measles or something. I'd like to wring her neck."

Cranley shot a significant glance at his superior, who seemed to be suppressing a yawn. Here was the information that Barraclough had been seeking, and yet it seemed to make little impression on him.

"Ah yes!" he said. "Brixton George! He was committed for trial a week or two back with one of the bank clerks. The Great Southern Bank forgery, wasn't it?"

"That was a neat job," broke in Billy. "Some one's split up a hundred and twenty-odd thousand, and all you get is George and the stool pigeon. That is, unless you've got some one in line." He looked cunningly across the table.

Barraclough smilingly shook his head.

"I'm not handling that case. Well, we won't keep you any longer from your friends. So long!"

He thrust his arm through Cranley's as they got outside, and hurried him with long, quick steps to Trafalgar Square, where they picked up a taxi. "The best piece of luck I've had to-day," insisted the inspector, more than once.

At Great Derby Street the cab halted, and Barraclough hurried into headquarters. When he returned ten minutes later he brought with him a third man, a sloping-shouldered individual with shrewd eyes and a light moustache.

"Three of us ought to be enough even for Gwennie," he said. "I've sent some one to drag Watford out of bed— he's looking after the Great Southern Bank case. But I doubt if we shall want him."

Cranley tugged at his moustache.

"I'm not quite clear what the point is yet, sir," he said.

Barraclough's eyes twinkled and he regarded the other whimsically.

"I'm too old a bird to show my hand until I'm dead sure," he smiled. "I'll tell you all about it sometime— when it's needful for you to know."

The car whizzed on and conversation languished. In half an hour it drew up panting at the corner of one of the neat, respectable streets of villas that fringe Tooting Common. Barraclough laughed as he got out, and cast a glance down the row of tiny front gardens arranged in geometrical designs of calceolarias and geraniums.

"Civil service clerks, small business men, and maiden ladies," he commented. "Wonder what some of the neighbours will say when they learn who Gwennie is. Come on, boys. You'd better wait, driver."

Not a soul did they meet as they sauntered down the dimly-lighted street, scrutinising the numbers on each side. At last Cranley lifted his hand in signal, and his companions joined him outside the gate at which he was standing.

"No. 107, sir," he said.

They advanced up the path and Barraclough plied knocker and bell. In a little a light was switched on at an upper window. They heard footsteps. Then a light sprang up in the hall and the door opened.

A skeleton of a man with deep-sunken eyes and a dressing gown hanging lankly about him stood peering out at them. "Well," he demanded curtly, "what is it?"

Cranley leant nonchalantly against the doorpost so that it was impossible to shut the door. Barraclough, dazzled somewhat by the sudden glare of electric light, wrinkled his brows at the interlocutor.

"That you, Velson?" he said, as he picked out the features of the man. "How's Gwennie?"

"I don't know you," retorted the other. "And my name's not Velson."

Barraclough stepped inside.

"No, very likely not," he admitted coolly. "Shall we cut all that out?"

A sudden blaze of wrath flamed in the dull, sunken eyes of the little man. He withdrew his right hand from beneath the folds of his dressing gown, and the blue barrel of a revolver showed in the electric light.

"No funny business!" he warned them. "You guys can't play it on me."

Cranley leapt swiftly. The revolver crackled noisily as he overbore the little man, and they fell a wriggling heap on the tiles. But Velson stood no chance. In rather less than sixty seconds he was disarmed, pulled to his feet, and handcuffed.

Barraclough picked up the revolver.

"I knew you were a gun man, Velson," he observed quietly, "but I didn't think you were a fool. You wouldn't have pulled out the weapon unless you were mighty frightened that something was going to happen."

"You go to blazes!" said the prisoner sulkily.

"All right." The inspector added the formal warning. "No need to tell you we're police officers. Anything you say may be used as evidence, you know. You look after him, Conder. Take him into the dining room. Cranley, you'd better stay at the door."

There were movements upstairs, the shuffling of footsteps, the sound of voices. Then the authoritative tone of a woman could be heard apparently ordering the frightened servants to bed. As Barraclough reached the foot of the stairs the woman descended, dignified and self-possessed. She was somewhere about fifty years of age, not uncomely— indeed, at one time she must have been possessed of striking beauty. Her face showed no sign of perturbation. She smiled sweetly at Barraclough.

"Good morning, Gwennie!" he said urbanely. "It's a pity to wake you up. Suppose you know what we've come about."

The smile persisted.

"Good morning, Mr. Barraclough! I see it's gone one, so it is good morning!"

If Barraclough had hoped to surprise any admission out of her, he was disappointed.

"Is there any one else in the house?" he asked.

She shook her head.

"Only the two maidservants. But you won't take my word for it, I know. You'll search anyway."

"That's so. You're a sensible woman. Come on."

He half led, half pulled her into the dining room, where Conder and the other prisoner were seated. She took a chair with composure.

"You've overdone it this time, Mr. Barraclough," she said. "What are you pulling us for?"

Barraclough shrugged his shoulders.

"You'll learn that a little later on," he said. In point of fact, he was still uncertain himself as to what the charge might be. "Meanwhile, if you will tell us where Miss Rockward is, it may save trouble."

She elevated her eyebrows.

"Miss Rockward! Who is she?"

The detective turned abruptly away.

"I'm going to search the house," he said.

He went through all the twelve rooms that composed the villa to make certain that Gwennie was speaking the truth when she said that there was no one else in the place but the maidservants.

From the two servants, all in a flutter by the unexpected raid, he extracted little. Mrs. Frankton— which was the name by which they knew Gwennie— had employed them for about six weeks— that was since she had taken the house.

They understood that she was going to conduct it as a boarding house. There had been only two boarders so far— Mr. Green (Barraclough understood that Velson was meant) and a Mr. Shilworth. Mr. Shilworth was a commercial traveller. He was now away on business— had been away for four days.

Here was food for thought. Miss Rockward had been missing for three days. Barraclough shot a question at the more intelligent and less flustered of the two girls. Yes, Mr. Shilworth had been away before— sometimes for one day, never more than two. He was a middle-aged man with a scar on the right temple, had a pointed beard, slightly auburn, and light hair, two-coloured. Barraclough got them to point out the rooms which had been occupied by Gwennie herself, by "Green," and by "Shilworth." It was in the drawer of a writing table in the apartment of the commercial traveller that he came across what he wanted.

He descended to the dining room and addressed the two prisoners.

"See here, you two people. You know as well as I do that I've no right to question you, but I may as well tell you that I'm not on the bluff. I've got evidence that you were concerned in the abduction of Miss Rockward, and I know why. You can't do any good by holding her up any longer. We're bound to find her— and Kid Foster. Now, where is she?"

"You're a wise guy," sneered Velson.

"Shut up," ordered Gwennie imperatively, and the little man relapsed into scowling silence. She fixed an appraising gaze on Barraclough. "You're a gentleman, Mr. Barraclough," she said. "Will you let up on us if we put you on the line?"

"I can't make bargains, I'm afraid," said Barraclough.

Gwennie placidly crossed her arms.

"Then you'll have to work out your own business," she observed.

Detective-Inspector Watford faced Detective-Inspector Barraclough as they sat in two of Gwennie's softly cushioned armchairs. Gwennie and Velson were safely on their way by taxicab to King Street Police Station, and a more minute search of the house than Barraclough had been able to make was being systematically conducted by the three men Watford had brought with him.

The latter tapped the bowl of an empty pipe thoughtfully upon the heel of his boot.

"I wish I was sure you hadn't dragged me out of bed on a wild-goose chase," he observed. "It seems to me like a dead end. We can't prove that they had anything to do with the Great Southern Bank business, and that's my funeral. You may feel sure about the abduction, but you haven't got the lady. I'm not quite comfortable. I own it freely."

Barraclough stood up.

"Of all the infernal gratitude! Why, man, it's as clear as crystal! Here's this forgery committed. You suspect one of the bank clerks and keep young Elsleigh

under observation. You find him colloquing with Brixton George, and, like a sensible man, you send 'em both down. They're both as tight as oysters, and there's a hundred thousand of the best stowed away somewhere that you can't lay your finger on."

"Well?" said Watford dryly.

"Well, it stands to reason that there's something behind it. They've briefed Luton, K.C., to defend them at the trial. Somebody's finding the money, and that somebody has got the hundred thousand stowed away in an old stocking. Now, you told me the other day that the defence intend to apply for an adjournment to the next sessions when the case comes up at the Old Bailey."

"Well?" repeated Watford.

"There'll be an application for bail," went on Barraclough. "The rest of the gang know Brixton George. They've got to get him out if they want him to save their own skins. He would talk too much if they deserted him. That's what Luton is for— to get bail— and then George could slip the country. Now the judge is bound to want a person of reputation as well as financial standing for bail— a man like Rockward, for instance."

His colleague moved till he was upright in his chair.

"I see your theory. Miss Rockward has been abducted to force Rockward to go bail for Brixton George."

"That's it. It's certain that Brixton George has been in close touch with Gwennie and Kid Foster. Add it all together, and you couldn't get a likelier gang than Gwennie, the Kid, Velson, and George for a job of this kind. And why did Velson draw a gun?"

A tap at the door and the entry of one of his men prevented Watford from answering. He took from him a couple of letters and three bank pass books, and looked them through. The creases smoothed out of his bronzed face.

"By the great horn spoon, you're right!" he cried. "Here's letters from the Kid. Why on earth Gwennie kept them I don't know. Where did you find them?"

"Stuffed between the mattress and the spring of her bed," replied the other.

"Listen to this," said Watford. He read:

" *'You're a real wonder, Gwennie. After you had given the girl the dope in the tea room in Bond Street I got her away to Charing Cross as simply as ABC. She kept up her daze right across the water, though I got a bit of a shock at Boulogne when I thought she was coming round. However, it was a false alarm. We got here safe enough to your friend at Rue Vaillant 24.*'

"Then there's the other letter:

" 'I went round to see the kid this morning. She's a little tartar, but I guess I will teach her to be good. I am staying at the Bristol, and am feeling a heap better. Have you fixed up about Chelsea yet?' "

"The Bristol!" remarked Barraclough. "That's going some. I suspect the Kid will have worse lodgings before long. Will you go out and burn up the wires, or shall I?"

"I'll go," said Watford.

The unravelling of a skein, once the right end of a mystery is found, proceeds rapidly. It was ten o'clock in the morning when Barraclough and his assistants finished ransacking the house at Tooting. A bath and a shave effaced the traces of a sleepless night, and Barraclough made his way to Scotland Yard. He found Watford in his room with a packed bag in one corner.

"Paris?" he asked.

"Yes," replied his friend. "I'm off to fetch the Kid. The business is well weighed up now. Those bank books show that all the money has been paid into the account of Gwennie and her pals, and we shall have no difficulty in proving the case. The Brigade de Sûrète have nobbled Foster and found the girl. She was in a little house cooped up with an old hag named Templeton, who was with Gwennie in a ladies' bank swindling in the States some years ago. Rockward is going over with me. He asked to be remembered to you, and said that if the commissioner approved he would like to hand you over a cheque."

"That so?" said Barraclough wearily. "Good!"

Watford tapped him on the shoulder.

"See here, old man, I'm puzzling how you got on to this in the first place. You might tell."

Barraclough sighed, and dragged the note that had been sent to Rockward out of his pocket.

"See how that's edged with pink?" he said. "That's what got me on to it. Of course, that edging was bound to attract any one's attention. I didn't know whether it was important or not, so I took it to the people most likely to know—a firm of paper merchants. They told me that the paper— technically a cream-tinted vellum— was made of esparto grass, and that aniline sulphate solution would turn it pink. That didn't seem to help much. I asked if anything else would have done it. Then I got my tip. It seemed that sulphur fumes might have done the trick— they had heard of a case where it had happened when a room had been fumigated.

"I bit right on to that. A room would probably be fumigated after some infectious disease, and that was what I had to look for. I had gone right over London before I hit Big Billy and got the straight tip. That's all there was to it."

"Quite simple, my dear Barraclough," grinned Watford. "There's the guv'nor in his room waiting to pat you on the back." He looked at his watch. "Crikey! I'll have to run to catch that train. Good-bye."

"Good-bye," said Barraclough.

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8: The Clock

A. E. W. Mason

1865-1948

The Windsor Magazine, April 1910

MR. TWISS was a great walker, and it was his habit, after his day's work was done, to walk from his pleasant office in the Adelphi to his home at Hampstead. On an afternoon he was detained to a later hour than usual by one of his clients, a Captain Brayton, over some matter of a mortgage. Mr. Twiss looked at his office clock.

"You are going west, I suppose?" he said. "I wonder if you would walk with me as far as Piccadilly? It will not be very much out of your way, and I have a reason for wishing your company."

"By all means," replied Captain Brayton, and the two men set forth.

Mr. Twiss, however, seemed in a difficulty as to how he should broach his subject, and for a while the pair walked in silence. They, indeed, reached Pall Mall, and were walking down that broad thoroughfare, before a word of any importance was uttered. And even then it was chance which furnished the occasion. A young man of Captain Brayton's age came down from the steps of a club and walked towards them. As he passed beneath a street lamp, Mr. Twiss noticed his face, and ever so slightly started with surprise. At almost the same moment, the young man swerved across the road at a run, as though suddenly he remembered a very pressing appointment. The two men walked on again for a few paces, and then Captain Brayton observed: "There is a screw loose there, I am afraid."

Mr. Twiss shook his head.

"I am sorry to hear you say so," he replied. "It was, indeed, about Archie Cranfield that I was anxious to speak to you. I promised his father that I would be something more than Archie's mere man of affairs, if I were allowed, and I confess that I am troubled by him. You know him well?"

Captain Brayton nodded his head.

"Perhaps I should say that I did know him well," he returned. "We were at the same school, we passed through Chatham together, but since he has relinquished actual service we have seen very little of one another." Here he hesitated, but eventually made up his mind to continue in a guarded fashion. "Also, I am bound to admit that there has been cause for disagreement. We quarrelled."

Mr. Twiss was disappointed. "Then you can tell me nothing of him recently?" he asked, and Captain Brayton shrugged his shoulders.

"Nothing but what all the little world of his acquaintances already knows. He has grown solitary, forbidding in his manner, and, what is most noticeable, sly—

extraordinarily sly. While he is speaking with you, he will smile at some secret thought of his; the affairs of the world have lost their interest for him; he hardly listens and seldom speaks. He is concerned with some private matter, and he hides it cunningly. That is the character, at all events, which his friends give of him."

They had now reached the corner of St. James's Street, and as they turned up the hill, Mr. Twiss took up the tale.

"I am not surprised at what you tell me. It is a great pity, for we both remember him ambitious and a good soldier. I am inclined to blame the house in the country for the change in him."

Captain Brayton, however, did not agree.

"It goes deeper than that," he said. "Men who live alone in the country may show furtive ways in towns, no doubt. But why does he live alone in the country? No, that will not do"; and at the top of St. James's Street the two men parted.

Mr. Twiss walked up Bond Street, and the memory of that house in the country in which Archie Cranfield chose to bury himself kept him company. Mr. Twiss had travelled down into the eastern counties to see it for himself one Saturday afternoon when Cranfield was away from home, and a walk of six miles from the station had taken him to its door. It stood upon the borders of Essex and Suffolk, a small Elizabethan house backed upon the Stour, a place of black beams and low ceilings and great fireplaces. It had been buttressed behind, where the ground ran down to the river-bank, and hardly a window was on a level with its neighbour. A picturesque place enough, but Mr. Twiss was a lover of towns and of paved footways and illuminated streets. He imagined it on such an evening as this, dark, and the rain dripping cheerlessly from the trees. He imagined its inmate crouching over the fire with his sly smile upon his face, and of a sudden the picture took on a sinister look, and a strong sense of discomfort made Mr. Twiss cast an uneasy glance behind him. He had in his pocket a letter of instructions from Archie Cranfield, bidding him buy the house outright with its furniture, since it had now all come into the market.

It was a week after this when next Captain Brayton came to Mr. Twiss's office, and, their business done, he spoke of his own accord of Archie Cranfield.

"I am going to stay with him," he said. "He wrote to me on the night of the day when we passed him in Pall Mall. He told me that he would make up a small bachelor party. I am very glad, for, to tell the truth, our quarrel was a sufficiently serious one, and here, it seems, is the end to it."

Mr. Twiss was delighted, and shook his client warmly by the hand.

"You shall bring me news of Archie Cranfield," he said—"better news than I have," he added, with a sudden gravity upon his face. For in making the arrangements for the purchase of the house, he had come into contact with

various neighbours of Archie Cranfield, and from all of them he had had but one report. Cranfield had a bad name in those parts. There were no particular facts given to account for his reputation. It was all elusive and vague, an impression conveyed by Archie Cranfield himself, by something strange and sly in his demeanour. He would sit chuckling in a sort of triumph, to which no one had the clue, or, on the other hand, he fell into deep silences like a man with a trouble on his mind.

"Be sure you come to see me when you return," said Mr. Twiss, and Captain Brayton replied heartily: "Surely I will." But he never did. For in a few days the newspapers were busy with the strange enigma of his death.

ii

THE FIRST HINT of this enigma was conveyed to Mr. Twiss late one night at his private address. It came in the shape of a telegram from Archie Cranfield, which seemed to the agitated solicitor rather a cry of distress than a message sent across the wires.

"Come at once. I am in terrible need.— Cranfield."

There were no trains at so late an hour by which Mr. Twiss could reach his client; he must needs wait until the morning. He travelled, however, by the first train from Liverpool Street. Although the newspapers were set out upon the bookstall, not one of them contained a word of anything amiss at Archie Cranfield's house, and Mr. Twiss began to breathe more freely. It was too early for a cab to be in waiting at the station, and Mr. Twiss set out to walk the six miles. It was a fine, clear morning of November; but for the want of leaves and birds, and the dull look of the countryside, Mr. Twiss might have believed the season to be June. His spirits rose as he walked, his blood warmed to a comfortable glow, and by the time he came to the gates of the house, Cranfield's summons had become a trifling thing. As he walked up to the door, however, his mood changed, for every blind in the house was drawn. The door was opened before he could touch the bell, and it was opened by Cranfield himself. His face was pale and disordered, his manner that of a man at his wits' end.

"What has happened?" asked Mr. Twiss as he entered the hall.

"A terrible thing!" replied Cranfield. "It's Brayton. Have you breakfasted? I suppose not. Come, and I will tell you while you eat."

He walked up and down the room while Mr. Twiss ate his breakfast, and gradually, by question and by answer, the story took shape. Corroboration was easy and was secured. There was no real dispute about the facts; they were simple and clear.

There were two other visitors in the house besides Captain Brayton, one a barrister named Henry Chalmers, and the second, William Linfield, a man about town as the phrase goes. Both men stood in much the same relationship to Archie Cranfield as Captain Brayton did— that is to say, they were old friends who had seen little of their host of late, and were somewhat surprised to receive his invitation after so long an interval. They had accepted it in the same spirit as Brayton, and the three men arrived together on Wednesday evening. On Thursday the party of four shot over some turnip fields and a few clumps of wood which belonged to the house, and played a game of bridge in the evening. In the opinion of all, Brayton was never in better spirits. On Friday the four men shot again and returned to the house as darkness was coming on. They took tea in the smoking-room, and after tea Brayton declared his intention to write some letters before dinner. He went upstairs to his room for that purpose.

The other three men remained in the smoking-room. Of that there was no doubt. Both Chalmers and Linfield were emphatic upon the point. Chalmers, in particular, said:

"We sat talking on a well-worn theme, I in a chair on one side of the fireplace, Archie Cranfield in another opposite to me, and Linfield sitting on the edge of the billiard-table between us. How the subject cropped up I cannot remember, but I found myself arguing that most men hid their real selves all their lives even from their most intimate friends, that there were secret chambers in a man's consciousness wherein he lived a different life from that which the world saw and knew, and that it was only by some rare mistake the portals of that chamber were ever passed by any other man. Linfield would not hear of it. If this hidden man were the real man, he held, in some way or another the reality would triumph, and some vague suspicion of the truth would in the end be felt by all his intimates. I upheld my view by instances from the courts of law, Linfield his by the aid of a generous imagination, while Cranfield looked from one to the other of us with his sly, mocking smile. I turned to him, indeed, in some heat.

"'Well, since you appear to know, Cranfield, tell me which of us is right,' and his pipe fell from his fingers and broke upon the hearth. He stood up, with his face grown white and his lips drawn back from his teeth in a kind of snarl.

'"What do you mean by that?' he asked; and before I could answer, the door was thrown violently open, and Cranfield's man-servant burst into the room. He mastered himself enough to say:

"'May I speak to you, sir?'

"Cranfield went outside the door with him. He could not have moved six paces from the door, for though he closed it behind him, we heard the sound of his voice and of his servant's speaking in low tones. Moreover, there was no

appreciable moment of time between the cessation of the voices and Cranfield's reappearance in the room. He came back to the fireplace and said very quietly:

"'I have something terrible to tell you. Brayton has shot himself.'

"He then glanced from Linfield's face to mine, and sat down in a chair heavily. Then he crouched over the fire shivering. Both Linfield and myself were too shocked by the news to say a word for a moment or two. Then Linfield asked:

"'But is he dead?'

"'Humphreys says so,' Cranfield returned. 'I have telephoned to the police and to the doctor.'

"'But we had better go upstairs ourselves and see,' said I. And we did."

Thus Chalmers Humphreys, the man-servant, gave the following account:

"The bell rang from Captain Brayton's room at half-past five. I answered it at once myself, and Captain Brayton asked me at what hour the post left. I replied that we sent the letters from the house to the post-office in the village at six. He then asked me to return at that hour and fetch those of his which would be ready. I returned precisely at six, and I saw Captain Brayton lying in a heap upon the rug in front of the fire. He was dead, and he held a revolver tightly clenched in his hand. As I stepped over hun, I smelt that something was burning. He had shot himself through the heart, and his clothes were singed, as if he had held the revolver close to his side."

These stories were repeated at the inquest, and at this particular point in Humphreys' evidence the coroner asked a question:

"Did you recognise the revolver?"

"Not until Captain Brayton's hand was unclenched."

"But then you did?"

"Yes," said Humphreys.

The coroner pointed to the table on which a revolver lay.

"Is that the weapon?"

Humphreys took it up and looked at the handle, on which two initials were engraved—"A. C."

"Yes," said the man. "I recognised it as Mr. Cranfield's. He kept it in a drawer by his bedside."

No revolver was found amongst Captain Brayton's possessions.

It became clear that, while the three men were talking in the billiard-room, Captain Brayton had gone to Cranfield's room, taken his revolver, and killed himself with it. No evidence, however, was produced which supplied a reason for Brayton's suicide. His affairs were in good order, his means sufficient, his prospects of advancement in his career sound. Nor was there a suggestion of any private unhappiness. The tragedy, therefore, was entered in that list of mysteries which are held insoluble.

"I might," said Chalmers, "perhaps resume the argument which Humphreys interrupted in the billiard-room, with a better instance than any which I induced— the instance of Captain Brayton."

iii

"YOU WON'T go?" Archie Cranfield pleaded with Mr. Twiss. "Linfield and Chalmers leave to-day. If you go too, I shall be entirely alone."

"But why should you stay?" the lawyer returned. "Surely you hardly propose to remain through the winter in this house?"

"No, but I must stay on for a few days; I have to make arrangements before I can go," said Cranfield; and seeing that he was in earnest in his intention to go, Mr. Twiss was persuaded. He stayed on, and recognised, in consequence, that the death of Captain Brayton had amongst its consequences one which he had not expected. The feeling in the neighbourhood changed towards Archie Cranfield. It cannot be said that he became popular— he wore too sad and joyless an air— but sympathy was shown to him in many acts of courtesy and in a greater charity of language.

A retired admiral, of a strong political complexion, who had been one of the foremost to dislike Archie Cranfield, called, indeed, to offer his condolences. Archie Cranfield did not see him, but Mr. Twiss walked down the drive with him to the gate.

"It's hard on Cranfield," said the admiral. "We all admit it. It wasn't fair of Brayton to take his host's revolver. But for the accident that Cranfield was in the billiard-room with Linfield and Chalmers, the affair might have taken on quite an ugly look. We all feel that in the neighbourhood, and we shall make it up to Cranfield. Just tell him that, Mr. Twiss, if you will."

"It is very kind of you all, I am sure," replied Mr. Twiss, "but I think Cranfield will not continue to live here. The death of Captain Brayton has been too much of a shock for him."

Mr. Twiss said "Good-bye" to the admiral at the gate, and returned to the house. He was not easy in his mind, and as he walked round the lawn under the great trees, he cried to himself:

"It is lucky, indeed, that Archie Cranfield was in the billiard-room with Linfield and Chalmers; otherwise, Heaven knows what I might have been brought to believe myself."

The two men had quarrelled; Brayton himself had imparted that piece of knowledge to Mr. Twiss. Then there was the queer change in Archie Cranfield's character, which had made for him enemies of strangers, and strangers of his friends— the slyness, the love of solitude, the indifference to the world, the furtive smile as of a man conscious of secret powers, the whole indescribable

uncanniness of him. Mr. Twiss marshalled his impressions and stopped in the avenue.

"I should have had no just grounds for any suspicion," he concluded, "but I cannot say that I should not have suspected," and slowly he went on to the door.

He walked through the house into the billiard-room, and so became the witness of an incident which caused him an extraordinary disquiet. The room was empty. Mr. Twiss lit his pipe and took down a book from one of the shelves. A bright fire glowed upon the hearth, and drawing up a chair to the fender, he settled down to read. But the day was dull, and the fireplace stood at the dark end of the room. Mr. Twiss carried his book over to the window, which was a bay window with a broad seat. Now, the curtains were hung at the embrasure of the window, so that, when they were drawn, they shut the bay off altogether from the room, and when they were open, as now, they still concealed the corners of the window-seats. It was in one of these corners that Mr. Twiss took his seat, and there he read quietly for the space of five minutes.

At the end of that time he heard the latch of the door click, and looking out from his position behind the curtain, he saw the door slowly open. Archie Cranfield came through the doorway into the room, and shut the door behind him. Then he stood for a while by the door, very still, but breathing heavily. Mr. Twiss was on the point of coming forward and announcing his presence, but there was something so strange and secret in Cranfield's behaviour that, in spite of certain twinges of conscience, he remained hidden in his seat. He did more than remain hidden. He made a chink between the curtain and the wall, and watched. He saw Cranfield move swiftly over to the fireplace, seize a little old-fashioned clock in a case of satinwood which stood upon the mantelshelf, raise it in the air, and dash it with an ungovernable fury on to the stone hearth. Having done this unaccountable thing, Cranfield dropped into the chair which Mr. Twiss had drawn up. He covered his face with his hands and suddenly began to sob and wail in the most dreadful fashion, rocking his body from side to side in a very paroxysm of grief. Mr. Twiss was at his wits' end to know what to do. He felt that to catch a man sobbing would be to earn his undying resentment. Yet the sound was so horrible, and produced in him so sharp a discomfort and distress, that, on the other hand, he could hardly keep still. The paroxysm passed, however, almost as quickly as it had come, and Cranfield, springing to his feet, rang the bell. Humphreys answered it.

"I have knocked the clock off the mantelshelf with my elbow, Humphreys," he said. "I am afraid that it is broken, and the glass might cut somebody's hand. Would you mind clearing the pieces away?"

He went out of the room, and Humphreys went off for a dustpan. Mr. Twiss was able to escape from the billiard-room unnoticed. But it was a long time before he recovered from the uneasiness which the incident aroused in him.

Four days later the two men left the house together. The servants had been paid off. Humphreys had gone with the luggage to London by an earlier train. Mr. Twiss and Archie Cranfield were the last to go. Cranfield turned the key in the lock of the front door as they stood upon the steps.

"I shall never see the inside of that house again," he said with a gusty violence.

"Will you allow me to get rid of it for you?" asked Mr. Twiss; and for a moment Cranfield looked at him with knotted brows, blowing the while into the wards of the key.

"No," he said at length, and, running down to the stream at the back of the house, he tossed the key into the water. "No," he repeated sharply; "let the house rot empty as it stands. The rats shall have their will of it, and the sooner the better."

He walked quickly to the gate, with Mr. Twiss at his heels, and as they covered the six miles to the railway station, very little was said between them.

iv

TIME RAN ON, and Mr. Twiss was a busy man. The old house by the Stour began to vanish from his memory amongst the mists and the veils of rain which so often enshrouded it. Even the enigma of Captain Brayton's death was ceasing to perplex him, when the whole affair was revived in the most startling fashion. A labourer, making a short cut to his work one summer morning, passed through the grounds of Cranfield's closed and shuttered house. His way led him round the back of the building, and as he came to that corner where the great brick buttresses kept the house from slipping down into the river, he saw below him, at the edge of the water, a man sleeping. The man's back was turned towards him; he was lying half upon his side, half upon his face. The labourer, wondering who it was, went down to the river-bank, and the first thing he noticed was a revolver lying upon the grass, its black barrel and handle shining in the morning sunlight. The labourer turned the sleeper over on his back. There was some blood upon the left breast of his waistcoat. The sleeper was dead, and from the rigidity of the body had been dead for some hours. The labourer ran back to the village with the astounding news that he had found Mr. Cranfield shot through the heart at the back of his own empty house. People at first jumped naturally to the belief that murder had been done. The more judicious, however, shook their heads. Not a door nor a window was open in the house. When the locks were forced, it was seen that the dust lay deep on floor and chair and table, and

nowhere was there any mark of a hand or a foot. Outside the house, too, in the long neglected grass, there were but two sets of footsteps visible, one set leading round the house— the marks made by the labourer on his way to his work— the other set leading directly to the spot where Archie Cranfield's body was found lying. Rumours, each contradicting the other, flew from cottage to cottage, and the men gathered about the police-station and in the street waiting for the next. In an hour or two, however, the mystery was at an end. It leaked out that upon Archie Cranfield's body a paper had been discovered, signed in his hand and by his name, with these words:

"I have shot myself with the same revolver with which I murdered Captain Brayton."

The statement created some stir when it was read out in the billiard-room, where the coroner held his inquest. But the coroner who presided now was the man who had held the court when Captain Brayton had been shot. He was quite clear in his recollection of that case.

"Mr. Cranfield's alibi on that occasion," he said, "was incontrovertible. Mr. Cranfield was with two friends in this very room when Captain Brayton shot himself in his bedroom. There can be no doubt of that." And under his direction the jury returned a verdict of "Suicide while of unsound mind."

Mr. Twiss attended the inquest and the funeral. But though he welcomed the verdict, at the bottom of his mind he was uneasy. He remembered vividly that extraordinary moment when he had seen Cranfield creep into the billiard-room, lift the little clock in its case of satinwood high above his head, and dash it down upon the hearth in a wild gust of fury. He recollected how the fury had given way to despair — if it were despair and not remorse. He saw again Archie Cranfield dropping into the chair, holding his head and rocking his body in a paroxysm of sobs. The sound of his wailing rang horribly once more in the ears of Mr. Twiss. He was not satisfied.

"What should take Cranfield back to that deserted house, there to end his life, if not remorse," he asked himself—"remorse for some evil done there"?

Over that question for some days he shook his head, finding it waiting for him at his fireside and lurking for him at the corner of the roads, as he took his daily walk between Hampstead and his office. It began to poison his life, a life of sane and customary ways, with eerie suggestions. There was an oppression upon his heart of which he could not rid it. On the outskirts of his pleasant world dim horrors loomed; he seemed to walk upon a frail crust, fearful of what lay beneath. The sly smile, the furtive triumph, the apparent consciousness of secret power— did they point to some corruption of the soul in Cranfield, of which none knew but he himself?

"At all events, he paid for it," Mr. Twiss would insist, and from that reflection drew, after all, but little comfort. The riddle began even to invade his business

hours, and take a seat within his private office, silently clamouring for his attention. So that it was with a veritable relief that he heard one morning from his clerk that a man called Humphreys wished particularly to see him.

"Show him in," cried Mr. Twiss, and for his own ear he added: "Now I shall know."

Humphreys entered the room with a letter in his hand. He laid the letter on the office table. Mr. Twiss saw at a glance that it was addressed in Archie Cranfield's hand. He flung himself upon it and snatched it up. It was sealed by Cranfield's seal. It was addressed to himself, with a note upon the left-hand corner of the envelope:

"To be delivered after my death."

Mr. Twiss turned sternly to the man.

"Why did you not bring it before?"

"Mr. Cranfield told me to wait a month," Humphreys replied.

Mr. Twiss took a turn across the room with the letter in his hand.

"Then you knew," he cried, "that your master meant to kill himself? You knew, and remained silent?"

"No, sir, I did not know," Humphreys replied firmly. "Mr. Cranfield gave me the letter, saying that he had a long railway journey in front of him. He was smiling when he gave it me. I can remember the words with which he gave it: 'They offer you an insurance ticket at the booking-office, when they sell you your travelling ticket, so there is always, I suppose, a little risk. And it is of the utmost importance to me that, in the event of my death, this should reach Mr. Twiss.' He spoke so lightly that I could not have guessed what was on his mind, nor, do I think, sir, could you."

Mr. Twiss dismissed the man and summoned his clerk. "I shall not be in to anyone this afternoon," he said. He broke the seal and drew some closely written sheets of note-paper from the envelope. He spread the sheets in front of him with a trembling hand.

"Heaven knows in what spirit and with what knowledge I shall rise from my reading," he thought; and looking out of his pleasant window upon the barges swinging down the river on the tide, he was in half a mind to fling the sheets of paper into the fire. "But I shall be plagued with that question all my life," he added, and he bent his head over his desk and read.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—

I am writing down for you the facts. I am not offering any explanation, for I have none to give. You will probably rise up, after reading this letter, quite incredulous, and with the conviction in your mind that you have been reading the extravagancies of a madman. And I wish with all my heart that you could be

right. But you are not. I have come to the end to-day. I am writing the last words I ever shall write, and therefore I am not likely to write a lie.

You will remember the little manor-house on the borders of Essex, for you were always opposed to my purchase of it. You were like the British jury, my friend. Your conclusion was sound, but your reason for it very far from the mark. You disliked it for its isolation and the melancholy of its dripping trees, and I know not what other town-bred reasonings. I will give you a more solid cause. Picture to yourself the billiard-room and how it was furnished when I first took the house— the raised settee against the wall, the deep leather chairs by the fire, the high fender, and on the mantelshelf— what?— a little old-fashioned clock in a case of satinwood. You probably never noticed it. I did from the first evenings which I passed in the house. For I spent those evenings alone, smoking my pipe by the fire. It had a queer trick. For a while it would tick almost imperceptibly, and then, without reason, quite suddenly, the noise would become loud and hollow, as though the pendulum in its swing struck against the wooden case. To anyone sitting alone for hours in the room, as I did, this tick had the queerest effect. The clock almost became endowed with human qualities. At one time it seemed to wish to attract one's attention, at another time to avoid it. For more than once, disturbed by the louder knocking, I rose and moved the clock. At once the knocking would cease, to begin again when I had settled afresh to my book, in a kind of tentative, secret way, as though it would accustom my ears to the sound, and so pass unnoticed. And often it did so pass, until one knock louder and more insistent than the rest would drag me in annoyance on to my feet once more. In a week, however, I got used to it, and then followed the strange incident which set in motion that chain of events of which tomorrow will see the end.

It happened that a couple of my neighbours were calling on me. One of them you have met— Admiral Palkin, a prolix old gentleman, with a habit of saying nothing at remarkable length. The other was a Mr. Stiles, a country gentleman who had a thought of putting up for that division of the county. I led these two gentlemen into the billiard-room, and composed myself to listen while the admiral monologued. But the clock seemed to me to tick louder than ever, until, with one sharp and almost metallic thump, the sound ceased altogether. At exactly the same moment, Admiral Palkin stopped dead in the middle of a sentence. It was nothing of any consequence that he was saying, but I remember the words at which he stopped. 'I have often' he said, and then he broke off, not with any abrupt start, or for any lack of words, but just as if he had completed all that he had meant to say. I looked at him across the fireplace, but his face wore its usual expression of complacent calm. He was in no way put out. Nor did it seem that any new train of thought had flashed into his mind and diverted it. I turned my eyes from him to Mr. Stiles. Mr. Stiles seemed actually to

be unaware that the admiral had stopped talking at all. Admiral Palkin, you will remember, was a person of consequence in the district, and Mr. Stiles, who would subsequently need his vote and influence and motorcar, had thought fit to assume an air of great deference. From the beginning he had leaned towards the admiral, his elbow upon his knee, his chin propped upon his hand, and his head now and again nodding a thoughtful assent to the admiral's nothings. In this attitude he still remained, not surprised, not even patiently waiting for the renewal of wisdom, but simply attentive.

Nor did I move, for I was amused. The two men looked just like a couple of wax figures in Madame Tussaud's, fixed in a stiff attitude and condemned so to remain until the building should take fire and the wax run. I sat watching them for minutes, and still neither moved nor spoke. I never saw in my life a couple of people so entirely ridiculous. I tried hard to keep my countenance— for to laugh at these great little men in my own house would not only be bad manners, but would certainly do for me in the neighbourhood— but I could not help it. I began to smile, and the smile became a laugh. Yet not a muscle on the faces of my visitors changed. Not a frown overshadowed the admiral's complacency; not a glance diverted the admiring eyes of Mr. Stiles. And then the clock began to tick again, and, to my infinite astonishment, at the very same moment the admiral continued.

'—said to myself in my lighter moments— And pray, sir, at what are you laughing?'

Mr. Stiles turned with an angry glance towards me. Admiral Palkin had resumed his conversation, apparently unaware that there had been any interval at all. My laughter, on the other hand, had extended beyond the interval, had played an accompaniment to the words just spoken. I made my excuses as well as I could, but I recognised that they were deemed insufficient. The two gentlemen left my house with the coldest farewells you can imagine.

The same extraordinary incident was repeated with other visitors, but I was on my guard against any injudicious merriment. Moreover, I had no longer any desire to laugh. I was too perplexed. My visitors never seemed to notice that there had been a lengthy interval or indeed any interval at all, while I, for my part, hesitated to ask them what had so completely hypnotised them.

The next development took place when I was alone in the room. It was five o'clock in the afternoon. I had been out shooting a covert close to the house, and a few minutes after I had rung the bell, I remembered that I had forgotten some instructions which I had meant to give to the keeper. So I got up at once, thinking to catch him in the gun-room before he went home. As I rose from my chair, the clock, which had been ticking loudly— though, as I have said, it was rather a hollow, booming sound, as though the pendulum struck the wood of the case, than a mere ticking of the clock-work— ceased its noise with the

abruptness to which I was growing used. I went out of the room into the hall, and I saw Humphreys with the tea-tray in his hands in the hall. He was turned towards the billiard-room door, but to my astonishment he was not moving. He was poised with one foot in the air, as though he had been struck, as the saying is, with a step half taken. You have seen, no doubt, instantaneous photographs of people in the act of walking. Well, Humphreys was exactly like one of those photographs. He had just the same stiff, ungainly look. I should have spoken to him, but I was anxious to catch my keeper before he went away. So I took no notice of him. I crossed the hall quickly and went out by the front door, leaving it open. The gun-room was really a small building of corrugated iron, standing apart at the back of the house. I went to it and tried the door. It was locked. I called aloud: 'Martin! Martin!'

But I received no answer. I ran round the house again, thinking that he might just have started home, but I saw no signs of him. There were some outhouses which it was his business to look after, and I visited them, opening the door of each of them and calling him by name. Then I went down the drive to the gate, thinking that I might perhaps catch a glimpse of him upon the road, but again I was disappointed. I then returned to the house, shut the front door, and there in the hall still stood Humphreys in his ridiculous attitude with the tea-tray in his hands. I passed him and went back into the billiard-room. He took no notice of me whatever. I looked at the clock upon the mantelshelf, and I saw that I had been away just fourteen minutes. For fourteen minutes Humphreys had been standing on one leg in the hall. It seemed as incredible as it was ludicrous. Yet there was the clock to bear me out. I sat down on my chair with my hands trembling, my mind in a maze. The strangest thought had come to me, and while I revolved it in my mind, the clock resumed its ticking, the door opened, and Humphreys appeared with the tea-tray in his hand.

'You have been a long time, Humphreys,' I said, and the man looked at me quickly. My voice was shaking with excitement, my face, no doubt, had a disordered look.

'I prepared the tea at once, sir,' he answered.

'It is twenty minutes by the clock since I rang the bell,' I said.

Humphreys placed the tea on a small table at my side and then looked at the clock. An expression of surprise came over his face. He compared it with the dial of his own watch.

'The clock wants regulating, sir,' he said. 'I set it by the kitchen clock this morning, and it has gained fourteen minutes.'

I whipped my own watch out of my pocket and stared at it. Humphreys was quite right; the clock upon the mantelshelf had gained fourteen minutes upon all our watches. Yes, but it had gained those fourteen minutes in a second, and that was the least part of the marvel. I myself had had the benefit of those

fourteen minutes. I had snatched them, as it were, from Time itself. I had looked at my watch when I rang the bell. It had marked five minutes to five. I had remained yet another four minutes in the room before I had remembered my forgotten instructions to the keeper. I had then gone out. I had visited the gun-room and the outhouses, I had walked to the front gate, I had returned. I had taken fourteen minutes over my search— I could not have taken less— and here were the hands of my watch now still pointing towards five, still short of the hour. Indeed, as I replaced my watch in my pocket, the clock in the hall outside struck five.

'As you passed through the hall, Humphreys, you saw no one, I suppose?' I said.

Humphreys raised his eyebrows with a look of perplexity. 'No, sir, I saw no one,' he returned, 'but it seemed to me that the front door banged. I think it must have been left open.'

"Very likely,' said I. 'That will do,' and Humphreys went out of the room.

Imagine my feelings. Time is relative, it is a condition of our senses, it is nothing more— that we know. But its relation to me was different from its relation to others. The clock had given me fourteen minutes which it denied to all the world besides. Fourteen full minutes for me, yet they passed for others in less than the fraction of a second. And not once only had it made me this gift, but many times. The admiral's pause, unnoticed by Mr. Stiles, was now explained to me. He had not paused; he had gone straight on with his flow of talk, and Mr. Stiles had gone straight on listening. But between two of Admiral Palkin's words, Time had stood still for me. Similarly, Humphreys had not poised himself upon one ridiculous leg in the hall. He had taken a step in the usual way, but while his leg was raised, fourteen minutes were given to me. I had walked through the hall, I had walked back through the hall, yet Humphreys had not seen me. He could not have seen me, for there had been no interval of time for him to use his eyes. I had gone and come quicker than any flash, for even a flash is appreciable as some fraction of a second.

I asked you to imagine my feelings. Only with those which I first experienced would you, from your sane and comfortable outlook upon life, have any sympathy, for at the beginning I was shocked. I had more than an inclination then to dash that clock upon the hearth and deny myself its bizarre and unnatural gift. Would that I had done so! But the inclination was passed, and was succeeded by an incredible lightness of spirit. I had a gift which raised me above kings, which fanned into a flame every spark of vanity within me. I had so much more of time than any other man. I amused myself by making plans to use it, and thereupon I suffered a disappointment. For there was so little one could do in fourteen minutes, and the more I realised how little there was which I could do in my own private special stretch of time, the more I wanted to do, the

more completely I wished to live in it, the more I wished to pluck power and advantage from it. Thus I began to look forward to the sudden cessation of the ticking of the clock; I began to wait for it, to live for it, and when it came, I could make no use of it. I gained fourteen minutes now and then, but I lost more and more of the hours which I shared with other men. They lost their salt for me. I became tortured with the waste of those minutes of my own. I had the power; what I wanted now was to employ it. The desire became an obsession occupying my thoughts, harassing my dreams.

I was in this mood when I passed Brayton and yourself one evening in Pall Mall. I wrote to him that night, and I swear to you upon my conscience that I had no thought in writing but to put an end to an old disagreement, and re-establish, if possible, an old friendship. I wrote in a sudden revulsion of feeling. The waste of my days was brought home to me. I recognised that the great gift was no more than a perpetual injury. I proposed to gather my acquaintances about me, discard my ambition for some striking illustration of my power, and take up once more the threads of customary life. Yet my determination lasted no longer than the time it took me to write the letter and run out with it to the post. I regretted its despatch even as I heard it fall to the bottom of the pillar-box.

Of my quarrel with Brayton I need not write at length. It sprang from a rancorous jealousy. We had been friends and class-mates in the beginning. But as step by step he rose just a little above me, the friendship I had turned to gall and anger. I was never more than the second, he always the first. Had I been fourth or fifth, I think I should not have minded; but there was so little to separate us in merit or advancement. Yet there was always that little, and I dreaded the moment when he should take a bound and leave me far behind. The jealousy grew to a real hatred, made still more bitter to me by the knowledge that Brayton himself was unaware of it, and need not have been troubled had he been aware.

After I left the Army and lost sight of him, the flame burnt low. I believed it was extinguished when I invited him to stay with me; but he had not been an hour in the house when it blazed up within me. His success, the confidence which it had given him, his easy friendliness with strangers, the talk of him as a coming man, bit into my soul. The very sound of his footstep sickened me. I was in this mood when the clock began to boom louder and louder in the billiard-room. Chalmers and Linfield were talking. I did not listen to them. My heart beat louder and louder within my breast, keeping pace with the clock. I knew that in a moment or two the sound would cease, and the doors of my private kingdom would be open for me to pass through. I sat back in my chair waiting while the devilish inspiration had birth and grew strong. Here was the great chance to use the power I had— the only chance which had ever come to me. Brayton was

writing letters in his room. The room was in a wing of the house. The sound of a shot would not be heard. There would be an end of his success; there would be for me such a triumphant use of my great privilege as I had never dreamed of. The clock suddenly ceased. I slipped from the room and went upstairs. I was quite leisurely. I had time. I was back in my chair again before seven minutes had passed.

Archie Cranfield.

9: Buried Treasure

O. Henry

1862-1910

Ainslee's, July 1908

THERE ARE many kinds of fools. Now, will everybody please sit still until they are called upon specifically to rise?

I had been every kind of fool except one. I had expended my patrimony, pretended my matrimony, played poker, lawn-tennis, and bucket-shops— parted soon with my money in many ways. But there remained one rule of the wearer of cap and bells that I had not played. That was the Seeker after Buried Treasure. To few does the delectable furor come. But of all the would-be followers in the hoof-prints of King Midas none has found a pursuit so rich in pleasurable promise.

But, going back from my theme a while— as lame pens must do— I was a fool of the sentimental sort. I saw May Martha Mangum, and was hers. She was eighteen, the color of the white ivory keys of a new piano, beautiful, and possessed by the exquisite solemnity and pathetic witchery of an unsophisticated angel doomed to live in a small, dull, Texas prairie-town. She had a spirit and charm that could have enabled her to pluck rubies like raspberries from the crown of Belgium or any other sporty kingdom, but she did not know it, and I did not paint the picture for her.

You see, I wanted May Martha Mangum for to have and to hold. I wanted her to abide with me, and put my slippers and pipe away every day in places where they cannot be found of evenings.

May Martha's father was a man hidden behind whiskers and spectacles. He lived for bugs and butterflies and all insects that fly or crawl or buzz or get down your back or in the butter. He was an etymologist, or words to that effect. He spent his life seining the air for flying fish of the June-bug order, and then sticking pins through 'em and calling 'em names.

He and May Martha were the whole family. He prized her highly as a fine specimen of the *racibus humanus* because she saw that he had food at times, and put his clothes on right side before, and kept his alcohol-bottles filled. Scientists, they say, are apt to be absent-minded.

There was another besides myself who thought May Martha Mangum one to be desired. That was Goodloe Banks, a young man just home from college. He had all the attainments to be found in books— Latin, Greek, philosophy, and especially the higher branches of mathematics and logic.

If it hadn't been for his habit of pouring out this information and learning on every one that he addressed, I'd have liked him pretty well. But, even as it was, he and I were, you would have thought, great pals.

We got together every time we could because each of us wanted to pump the other for whatever straws we could to find which way the wind blew from the heart of May Martha Mangum— rather a mixed metaphor; Goodloe Banks would never have been guilty of that. That is the way of rivals.

You might say that Goodloe ran to books, manners, culture, rowing, intellect, and clothes. I would have put you in mind more of baseball and Friday-night debating societies— by way of culture— and maybe of a good horseback rider.

But in our talks together, and in our visits and conversation with May Martha, neither Goodloe Banks nor I could find out which one of us she preferred. May Martha was a natural-born non-committal, and knew in her cradle how to keep people guessing.

As I said, old man Mangum was absent-minded. After a long time he found out one day— a little butterfly must have told him— that two young men were trying to throw a net over the head of the young person, a daughter, or some such technical appendage, who looked after his comforts.

I never knew scientists could rise to such occasions. Old Mangum orally labelled and classified Goodloe and myself easily among the lowest orders of the vertebrates; and in English, too, without going any further into Latin than the simple references to *Orgetorix, Rex Helvetii*— which is as far as I ever went, myself. And he told us that if he ever caught us around his house again he would add us to his collection.

Goodloe Banks and I remained away five days, expecting the storm to subside. When we dared to call at the house again May Martha Mangum and her father were gone. Gone! The house they had rented was closed. Their little store of goods and chattels was gone also.

And not a word of farewell to either of us from May Martha— not a white, fluttering note pinned to the hawthorn-bush; not a chalk-mark on the gate-post nor a post-card in the post-office to give us a clew.

For two months Goodloe Banks and I— separately— tried every scheme we could think of to track the runaways. We used our friendship and influence with the ticket-agent, with livery-stable men, railroad conductors, and our one lone, lorn constable, but without results.

Then we became better friends and worse enemies than ever. We forgathered in the back room of Snyder's saloon every afternoon after work, and played dominoes, and laid conversational traps to find out from each other if anything had been discovered. That is the way of rivals.

Now, Goodloe Banks had a sarcastic way of displaying his own learning and putting me in the class that was reading "Poor Jane Ray, her bird is dead, she cannot play." Well, I rather liked Goodloe, and I had a contempt for his college learning, and I was always regarded as good-natured, so I kept my temper. And I

was trying to find out if he knew anything about May Martha, so I endured his society.

In talking things over one afternoon he said to me:

"Suppose you do find her, Ed, whereby would you profit? Miss Mangum has a mind. Perhaps it is yet uncultured, but she is destined for higher things than you could give her. I have talked with no one who seemed to appreciate more the enchantment of the ancient poets and writers and the modern cults that have assimilated and expended their philosophy of life. Don't you think you are wasting your time looking for her?"

"My idea," said I, "of a happy home is an eight-room house in a grove of live-oaks by the side of a *charco* on a Texas prairie. A piano," I went on, "with an automatic player in the sitting-room, three thousand head of cattle under fence for a starter, a buckboard and ponies always hitched at a post for 'the missus'— and May Martha Mangum to spend the profits of the ranch as she pleases, and to abide with me, and put my slippers and pipe away every day in places where they cannot be found of evenings. That," said I, "is what is to be; and a fig— a dried, Smyrna, dago-stand fig— for your curriculums, cults, and philosophy."

"She is meant for higher things," repeated Goodloe Banks.

"Whatever she is meant for," I answered, just now she is out of pocket. And I shall find her as soon as I can without aid of the colleges."

"The game is blocked," said Goodloe, putting down a domino; and we had the beer.

Shortly after that a young farmer whom I knew came into town and brought me a folded blue paper. He said his grandfather had just died. I concealed a tear, and he went on to say that the old man had jealously guarded this paper for twenty years. He left it to his family as part of his estate, the rest of which consisted of two mules and a hypotenuse of non-arable land.

The sheet of paper was of the old, blue kind used during the rebellion of the abolitionists against the secessionists. It was dated June 14, 1863, and it described the hiding-place of ten burro-loads of gold and silver coin valued at three hundred thousand dollars. Old Rundle— grandfather of his grandson, Sam— was given the information by a Spanish priest who was in on the treasure-burying, and who died many years before— no, afterward— in old Rundle's house. Old Rundle wrote it down from dictation.

"Why didn't your father look this up?" I asked young Rundle.

"He went blind before he could do so," he replied.

"Why didn't you hunt for it yourself?" I asked.

"Well," said he, "I've only known about the paper for ten years. First there was the spring ploughin' to do, and then choppin' the weeds out of the corn; and then come takin' fodder; and mighty soon winter was on us. It seemed to run along that way year after year."

That sounded perfectly reasonable to me, so I took it up with young Lee Rundle at once.

The directions on the paper were simple. The whole burro cavalcade laden with the treasure started from an old Spanish mission in Dolores County. They travelled due south by the compass until they reached the Alamito River. They forded this, and buried the treasure on the top of a little mountain shaped like a pack-saddle standing in a row between two higher ones. A heap of stones marked the place of the buried treasure. All the party except the Spanish priest were killed by Indians a few days later. The secret was a monopoly. It looked good to me.

Lee Rundle suggested that we rig out a camping outfit, hire a surveyor to run out the line from the Spanish mission, and then spend the three hundred thousand dollars seeing the sights in Fort Worth. But, without being highly educated, I knew a way to save time and expense.

We went to the State land-office and had a practical, what they call a "working," sketch made of all the surveys of land from the old mission to the Alamito River. On this map I drew a line due southward to the river. The length of lines of each survey and section of land was accurately given on the sketch. By these we found the point on the river and had a "connection" made with it and an important, well-identified corner of the Los Animos five-league survey—a grant made by King Philip of Spain.

By doing this we did not need to have the line run out by a surveyor. It was a great saving of expense and time.

So, Lee Rundle and I fitted out a two-horse wagon team with all the accessories, and drove a hundred and forty-nine miles to Chico, the nearest town to the point we wished to reach. There we picked up a deputy county surveyor. He found the corner of the Los Animos survey for us, ran out the five thousand seven hundred and twenty varas west that our sketch called for, laid a stone on the spot, had coffee and bacon, and caught the mail-stage back to Chico.

I was pretty sure we would get that three hundred thousand dollars. Lee Rundle's was to be only one-third, because I was paying all the expenses. With that two hundred thousand dollars I knew I could find May Martha Mangum if she was on earth. And with it I could flutter the butterflies in old man Mangum's dovecot, too. If I could find that treasure!

But Lee and I established camp. Across the river were a dozen little mountains densely covered by cedar-brakes, but not one shaped like a pack-saddle. That did not deter us. Appearances are deceptive. A pack-saddle, like beauty, may exist only in the eye of the beholder.

I and the grandson of the treasure examined those cedar-covered hills with the care of a lady hunting for the wicked flea. We explored every side, top,

circumference, mean elevation, angle, slope, and concavity of every one for two miles up and down the river. We spent four days doing so. Then we hitched up the roan and the dun, and hauled the remains of the coffee and bacon the one hundred and forty-nine miles back to Concho City.

Lee Rundle chewed much tobacco on the return trip. I was busy driving, because I was in a hurry.

As shortly as could be after our empty return Goodloe Banks and I forgathered in the back room of Snyder's saloon to play dominoes and fish for information. I told Goodloe about my expedition after the buried treasure.

"If I could have found that three hundred thousand dollars," I said to him, "I could have scoured and sifted the surface of the earth to find May Martha Mangum."

"She is meant for higher things," said Goodloe. "I shall find her myself. But, tell me how you went about discovering the spot where this unearthed increment was imprudently buried."

I told him in the smallest detail. I showed him the draughtsman's sketch with the distances marked plainly upon it.

After glancing over it in a masterly way, he leaned back in his chair and bestowed upon me an explosion of sardonic, superior, collegiate laughter.

"Well, you *are* a fool, Jim," he said, when he could speak.

"It's your play," said I, patiently, fingering my double-six.

"Twenty," said Goodloe, making two crosses on the table with his chalk.

"Why am I a fool?" I asked. "Buried treasure has been found before in many places."

"Because," said he, "in calculating the point on the river where your line would strike you neglected to allow for the variation. The variation there would be nine degrees west. Let me have your pencil."

Goodloe Banks figured rapidly on the back of an envelope.

"The distance, from north to south, of the line run from the Spanish mission," said he, "is exactly twenty-two miles. It was run by a pocket-compass, according to your story. Allowing for the variation, the point on the Alamito River where you should have searched for your treasure is exactly six miles and nine hundred and forty-five varas farther west than the place you hit upon. Oh, what a fool you are, Jim!"

"What is this variation that you speak of?" I asked. "I thought figures never lied."

"The variation of the magnetic compass," said Goodloe, "from the true meridian."

He smiled in his superior way; and then I saw come out in his face the singular, eager, consuming cupidity of the seeker after buried treasure.

"Sometimes," he said with the air of the oracle, "these old traditions of hidden money are not without foundation. Suppose you let me look over that paper describing the location. Perhaps together we might— "

The result was that Goodloe Banks and I, rivals in love, became companions in adventure. We went to Chico by stage from Huntersburg, the nearest railroad town. In Chico we hired a team drawing a covered spring-wagon and camping paraphernalia. We had the same surveyor run out our distance, as revised by Goodloe and his variations, and then dismissed him and sent him on his homeward road.

It was night when we arrived. I fed the horses and made a fire near the bank of the river and cooked supper. Goodloe would have helped, but his education had not fitted him for practical things.

But while I worked he cheered me with the expression of great thoughts handed down from the dead ones of old. He quoted some translations from the Greek at much length.

"Anacreon," he explained. "That was a favorite passage with Miss Mangum— as I recited it."

"She is meant for higher things," said I, repeating his phrase.

"Can there be anything higher," asked Goodloe, "than to dwell in the society of the classics, to live in the atmosphere of learning and culture? You have often decried education. What of your wasted efforts through your ignorance of simple mathematics? How soon would you have found your treasure if my knowledge had not shown you your error?"

"We'll take a look at those hills across the river first," said I, "and see what we find. I am still doubtful about variations. I have been brought up to believe that the needle is true to the pole."

The next morning was a bright June one. We were up early and had breakfast. Goodloe was charmed. He recited— Keats, I think it was, and Kelly or Shelley— while I broiled the bacon. We were getting ready to cross the river, which was little more than a shallow creek there, and explore the many sharp-peaked cedar-covered hills on the other side.

"My good Ulysses," said Goodloe, slapping me on the shoulder while I was washing the tin breakfast-plates, "let me see the enchanted document once more. I believe it gives directions for climbing the hill shaped like a pack-saddle. I never saw a pack-saddle. What is it like, Jim?"

"Score one against culture," said I. "I'll know it when I see it."

Goodloe was looking at old Rundle's document when he ripped out a most uncollegiate swear-word.

"Come here," he said, holding the paper up against the sunlight. "Look at that," he said, laying his finger against it.

On the blue paper— a thing I had never noticed before— I saw stand out in white letters the word and figures: "Malvern, 1898."

"What about it?" I asked.

"It's the water-mark," said Goodloe. "The paper was manufactured in 1898. The writing on the paper is dated 1863. This is a palpable fraud."

"Oh, I don't know," said I. "The Rundles are pretty reliable, plain, uneducated country people. Maybe the paper manufacturers tried to perpetrate a swindle."

And then Goodloe Banks went as wild as his education permitted. He dropped the glasses off his nose and glared at me.

"I've often told you you were a fool," he said. "You have let yourself be imposed upon by a clodhopper. And you have imposed upon me."

"How," I asked, "have I imposed upon you?"

"By your ignorance," said he. "Twice I have discovered serious flaws in your plans that a common-school education should have enabled you to avoid. And," he continued, "I have been put to expense that I could ill afford in pursuing this swindling quest. I am done with it."

I rose and pointed a large pewter spoon at him, fresh from the dish-water.

"Goodloe Banks," I said, "I care not one parboiled navy bean for your education. I always barely tolerated it in any one, and I despised it in you. What has your learning done for you? It is a curse to yourself and a bore to your friends. Away," I said— "away with your water-marks and variations! They are nothing to me. They shall not deflect me from the quest."

I pointed with my spoon across the river to a small mountain shaped like a pack-saddle.

"I am going to search that mountain," I went on, "for the treasure. Decide now whether you are in it or not. If you wish to let a water-mark or a variation shake your soul, you are no true adventurer. Decide."

A white cloud of dust began to rise far down the river road. It was the mail-wagon from Hesperus to Chico. Goodloe flagged it.

"I am done with the swindle," said he, sourly. "No one but a fool would pay any attention to that paper now. Well, you always were a fool, Jim. I leave you to your fate."

He gathered his personal traps, climbed into the mail-wagon, adjusted his glasses nervously, and flew away in a cloud of dust.

After I had washed the dishes and staked the horses on new grass, I crossed the shallow river and made my way slowly through the cedar-brakes up to the top of the hill shaped like a pack-saddle.

It was a wonderful June day. Never in my life had I seen so many birds, so many butter-flies, dragon-flies, grasshoppers, and such winged and stinged beasts of the air and fields.

I investigated the hill shaped like a pack-saddle from base to summit. I found an absolute absence of signs relating to buried treasure. There was no pile of stones, no ancient blazes on the trees, none of the evidences of the three hundred thousand dollars, as set forth in the document of old man Rundle.

I came down the hill in the cool of the afternoon. Suddenly, out of the cedar-brake I stepped into a beautiful green valley where a tributary small stream ran into the Alamito River.

AND THERE I was startled to see what I took to be a wild man, with unkempt beard and ragged hair, pursuing a giant butterfly with brilliant wings.

"Perhaps he is an escaped madman," I thought; and wondered how he had strayed so far from seats of education and learning.

And then I took a few more steps and saw a vine-covered cottage near the small stream. And in a little grassy glade I saw May Martha Mangum plucking wild flowers.

She straightened up and looked at me. For the first time since I knew her I saw her face— which was the color of the white keys of a new piano— turn pink. I walked toward her without a word. She let the gathered flowers trickle slowly from her hand to the grass.

"I knew you would come, Jim," she said clearly. "Father wouldn't let me write, but I knew you would come."

What followed you may guess— there was my wagon and team just across the river.

I'VE OFTEN wondered what good too much education is to a man if he can't use it for himself. If all the benefits of it are to go to others, where does it come in?

For May Martha Mangum abides with me. There is an eight-room house in a live-oak grove, and a piano with an automatic player, and a good start toward the three thousand head of cattle is under fence.

And when I ride home at night my pipe and slippers are put away in places where they cannot be found.

But who cares for that? Who cares— who cares?

———————

10: Laurie of the "Plainsman"

A Story of Western Canada

Hulbert Footner

1879-1944

Lippincott's Magazine, Dec 1910

THE *PLAINSMAN* OCCUPIES the last store of the Carver Block, a one-story row of plate-glass fronts on A Street, east, ending at the railway tracks. The Carver Block, all of five years old, begins to wear an air of haggard antiquity in the brand new streets of Blackfoot: most of the paint has peeled off the towering cornice, and more than one jagged rent lets daylight through that apparently solid front. The curious thing about the buildings of Blackfoot, as of other Western towns, is that they seem to pass direct from the freshness of the trowel to the snuffiness of second-hand building materials. As to this particular store, it needs no sign to identify it as the home of a newspaper—the excessive griminess does that. A flannelette curtain, once a rich green, but more recently a bilious yellow, hangs across the back of the show window, which contains nothing but the accumulations of five years' dust and a framed card of job printing samples dating from the same era. Upon opening the door, the characteristic warm, pungent smell of printers' ink and fresh pulp paper greets the nostrils, lent individuality in this case by a rich undertone of ripening bananas—for part of the back premises is sublet to a wholesale fruiterer, who conducts his business via the rear alley. There is a little sanctum in one corner of the shop, and a counter crosses from that to the wall. Damaged and unsold copies of the *Plainsman* for a year back are heaped everywhere.

FRANK ARDRY, editor and proprietor, was doubled over the counter, with his chin in his palms. It was Saturday afternoon, and the staff had distributed itself in quest of amusement, except that the chunking of the monotype in the basement gave notice that Leonora Colpas, the typesetter, was still at work. Frank was a good-looking youth, with a round head, broad over the ears and smoothly thatched with black; and bright, sophisticated gray eyes. His air of high and humorous assurance, brooking no opposition, was the *Plainsman's* chief asset. But just now his colors were hauled down.

It was not that the *Plainsman* was in any worse case than ordinary: the sword of bankruptcy had always hung suspended by a hair over that devil-may-care publication. Frank had secured it from the last proprietor in exchange for a polo pony, and was considered to have received the worst of the bargain. No, he had succeeded in paying his employees for the week; it was simply the

"elevation" that ailed him. I should explain that the altitude of Blackfoot is held accountable for most that goes amiss there. Frank was blue—richly and luxuriously blue.

So intent was he on his gloomy thoughts that he did not see a small figure come in through the open doorway and approach the counter.

"Good afternoon," she said.

Frank jerked his head up. His astonished and delighted eyes took in a small, slim girl who looked seventeen and was undoubtedly older. The most remarkable thing about her was the brave, friendly expression of her blue eyes. She plainly wished to ingratiate herself, but without abating any point of personal pride. The next remarkable thing was her hair, the quantity of it and its color— most like raw mahogany, but exactly like nothing else under the sun. This enframed a face cut with delicate certainty of outline, with a healthy, pale skin and lips fresher and sweeter than opening crimson petals. The vision was clad in close-fitting green, which became her rarely, and a crafty little hat of the same color.

To Frank the sight of her was like the unhoped-for granting of a secret prayer. He flushed to the roots of his hair.

"My name is Laurie Gray," she said with an engaging candor— she had the cheerful, incisive voice of a schoolboy. "I'm looking for something to do. Can you give me any work on the paper?"

"Why, yes!" said Frank instantly, the possibility of refusing anything to one so pretty never occurring to him. Some time afterwards he added, "What can you do?"

"I never worked before," she said, "but now I have to. My mother and I have come West to make our fortunes."

Her cool, cheerful frankness turned the point of sentimentality. Young Frank was compelled to be businesslike. It was soon decided that Laurie was to cover "locals," meetings, sermons, and society. The glint of a fanatic enthusiasm shone in her eyes as this fascinating program was unrolled in her hearing.

"I have dreamed of being a reporter," she murmured.

It may be remarked that there was more danger in a conversation like this than in whole bucketfuls of sentiment. Quite so! The red head and the black unconsciously drew closer across the counter, and in smiles flying back and forth and in the kind, shining eyes, already there promised something a good deal tenderer than the customary relation between employer and employee.

They were interrupted by an ominous " 'Hem!" from behind Frank's back. He looked over his shoulder apprehensively. At the head of the basement steps stood Miss Colpas, the typesetter, in her lace coat and picture hat, the plumes of the latter seeming to bristle with indignation. Leonora was a veteran pioneer of the West; without undertaking to state just how old she was, I may say, well-

seasoned. She was likewise westernly free of speech and uncommonly well able to take care of herself. Ordinarily she was amiable, and ruled the males of the *Plainsman*, including the proprietor, with a rough, bantering coquettishness; but just at present she was very much on her dignity, pale under her rouge, and with black eyes glittering dangerously.

"Pardon me if I intrude," she drawled.

"Not at all," said Frank uncomfortably. "This is Miss Gray, the new reporter," he explained.

"Indeed, I was not aware!" said Miss Colpas grandly. She took a good fifteen seconds to look Laurie up and down. "Charmed!" she murmured as insultingly as she could, and made her way languidly to the street door. With her hand on the latch she turned. "I think you call for me at eight," she said indifferently to Frank, and went her ways. The door must have slipped out of her hand, or something; the impact was terrific.

Laurie had been watching her with cool wonder. "Look here," she said with her inimitable directness, "if I'm going to be here, I ought to know where I stand. What's the matter with her?"

Laurie's frankness demanded a return in kind. "You see," Frank explained, "she and her brother are the only ones in town who can run the monotype, and she knows it. Besides—"

"Well?" prompted Laurie.

"She has money," said Frank. "Made it speculating in real estate during the boom. She holds a chattel mortgage on the plant down-stairs."

"H'm!" said Laurie.

"So I— er— take her about to the subscription dances to keep her in a good humor about the interest," he blurted out.

Laurie took note of his rueful grin, and suddenly her face broke up like a sunny pool under a gust from the west. She cocked up her pretty chin and laughed a peal like a boy. Such delicious, heart-disquieting music had surely never been heard within those grimy precincts.

On her very first day Laurie made herself an important factor of the *Plainsman*. As she crossed the Estevan bridge on her way to work she witnessed an accident, brought about, it might have seemed, for the especial benefit of the fledgling reporter. The only automobile in town, property of one Mackinnon, a real-estate agent and unpopular, was to blame for the ruin of an immigrant farmer's household goods. Laurie, warm with generous indignation, got half a column out of it. Womanlike, she discovered the owner's vulnerable point, and turned her pen in the wound. The reason the automobile made so much noise, said Laurie, was because it was such a cheap machine.

Frank ran the story as it stood, and next morning all Blackfoot chuckled over it, with the possible exception of Mackinnon. The real-estate agent was a gross

creature: little Laurie, passing his shop later in the day, was publicly insulted. On her return to the office, she casually mentioned what had occurred, and Frank, with a brightening eye, took his hat from its peg, and, commanding Laurie to keep the shop, sallied forth. Laurie promptly disobeyed him. Following at a discreet distance, note-book in hand, she missed not a detail of the brief and pointed discussion which ended in the fat real-estate agent rolling in the gutter. Laurie got a whole column out of that, and Blackfoot agreed that it was the best account of a scrap which had appeared in the local press. The paper was sold out in an hour, and the regular circulation jumped four hundred.

AMONG OTHER THINGS, Laurie was assigned to cover the meetings of the town council. Her first arrival in the dingy little chamber (which is in the loft of the police station) created something of a sensation. His Worship Mayor Pink (one of Blackfoot's leading grocers) himself descended from his throne to take her hand, and all the aldermen pulled down their waistcoats and strove to look aldermanic.

Laurie soberly disposed herself at the "press table" in the corner (it has only three legs and you must watch which end you sit at), and the usual mad torrent of eloquence was forthwith unloosed. Once a fortnight the aldermen are seized with this lust to orate, and nothing will stop them. Only Sam Puffer, the ex-cow-puncher, rarely spoke— but he spat most eloquently. There was one spectator, Hennery Haddie, Blackfoot's eminent rag and bone merchant, who has run for alderman every year in the memory of man, without ever receiving a hundred votes, and who writes to the papers nearly every day. As a tax-payer, Hennery delivered a diatribe on the puddles in the main street, which was cut short only by Sam Puffer threatening to take him out and souse him therein.

Although she affected to be diligently taking notes, the proceedings were naturally quite incomprehensible to Laurie; but the reporter on the other paper, a pale youth of an evangelical turn, offered to write her story as well as his own. Laurie smiled her thanks and found herself free to smile at the aldermen one by one. The smile of a clever woman is a curious thing: the degree of promise gathered from it by the recipient is usually in inverse ratio with his intelligence. The aldermen hastened to write out their speeches for Laurie, and the city clerk made her a copy of the minutes; but Laurie thought most of Sam Puffer, who, abashed by her presence, only scowled at her sidewise from beneath his shaggy brows.

As time went on the slender, green-clad figure, intent upon business, became one of the familiar sights of Rowland Avenue. The six tall policemen were her sworn friends, and one or another invariably accompanied her when she was called out at night. Policemen are only human; there was not one of them but sometimes drew her aside to mention some little deed of heroism he

had performed— hoping it would appear in next day's paper. Laurie enjoyed alike the freedom of the banking offices and the jail. Every one wished her well, from the president of the Board of Trade down to the undertakers, who telephoned her when they had interesting corpses on view.

Her work was supposed to be done when the last of the local news was turned in at eleven o'clock each night, but how could Frank discourage her if she volunteered to stay another hour to help him read proof? They would sit side by side at the table in the rear of the little store, dark but for the single shaded globe hanging low over their heads. Laurie always had so much to say about the day's experiences, her tongue fairly tumbled over itself in her impatience to get it all out. Consider the feelings of the youthful editor as he watched the changing face of his very dear aide, and hung on the delicious tones of her merry, boyish voice. Need I say that the *Plainsman* was scandalously proof-read? There is more than one pointed story still in circulation concerning quaint misprints which escaped that precious pair of readers.

But as a result of this inspiriting hour Frank would set to work each day with renewed courage to keep his crazy bark afloat. The whilom careless youth had now a definite and absorbing aim. Week by week the *Plainsman* was doing steadily better, but, unfortunately, the increased business only made the pinch of insufficient capital more keen. Leonora was the most troublesome feature of the problem. The mere sight of little Laurie was sufficient to rouse that weather-beaten virgin to a pitch of blind unreasonableness. Frank used his best powers of cajolery, but the tension was stretched little by little towards the breaking-point. There was six months' interest on the mortgage overdue.

At Laurie's third council meeting old Sam Puffer produced from his capacious pocket a box of candy, the Eastern kind, very expensive and very stale in Blackfoot, and silently laid it on the reporters' table. Laurie was immensely gratified. From the other aldermen there were audible murmurs of "graft," for Sam was a candidate for Mayor, and this was looked upon as an attempt to suborn the press. But there was nothing in that; for at the next meeting, when Sam Puffer turned up in a somewhat "elevated" condition as a result of too long a dalliance at the mahogany of the Royal Hotel, Laurie regretfully but relentlessly entered the fact in her account of the proceedings. Next day Sam came around to the office and shook hands with her. It did him good, he said, to meet a person with sand enough to call his friends down when they needed it.

The other candidate for mayor was the smug Alderman Telfair, Sam's ancient enemy. He too sought to ingratiate himself with Laurie, but with this difference—that while old Sam was a real man, who admired Laurie for a pretty girl and respected her for a plucky one, Telfair was no more than a puff-ball, who saw in Laurie the means of getting his name before the public. Laurie perceived the difference very clearly.

The *Plainsman* supported Sam Puffer, of course, but in local politics a man is very often at a disadvantage with a puff-ball. Alderman Telfair was known to be a fool and strongly suspected of grafting; nevertheless he threatened to carry the election by the sheer weight of his protestations of morality. It is so difficult to oppose these platform moralists, without the implication of championing the immoral! The only weapon the *Plainsman* had against Telfair was ridicule—which inflicts painful but seldom mortal injuries. The town chuckled, and Alderman Telfair writhed under its thrusts. Furious reprisals were threatened; the *Plainsman* merely laughed editorially and continued its course. Then one night there was a late conference in Alderman Telfair's office— men with a common grudge may be infallibly depended on to smell each other out. Mackinnon was there; also a heavily veiled lady wearing a lace coat and a picture hat.

A week later the blow fell. Frank was in Prince George, the provincial capital, lobbying for some of the government printing. Laurie had undertaken the responsibilities of editor-in-chief, with a heart swelling with pride, destined, alas, to be immediately dashed. Reaching the office after the morning session of the police court, she found Hennery Haddie in the editor's own chair, with his feet on another, and the sanctum odorous of one of the cigars manufactured, according to popular belief, from his stock-in-trade: *i.e.*, rags. Laurie's face reddened at the spectacle.

"Outside is the place to wait," she said sharply.

Hennery arose and puffed out his cheeks. He was a short, square man with a portentously serious eye, the carriage of the alderman he yearned to be, and the clothes of the rag and bone merchant he was. Hennery thought and spoke in purest journalese.

"It is my regretful duty to inform you, miss," he said, "that I have been denoted to take charge here—"

Laurie's face was a study in scorn. "Take charge!" she repeated.

"Owing, no doubt, to my well-known association with the press and public affairs," explained Hennery, with a smirk.

"What do you mean?" demanded Laurie.

"Bailiff appointed by the court at the suit of Alderman Telfair, Esquire"—

Laurie took her breath sharply.

—"Holder of a mortgage of eleven hundred dollars on the chattels of this here establishment, assigned by Leonora Colpas, Esquire—I mean, spinster."

Laurie knew all about the mortgage. Her heart seemed to shrivel in her breast, and for an instant she felt herself a small, small person alone in a vast and cruel world.

"My instructions being," continued Hennery, "to allow the business to proceed in all ways as usual, only everything printed in the paper must be satisfactory to my principal."

Laurie heard him but dully.

At this moment Miss Colpas ascended from the basement, ostensibly to ask about a word in her copy, but really to see how Laurie was taking the blow. She got small satisfaction from the acting editor: the mere sight of the other woman provided Laurie with a tonic. She lifted her head, took a long breath, and issued her instructions with perfect coolness. When Hennery went to lunch she locked herself in the sanctum and, dropping her head on the desk, cried it out like a girl. Then she sat up and, bending her pretty brows, thought it out like a man. By and by she seized paper and began to write, tearing off page after page, entirely oblivious to her surroundings and to the flight of time. Anon the tears came into her eyes, anon she frowned and then laughed outright. Laurie was putting "soul" into it. She concluded with a great sigh of relief, and, without stopping to read what she had written, folded the bulky package once across and, thrusting it into the bosom of her dress, reappeared in public.

All the afternoon she put things in train for the next day's paper as if nothing had happened. She exerted herself to be agreeable to Hennery Haddie, who, worthy man, was not sufficiently astute to smell danger. Inflated by the importance of his duties, he felt an ever-recurring need of a fresh supply of bar-room hydrogen, and by evening there was a noticeable access of dignity in the bailiff, joined to an increased tendency to puff out his cheeks. Miss Colpas swept home as usual at five o'clock, and was succeeded at the monotype after supper by her brother. Hennery brought back some editorials from his "principal," which Laurie, with a casual glance, sent down-stairs. Laurie herself took no time for supper.

At nine o'clock the proofs for the first side came up-stairs. By this time the bailiff and the acting editor, sitting side by side at the table under the shaded electric light, were apparently on terms of perfect amity. With an innocent air Laurie volunteered to read the proofs aloud, and lifted a voice of monotony calculated to lull Argus himself. Hennery tipped his chair back, his eyes closed, and his head drooped lower and lower. Before Laurie reached the bottom of the first galley he emitted a round and convincing snore. By the very look of Hennery you would know him for a hearty sleeper, not to speak of his potations during the afternoon.

Instantly Laurie, all excitement, scampered down the basement stairs. Besides Colpas, a weak youth, completely under the dominion of his sister, Higden, the printer, and Peake, who made up the forms, were at work. Into the ears of these two she whispered, and a wide, delighted smile slowly overspread each grimy face; they violently nodded their heads and followed her up-stairs.

Laurie unlocked the door into the quarters of the fruit company. Peake grasped the back of Hennery's chair, Higden took the front legs, and the unconscious bailiff was tenderly lifted and carried up the four steps into the dark loft. Inside, there were several great bins reaching to the roof, such as are used for the storage of vegetables. These were made of stout palings, with narrow interstices to allow the passage of air. One of these cages was empty and the door stood open.

Hennery woke up as they set him down, and struggled to his feet. But the cage door was already closed and the hasp secured with a stout wooden pin. Hennery's fat hand would not pass between the bars. He seized the door of his cage and shook it exactly like that animal from which we are said to derive our descent; his cries were piteous, but quite in vain. Laurie sent him a cigar to soothe his outraged feelings, and after a while he ceased his lamentations.

Meanwhile the packet of copy was produced from Laurie's bosom and sent down-stairs. As she expected, young Colpas presently came up two steps at a time and, without looking at her, darted out through the street door. Laurie spent an anxious five minutes—if they had stayed away she would have been utterly defeated, but she was counting on the motive power of curiosity, and the end justified her: the Colpases, brother and sister, entered the office, the lady plumed, rouged, and grim. She had some sheets of Laurie's copy in her hand. Laurie stood up, and they faced each other, the little one and the old-timer.

"What is this?" demanded Leonora stridently.

"The leading article for to-morrow," said Laurie mildly.

"Not if I know it!" said the older woman viciously.

Laurie was patient. "Have you read it?" she asked.

"The first page is enough!" said Leonora, violently rattling the sheets. "Alderman Telfair is my friend!"

"Please read it," said Laurie.

Miss Colpas held the copy under the light. Laurie watched her narrowly. As she turned over the pages, first her lip uncurled, then her black eyes softened a very little; she paused and bit her lip and frowned. Finally she threw the papers pettishly on the table, her arms dropped indecisively, she avoided Laurie's eye.

"I know very well it all rests with you," said Laurie. "If you and your brother won't set it up, of course there'll be no *Plainsman* to-morrow—nor ever again!" She paused for a moment to let this sink in. "No one blames you for selling your mortgage," she continued with a reasonable air. "That was simply business. But selling it doesn't bind you to help old Telfair with his dirty work, does it? You are never the one to knife an old friend when his back is turned!"

Frankness was little Laurie's disconcerting weapon. Certainly the devil was in it if man or woman could resist her when she looked like that!

Leonora was in a wretched state of indecision. "Where's the bailiff?" she muttered.

"We put him in a potato bin," said Laurie calmly.

Leonora snorted briefly: Hennery was no favorite of hers.

"I wrote this for to-morrow's paper, too," said Laurie, taking up another page or two of copy from the table and handing it over. "And I borrowed your new photograph from Peake this afternoon, and had a cut made to run with it."

Miss Colpas read an eloquent half-column appreciation of herself and her services to the *Plainsman*; "great personal popularity" and "unswerving loyalty" figured largely. The cut lay on the table; Leonora distinguished the lines of the beloved picture hat and lace coat, and in her mind's eye she could not help but see it at the head of a column.

"Would you really run that?" she said incredulously.

"Just as it stands," said Laurie— "unless you want to add something."

Leonora looked at her oddly. "You're just twisting me round your finger!" she grumbled.

"No," said Laurie, honestly enough. "It's not me, really. You see, I *knew* you had a good heart!"

The old girl's wrinkles worked curiously. She suddenly caught Laurie by her two arms above the elbows and gave her a sharp little squeeze. "Laurie Gray, I've been an everlasting fool!" she said. Then, turning furiously to her brother, she shouted, "You Colpas! What are you gaping at? Get back to work, boy!" She commenced tearing off her gloves. "Here, I'll take the machine myself, and you set up by hand!"

ON HIS WAY back from Prince George next morning, Frank Ardry bought a copy of the *Plainsman* when it was brought aboard the train at White Deer station. He opened it with an amused and tender smile at the recollection of the seriousness with which little Laurie had undertaken the role of editor— and then he gasped. Clear across the top of the paper spread this amazing announcement in the largest type they owned:

DASTARDLY PLOT TO MUZZLE THE PLAINSMAN LAID BARE

And underneath, in type a little smaller, this:

ARE THE CITIZENS OF BLACKFOOT GOING TO SEE FAIR PLAY DONE?

He skimmed through the story with anxious eyes and a beating heart; then he read it carefully and considered; then he read it a third time— and laughed. "Oh, marvelous Laurie!" was his thought. Her strength as always lay in her

frankness: here was the whole story, Telfair, Mackinnon, and the unfortunate Hennery Haddie, rendered in faithful, if somewhat heightened, colors. The automobile incident was rehearsed, the midnight meeting painted in strongly, the cowardly waiting of the conspirators until they had only a woman to deal with pointed out. She was compelled to boggle the truth a little as to Leonora's part, but what she could not say honestly she left unsaid— a privilege of special pleaders. Written straight from her generous young heart, the story could not help but be convincing— irresistible. It concluded with an eloquent and dignified appeal for funds in the cause of free speech. Mayor Pink was named as the repository.

Four times in the two blocks between the station and the *Plainsman* office Frank was clapped on the back and congratulated. The office itself was crowded, not with mere idlers, but solid men, members of the board of trade, a bank manager. Laurie was in the centre, perfectly self-possessed—only her lip trembled as Frank came in the door. In the sanctum Mayor Pink was entering checks in a note-book. By noon they had the *Plainsman* reorganized. Frank was elected president, and Laurie was put on the board of directors. Sufficient cash was subscribed to pay off all indebtedness and start the regenerated paper with a safe working capital.

LATE THAT NIGHT, when the last friend and well-wisher had gone home to bed, Frank and Laurie adjourned to Mat Runyon's for a bite, as they often did before he took her home. Laurie, perched on a round stool, with her ridiculously small feet swinging free, was munching a cheese sandwich with perfect composure. Frank for his part could only look at her and murmur:

"Laurie! Laurie! How wonderful you are!"

She turned a frowning brow in his direction. "Oh, stuff!" she said inelegantly. "Be sensible! Pals don't carry on that way."

"Hang the pal game!" said Frank energetically. "You've got to marry me now, that's what!"

The sandwich was on its way to Laurie's mouth as he spoke. It completed its journey, and the white teeth met through it without a tremor. Laurie chewed and swallowed the bite before she spoke.

"Would I keep my job?" she inquired casually.

"For life!" said Frank.

"Oh, very well, then!" she said coolly. "I don't mind!"

But for all her cool airs, in the swift, veiled glance she vouchsafed him Frank saw that which made his breast rise with wonder and delight.

———————

11: A Lover of Nature.

C. J. Dennis

1876-1938

The Bulletin, 6 Jun 1912

MR. TUNKS, that is to say, "Councillor Tunks, J.P., our well-known and highly-respected Shire President," as the local "educator" has it, was showing Miss Palmer, the new school-teacher, over his cow-yard— that is to say, over his estate. As became a Shire President— thrice elected— Chairman of the School Board and Library Committee, Life Governor of the local hospital, and leader of the Progress League, Councillor Tunks wore an air of chesty importance. The fact that Councillor Tunks's chest, overburdened with the weight of so much importance, had slipped down a little, is a matter for comment only amongst the flippant and uncultured. We shall ignore it here.

"This," said Mr. Tunks, in a tone of mingled pride and patronage. "This is wot I calls me nursery, Miss Palmer, an' them's the hinfants. Fourteen poddies we got at present, an' would a' 'ad two more, but for that young scoundril Frank went to bed one night an' fergot to feed 'em."

"What perfect dears!" said Miss Palmer, stroking the nose of one of the calves. "I think calves are such attractive creatures, Mr. Tunks."

"Your sentiments does you credit, Miss Palmer," said Councillor Tunks, with condescension. "Interlechal people, like ourselves, understands that carves is carves. Carves grows into cows, Miss Palmer; an' cows is the mainstay of the country.... Bill!" he broke off, addressing a small, scared-looking urchin who was laboring across the yard with two heavy buckets.

"Ain't yer cleaned that sepyerater yet, you young scoundrel? By Gum, if I get to you, me lad, I'll warm yer jacket. An' tell Frank to 'urry with them cows. It's time 'e set 'is traps long ago. Remember, you get no tea till yer finished, the pair o' you!.... Yes, Miss Palmer," he continued, returning to the councillor's manner. "Cows is the mainstay of the country, an' the man who is successful in cows is successful in life. As you say, carves is interestin creachers."

"But I was not altogether referring to their utility, Mr. Tunks," ventured the teacher. "I think that all young things are delightful—calves and lambs and kittens, they are so gentle and innocent and playful—"

" 'Ere, 'ere, Miss Agen I say yer sentiments does you credit."

"You are a lover of nature, Mr. Tunks?" inquired the teacher.

"I ham," answered Mr. Tunks, who habitually employed the aspirate for emphasis. "I ham, Miss Palmer. That is to say, Hi am. All young things appeals to me, Miss Palmer— the young carves, that seems to trust yer as though they knowed you wouldn't 'arm 'em; the young, lambs, buckin' about in the paddieks; an' the chickens, an' the little ducks, an all the rest of 'em. See that little foal

there. Miss Palmer. There's a picter for yer! All innercence an' trustfulness an' beauty. Some day 'e'll grow up an' be an 'orse, an' 'ave to work; but now's 'is time fer play. Give 'em their fling while they're young, that s my motter— Ullo! Wot's up now?" he asked, as his wife appeared beckoning in the doorway.

Mrs. Tunks wore none of the importance of her lord. Indeed, the worthy councillor appeared to have mopped up the whole family supply of that commodity. She was a meek, faded woman, flat-breasted and scraggy-necked, worn with heavy toil and much child-bearing; and her patient eyes wore the dull, half-scared look which was emphasised in the eyes of the children.

"It's Sarah," said Mrs. Tunks in a weary monotone. "She's got the toothache bad. Someone else'll have to do the"

"Wot!" thundered the cow-master with sudden fury. "I'll toothache 'er! The lazy, good-fer-nothin' himidge! Excuse me, Miss Palmer," he said striding towards the house. "Hi must 'ave discerpline."

As his loud voice came from within, punctuated by meek protests, the waiting teacher recalled the picture of Sarah as she had known her during the first day in school— a mere infant of not more than eight or nine years, smileless and ever weary. She had the same dull, heavy look as her brothers and sisters; like theirs, her brain seemed to be numb; like theirs, her tiny childish hands were already roughened by toil; and she shared, to a great degree, the family tendency to fall asleep in school.

For five minutes Mr. Tunks continued to thunder in his castle.

"Not in my 'ouse! Not in my 'ouse, you good-fer-notliin' baggage! None of yer loafin' an' lollin' about 'ere. If you did yer work an' kept yerself warm, you'd 'ave no toothache. Hout you get, me lady.... Where's Ellen? Ellen, wotcher mean by leavin' these dishes about 'ere? Get a move on, now, the lot o' yer, or I'll make it warm fer you. Where's Frank? Ain't you gone out with them traps yet, you young imp? Wot.! Don't you answer me like.... There, take that to go on with; and get a move on, the lot o' yer. I won't 'ave no loafin' in my 'ouse. I won't 'ave it."

Preceded by a youngster, who carried a score of rabbit traps slung across his shoulder, the lord of the cow-yard came out of the house and rejoined the teacher.

"Discerpline, Miss Palmer, discerpline in school or at 'ome is allus necessary. Wot was we talkin' about? Ha, yes; young carves an' foals an' all them innercent little things. I appreciates yer sentiments, Miss Palmer; I appreciates yer sentiments,"

Miss Palmer said nothing. Had the good councillor been an observant man he might have noticed a suspicious tightness about the little teacher's lips, a moistness in her eyes as she gazed after the small lad limping away across the paddocks. She coughed to hide her annoyance.

"Hi beg yer pardon?" said Mr. Tunks politely.

"I didn't speak," said the teacher, somewhat icily. "I was merely thinking, Mr. Tunks," she continued with sudden temerity, "of some verse that your talk suggested."

"Ha! po'try!" exclaimed Mr. Tunks. "Hall lovers of nater is lovers of po'try, Miss Palmer."

"You are a lover of poetry, Mr. Tunks?"

"Hi am. Hi ham, indeed. In me young days, Miss Palmer, I useter ricite 'The Hold Bark 'Ut' from end to hend without a fault. Would you mind lettin' me 'ear the bit you spoke about?"

"Perhaps"— began the teacher, losing courage.

"Never mind 'ow 'igh flown it is, I'll appreciate it, Miss Palmer. It's me dooty to appreciate it as Chairman of the School Board. Fire away, Miss, don't you be bashful."

Forsaking discretion, the little teacher quoted softly

Do you hear the children weeping, O my brothers,
Ere the sorrow comes with years?
They are leaning their young heads against their mothers —
And that cannot stop their tears.

The young lambs are bleating in the meadows;
The young birds are chirping in the nest;
The young fawns are playing with the shadows;
The young flowers are blowing towards the West —

But the young, young children, O my brothers,
They are weeping bitterly! —
They are weeping in the playtime of the others,
In the country of the free.

"Good ! Hexcellent! That's wot I call po'try!" exclaimed Mr. Tunks with surprising enthusiasm. „ "Oo wrote that, may I ars't?"

"It was a woman writer," replied Miss Palmer, rather taken back, "named Elizabeth Barrett Browning. You like it?"

"Hi do. Hindeed Hi do. That bit about the young lambs bleatin' in the meaders is tiptop. She mighter put in somethin' about carves, though. 'The young carves is nosin' at the bucket,' or somethin' like that.' Would you mind sayin' it again, Miss Palmer? Jest that bit beginnin' with the lambs."

With increased confidence, Miss Palmer quoted again:—

The young lambs are bleating in the meadows;
The young birds are chirping in the nest;

The young fawns are playing with the shadows ;

("That orter be carves," interpolated Mr. Tunks.)

The young flowers are blowing towards the West—
But the young, young children—"

"Very good, hindeed ! Hexcellent!" said Mr. Tunks.

"But I haven't finished," said the teacher.

The councillor waved his hand airily. "Oh, that bit about the kids howlin'," he said. "That ain't nothin'. They're allus howlin'; but it ain't worth writin' po'try about. P'raps she was like nay missus, allus wantin' to coddle 'em. Women's like that, but I don't 'old with it. Or p'raps she meant it fer 'umor; but I reckon 'umor's outer place with that bit about the lambs. That's the bit that 'its me."

The councillor's hide was plainly impervious to the keenest of rapiers, and with fine courage the little teacher decided to try a club.

"Mr. Tunks," she said with suspicious evenness, "don't you think that young children deserve as much consideration as young animals —as 'carves' ? Do you think the playtime of their lives should be spoiled with work and worry and tears? Haven't they as much right to enjoy their youth as your foal?"

Mr. Tunks stepped back and surveyed the little teacher from head to toe, his eyes bulging with astonishment.

"Miss Palmer," he exclaimed, "you su'prise me! An' a young woman of your perfeshin, too ! You —you hastonish me ! Where's our civilisation, I arst yer? Where's our hedication? Children ain't carves or foals; they're 'uman bein's! I've 'eard this sort o' tork before, an' I jest put it down to hignerance. But a young woman of your standin' who's supposed to be hedicated! You su'prise me! W'y, they might as well be black-feller's children instead of civilised 'uman bein's. Blackfeller's children don't do no work; an' when they grow up, wot are they? Blackfellers, of course! No, Miss Palmer, we mustn't ferget that our children is civilised, an' treat 'em as civilised bein's, wot's meant to work. Look at me. I never 'ad no schoolin', though you mightn't believe me. Workin' when I was eight year old, an' now wot am I? President o' this Shire, three times; Chairman o' the School Board an' the Progress Committee; one o' the leadin' men o' the district, and a J.P., Miss Palmer— a J.P. You take the hadvice of a hixperienced man, an' drop them notions about coddlin' kids. They may be all right in towns where there's money an' cranks in plenty; but out 'ere we're civilised, Miss Palmer, an' we treats our children civilised. Wot? You must be goin'? Well, I'll see you as far as the sliprails. I'm glad you seen the carves; an' I'm glad I've 'ad this little tork with you. You'll 'ave to drop them old-fashioned notions out 'ere;

drop 'em like a 'ot brick, as the sayin' is. I don't 'old with 'em, an' none o' the School Board 'olds with 'em. You'll find us all sensible, plain-spoken men."

The little teacher walked along in silence, not knowing whether to cry or laugh, and at the sliprails Councillor Tunks was once more all easy affability.

"Wot you wanter do," he advised, "is to read more o' that 'Lizabeth Browner's po'try about the lambs an' carves. She don't 'old with children playin' with the shadders or chirpin' in the nest. Don't she say so? 'They're weepin',' she ses. I dare say she was a sensible, civilised woman. Good-bye, Miss Palmer, an' you mustn't mind if the children is a bit late for school in the mornin's now and then. Young Frank an' Bill they has their rabbit traps to go round; an' that Sarah, she lies in bed till all hours. After four o'clock it was this mornin' before she was. out. An' wallop 'em plenty, Miss Palmer, wallop 'em plenty. That's wot they're sent to school for."

"Are you sure," asked Miss Palmer, very sweetly, pretending not to see the hand held out condescendingly. "Are you sure, Mr. Tunks, that you would not rather send your carves?" And before the excellent councillor could reply, she had turned and gone.

For some minutes Mr. Tunks remained leaning on the rails, gazing at the retreating figure.

"If I was sure," at last mused the Chairman of the School Board. "If I was sure that that young woman meant to be himpident, I'd report 'er to the Department." And for another space, he still gazed at the trim figure stepping across the paddock. "Dashed if I know," he muttered again. "S'pose she meant it fer a joke....'Rather send yer carves... .Seems to me she's a bit hignerant fer a teacher." Still, for another minute, Councillor Tunks stared with puzzled expression after the vanishing figure. Then his brow cleared, and he removed his gaze.

"Yes, that's all it is," said the lover of nature, turning toward the house. "Just hignerance."

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12: A Chest of Chinese Gold

Albert Dorrington

1847-1953

Sun (Kalgoorlie, WA), 29 May 1910

William "Bully" Hayes (c. 1827-31 March 1877) was a real-life South Seas pirate and slaver who earned his nickname, and Dorrington wrote many stories featuring a fictional version. The American-born rogue was eventually murdered by his ship's cook Peter Radek, who was widely treated as a hero for doing it, and who was never prosecuted.

THERE was a sound of lapping water on the seaward side of the trade-house. The stiff, spike-crested palms seemed to pierce the blue span of sky overhead. In the east lay Espiritu Santo with its innumerable jungle-screened inlets and sloping hills. The lip of a young moon glinted with tropic brightness over the distant headland. The trade-house verandah was in darkness. A white-coated German, heat-fretted and lazy, rolled in the hammock, and watched a big-beamed lugger crawl to her moorings across the bay.

"Chow at the helm. Brings his craft up to a three-knot breeze as though he was sparring with an old-man cyclone."

Captain William Hayes moves from the deep verandah shade and glanced seawards through his night-glasses. "Jimmy Ah Lee chasing trepang and beche-de-mer. Wonder if he ever goes to sleep?"

"Der Chows haf der luck of mules," grunted the German.

"I used to laugh at chinkies once," said Hayes, thoughtfully. "But now I'd sooner skin a live wolf than meddle with a Chinese pigtail on the high seas."

"Dey haf no more brains dan monkeys. Dey was shoost a nation off flies crawlin' about der East. I vud sooner admire your skinned wolf, anyway, Hayes."

Hayes licked a big green cigar and padded uneasily up and down the wide verandah. "Up in Swatow nine years ago, they sold me a cargo of golden-tip Pekoe for six hundred dollars. After I broke all sailing records to land it in Sydney I found that they'd loaded me with dried dog-weed and warehouse refuse. Fancy me tearing south to hit the market with a cargo of pig-mash and plantation litter!"

A big-shouldered, lion-footed adventurer was Captain William Hayes. In his younger days he had bartered human lives for pearls and dollars. As a navigator he towered above Teach, Ross Lewin and other island black-guards. In his worst moments Hayes was always ready to laugh at his own blunders. He eluded gunboats and commissions of inquiry with the ease and diplomacy of a sultan. At a pinch he could pose as a cultured diplomat, even in the presence of British and American consuls. From Manikiki to the Line the sound of his name uttered suddenly on an island beach brought men, rifle in hand, to their trade-house palisades.

"I've had a hard life," he continued slowly, "fighting kanakas and keeping dirty little island kings in their places. There was a time when I'd have kicked the linch-pins from the wheels of a Juggernaut car to upset a rival. And there were times when things used to hit back. Women put me away, and the gunboat dudes treated me like a dog whenever I hurt a black man's feelings."

"Hayes, Hayes, you vas a bad man!" The German sat up in the hammock and regarded the buccaneer closely. "I haf seen you drunk, and you— you—"

"Don't say it, Schultz," growled Hayes. " I've stood knee-deep in wine I admit; I've bluffed big-bended consuls and licked what I couldn't eat. The grandest bluff I ever put up was my scheme for stopping the *Ning Po*, a China steamer bound from Brisbane to Shanghai, carrying two thousand ounces of gold in her bullion-room.

"Yah! You vill bump der yard-arm some day, Billy. You haf no belief in der size of tings."

"Guess the hemp isn't spun, that will hoist me," grinned the buccaneer. "I had a smart schooner once, and a nice lot of white lads lying idle on the beach at Mount Eames Island, 27 miles nor'-east of Thursday, between Long Reef and Nine-Pin Rock. Collecting copra and hunting kanakas had made us tired. And a crew that sails under me for a year is good enough to swap curses with anything that floats. Black crews are no good at a pinch. Strike a match in their faces on a dark night, and they fold up at the knees.

"Well, we settled it among ourselves that the *Ning Po*, with her big gold-box, was ours the moment she showed her black funnel ten miles east of the Barrier Light.

"I've helped myself to loose cargoes of trade from the Straits to the Marquesas, but my mouth grew hot and my heart danced the night we waited for the China-bound steamer. She carried gold won from Australian soil, stuff that had been dollied out of the Fraser Creek beds and Gulf mining camps: it was going to fatten the Chinese banks at Hong Kong and Shanghai.

"She was a two-thousand-tonner, with a nose like a plunging bison. She carried a coolie crew and four white officers. Her steel-clamped vault was between bunkers and store-room. It was guarded night and day by a gang of yellow dogs armed belt and fist. I guess a Chinaman can nurse his gold like a bull-dog hugging a bone— when it's worth while.

"The night was black enough to hide a crow. It was a night to help a poor man like me into nice white gaol or a Chinese saving bank. Most of us had starved in Sydney at some time or other. And as we lay for'ard, my mate, Bill Howe, reckoned that each man ought to come out of the affair with ten thousand dollars to his credit. '

"It was past midnight when we sighted her. She was standing well away from the Barrier, like a thing afraid, fuming and hooting from light to light. Funny how

these Chinese transports squeal in the dark— you'd think the blamed sea wasn't wider than a racecourse.

"We carried a long-range American cannon for'ard, one I'd picked up from a Chilian slave-agent in Samoa. But Howe looked after the ammunition and the loading, and he sent a shot across the Chinaman's bows as though he was shooting for a box of cigars. I signalled that we'd put a mustard plaster on her water-line if she didn't heave-to quick and lively. " She hove-to, coughing and swearing like an old woman with a cold in her head. I measured her fore-and-aft with my night glasses, and I could almost smell the dirty decks. I'd seen cow-boats with cleaner spaces abaft their funnels. There was a crowd of Chinese merchants and dig-crowd of Chinese merchants and diggers aboard; they heaved up from below in a simultaneous bundle, and they stood on each other's feet trying to get a look at us.

"We pulled towards 'em in the whale boat. There were eight of us carrying revolvers seated for'ard. Some of us had been fighting Chows since we were boys. It is a far better game than fighting poor policemen and tearing valuable uniforms.

" 'Steady, boys!' I said, as we pulled under her black, sweating side. She heaved and rolled above us like a hot thing with burning eyes. Funny how some ships glower at you! We felt her uneasy breathing; and we heard the stammer of her engines as the seas swung us under her port-rail.

" 'What ship?' says I, hailing her smartly. Two of the lads steadied the whale-boat to keep us from smashing against her ribs.

"A long, melon-faced chinky looked at me over the side, then another and another, until the steamer's rail was alive with pig-tails and squint-eyed Mongolians. The little white skipper, his face puffy with indigestion and whisky, threw his patent lantern on us. I saw his hand shake, and I knew that the bulge in his eyes spelt funk.

" 'It's that infernal Hayes!' he shouted to an officer. What the blazes is he after?'

" 'See here, Cap'n Shypoo,' says I, briskly, 'no personalities, or I'll brighten the cabin fittings with your bald head. Savvy?'

"My word, he did. I guess the name of Hayes was as good as a charge of grape-shot in those unpoliced waters. The compass-light showed me his blithering face as he climbed down from the bridge, wild-eyed and clawing the air.

" 'Hayes,' says he, 'don't be an ass. I know you mean mischief— anything short of murder. What is it?' he asks. 'Mail bags?'

" 'No,' says I. 'Bullion-sacks— two thousand ounces or thereabouts. Hope you didn't think I was after the saloon ducks.'

"When a man turns away his face I know his knees are giving in, and his heart is trying to climb out of the front window. I've always taken credit for shooting away explanations. It's part of my business; and the cargo skippers trading between Sud Est and Thursday have good memories. As aforesaid, Captain Shypoo climbed down in a bundle.

"He looked down at me like a sick spaniel. 'Hayes,' says he, 'I've heard that you never did a scurvy act in the presence of ladies. We have several on board, travelling with their fathers and husbands, to Shanghai. Now, Bully, I ask you not to turn my steamer into a bear pit. Are you going to play buccaneer or white man?'

"Guess he had me in a soft place if he'd only known. I was never game to hold up a banana punt if a skirt of a woman showed itself. Still, I told myself they might be Chinese ladies, he had aboard, and Chinese ladies never let down their hair on a question of barratry or spirit-rapping. So I adjusted my voice and gave him my second-best yell.

" 'Don't want to interfere with your passengers. I don't want to stand clawing your greasy hull, sir. We're in a hurry, and if you can't make up your mind about the gold box we'll whistle it down with a five-inch shell.'

"It struck me that while we palavered over the rail, the Chows were holding a private meeting aft. They were explaining in their own lingo that I was a bad man with a string of buccaneers at my heels. I don't like Chinese when they rush together— they're as cute as the end of a lightning rod.

" 'Hurry up !' says I. 'My ship is riding on your quarter. Just chase your feet into the bullion-room and sling down the box, or I'll put a shell under your propeller.'

"The skipper was a piebald man, smitten with ague and loaded with Chinese habits. He squealed at me and threatened; then when he'd used up his rage he floated into hyperbole and collapsed. 'Hayes,' says he, 'this is a hanging matter. Piracy, by Heaven! I'll have a warship on your heels in less than a week.'

"The Chows ran to the side and stared at us again. One of them, a fellow with an evil squint, spoke for the others. 'Hayes, you welly bad man,' says he. 'Wha fo' you want our money?'

" 'Don't want your squeaks, anyhow,' I said, hotly. 'If you serve up any Canton bluff I'll present the crowd of you with a raft and a cask of water!'

"That sent 'em in a heap to the stateroom, where the captain was hiding his face in a brandy squash. They asked him to turn a steampipe on us and skin us alive. But the mention of my name had put him in a funk. He came on deck and consulted a pig-whiskered mandarin, who wore the order of the peacock and the gilt but-ton on his sleeve.

"The night was black enough for any devilry. You could have hit a man without seeing his face. And the seas rolled us in and out, threatening to stave us in against the Ning Po's sides. "

We waited six minutes while Pig-whiskers and the skipper hurried down to the vault-room to unlock and wheel the blamed bullion on deck. Things began to feel as nice as a free con-cert. There's nothing like a bit of gun-skite to steady a loose gang of rat-headed Chows.

"The skipper yelled a Chinese word from below, and then came the rattle and jolt of a steam-driven winch. 'They're going to lower the stuff in a box, says Bill Howe, in a whisper. 'I reckon two thousand ounces of dust ought to weigh close on half a ton, cap'n—'

"Bill was never much good at figures; he couldn't reckon, the price of three drinks and a dog-license at a pinch. Still I allowed that the gold was heavier than a hod of bricks.

"Fore and aft the big steamer was as quiet as a church. Her engines seemed to breathe and strain, like a hound on a leash. The Chows had scampered below to wallop their joss and call me bad names. I guess it twisted their heart-strings to see their gold being heaved over the side.

" 'Some men sweat and groan trying to make a hundred dollars,' says I to the lads beside me, ' but it takes a man like me to get it hoisted into your pockets with a donkey engine.'

"From the boat to derrick chain was thirty feet, and as it swing over us I could almost see the bullion tank, bolted with steel, and copper-fastened, descending towards us.

" 'Stand by!' roared a voice from the winch; 'and hold her when she touches.'

"The bullion tank was hanging fifteen feet above us, and there wasn't the ghost of a light on our quarter to show us its exact bearings. We knew it was swinging in the air like a pendulum, in and out, in and out, until it hung level with the *Ning Po*'s rail.

" 'All ready?' shouts the winch-man. 'Aye, aye,' says I. 'Lower away, my lad. Heave ho for the yellow man's gold.'

" 'Heave ho!' sang the lads beside me. Bill Howe groped for the hurricane lamp while we stood up to steady the swinging tank. I was taller than the others, and my head was nearer to it by half a foot than the mate's. As I reached up something seemed to get into my throat like the taste of hot poison. Down came the black tank, long as a baker's trough and oozing water. Only a Chinaman or a devil could have planned what happened afterwards. 'Back water for your lives!' I roared. 'Back water!' No one heard me in the unholy crash that followed.... And the thing struck us like a live comet, whipping us to match-wood as it fell.

"Guess I know the musky smell of a Queensland alligator when it breathes over me in the water. The Chows had upset the tank and spilled a big saurian on top of us. I awoke in the water, my hands gripping a piece of smashed whale-boat. I heard the beast grunt, and snap its jaws when it struck the boat. The tank was hoisted back to the steamer just as the alligator turned its snout shoreward and disappeared.

"Eighty Chows sprang to the rail, dancing like fanatics at sight of our broken boat and the crew struggling below. The skipper jumped to the bridge and rang full steam ahead, leaving us astern half blinded by the wash of the big propeller.

"I heard afterwards that a show-man was taking his live alligator and tank to Hong Kong when we bailed up the *Ning Po*. The Chows gave him a thousand dollars for the use of his blamed reptile. They said it was a nice Christmas-box for a man like me."

Captain Hayes leaned over the verandah rail and smoked reflectively.

"No," he said to the German, "I never afterwards met the skipper of the *Ning Po*. He faded out of this life on an overdose of opium, up in Shanghai, last year. There's nothing to prevent me congratulating the alligator showman when we meet, though. I admire presence of mind. But I'd like to tell that showman— with my heel on his neck— that we accepted delivery of his bull 'gator.

"I intend to be a better man in future, Schultz; and if you want a reliable navigator to hustle around the islands or boss a pearl lugger, I'll show you my certificate."

With a boisterous "Good-night" to the heat-fretted German in the hammock, Hayes swung from the trade-house to where his boat lay at the pier end. Later, his voice sounded across the bay— a roaring bass that seemed to shatter the tropic silence.

We heard the Chinkies prattle way up in China Town,
We heard the hawse-chains rattle that let the anchor down.

"Dot was a strange fellow, anyhow," grunted the German, and went to sleep.

13: A Novel Forgery

Rodrigues Ottolengui

1861-1937

In: *The Final Proof*, 1898

A Mitchel and Barnes detective story (yes, one "l" in Mitchel)

MR. BARNES was wondering whether he would soon have a case which would require special mental effort in its solution. "Something that will make me think," was the way he phrased it to himself. The same idea had occupied him for some time. Not that he had been idle, but his "cases" had all been of such a nature that with a little supervision it had been safe to intrust them entirely to his subordinates. Nothing had occurred to compel his personal investigation. On this morning, however, fate had something peculiarly attractive for him. His office-boy announced a visitor, who, when shown into the detective's sanctum, introduced himself thus:

"I am Stephen West, cashier of the Fulton National Bank. Is this Mr. Barnes?"

"Yes, sir," replied the detective. "Is your business important?"

"It is very important to me," said Mr. West. "I am interested to the extent of forty thousand dollars."

"Forty thousand dollars! Forgery?" Receiving an assenting nod, Mr. Barnes arose and closed the door of the office after instructing the boy to prevent his being disturbed. Returning to his seat, he said: "Now then, Mr. West, tell me the story. All of it, as far as you know it. Omit no detail, however unimportant it may seem to you."

"Very good. My bank has been swindled out of forty thousand dollars in the most mysterious manner. We have received four checks, each for ten thousand dollars. These were signed with the name John Wood, one of our best customers. In making up his monthly balance these checks were sent to his house in the usual order of business. To-day Mr. Wood came to the bank, and declared them to be forgeries."

"Were these checks paid by you personally?"

"Oh, no. We received them through the Clearing-House. They had been deposited at the Harlem National Bank, and reached us in the routine way. They were taken on four different days."

"Who was the depositor at the Harlem Bank?"

"There is a mystery there. His name is Carl Grasse. Inquiry at the Harlem Bank shows that he has been a depositor for about a year. He had a seemingly flourishing business, a beer-garden and concert place. Recently he sold out and returned to his home in Germany. Before doing so he drew out his deposits and closed his account."

"How is it that you did not yourself detect the forgeries? I supposed you bank people were so expert nowadays that the cashing of a worthless check would be impossible."

"Here are the forged checks, and here is one cashed by us since the accounting, which is genuine. Compare them, and perhaps you will admit that anyone might have been deceived."

Mr. Barnes examined the checks very closely, using a lens to assist his eyes. Presently he laid them down without comment, and said:

"What do you wish me to do, Mr. West?"

"To me it seems like a hopeless task, but at least I should like to have the forger arrested. I will gladly pay five hundred dollars as a reward."

Mr. Barnes took up the checks again, examined them most carefully with the lens, and once more laid them down. He strummed on his desk a moment and then said suddenly:

"Mr. West, suppose that I not only arrest the guilty man, but recover the forty thousand dollars?"

"You don't mean to say—" began Mr. West, rather astonished.

"I said 'suppose,' " interrupted Mr. Barnes.

"Why, in that case," said Mr. West, "I would gladly give a thousand more."

"The terms suit me," said the detective. "I'll do my best. Leave these checks with me, and I'll report to you as promptly as possible. One moment," as Mr. West was about to depart; "I will make a memorandum of something you must do yourself." He wrote a few lines on a sheet of paper and handed it to Mr. West, saying, "Let me have those to-day, if possible."

One week later Mr. West received the following note:

"Stephen West, Esq.:—

"Dear Sir—

I have completed my investigation of your case. Please call at my office at four o'clock. If convenient, you may as well bring with you a check for fifteen hundred dollars, made payable to John Barnes."

"Great heavens!" ejaculated the cashier upon reading the above, "he tells me to bring fifteen hundred dollars. That means he has recovered the money. Thank God!" He dropped into his chair, overcome at the sudden release from the suspense of the previous week, and a few tears trickled down his cheek as he thought of his wife and little one who would not now be obliged to give up their pretty little home to make good his loss.

Promptly at four he was ushered into the presence of Mr. Barnes. Impatient to have his hopes confirmed, he exclaimed at once:

"Am I right? You have succeeded?"

"Most thoroughly," said the detective. "I have discovered the thief, and have him in prison. I also have his written confession."

"But the forty thousand dollars?"

"All safe and sound. Your bank does not lose a dollar— except the reward." Mr. Barnes added the last after a pause and with a twinkle of his eye.

"Oh, Mr. Barnes, that is a trifle compared to what I expected. But tell me, how was this trick played on us? Who did it?"

"Suppose I give you a detailed account of my work in solving the riddle? I am just in the humor for telling it, and besides you will be more appreciative."

"That is just what I should most desire."

"Very well," began Mr. Barnes. "We will go back to the moment when, after scrutinizing the checks, I asked what you would give for the recovery of the money. I asked that because a suspicion had entered my mind, and I knew that if it should prove to be correct, the arrest of the criminal and the recovery of the money would be simultaneous. I will not explain now why that should be a necessary sequence, as you will see that I was right. But I will tell you what made me entertain the suspicion. In the first place, as you know, of course, John Wood uses a private special check. The forgeries were upon blanks which had been stolen from his check-book. Thus the thief seemingly had access to it. Next, as is commonly done nowadays, the amount of the check was not only written, but also punched out, with the additional precaution of punching a dollar mark before and after the figures. It would seem therefore almost impossible that any alterations had been made after the check was originally drawn. Such things have been done, the holes being filled up with paper pulp, and new ones punched afterwards. But in this case nothing of the sort had been attempted, nor indeed was any such procedure necessary, for the checks were not raised from genuine ones, but had been declared by Wood to be forgeries outright. That is, he denied the signatures."

"Certainly. They were declared to be spurious."

"Exactly. Now that was all that I knew when you were here last except that the signatures seemed to be very similar. It was possible that they were tracings. The plain deduction from this was that the forger was some one in John Wood's establishment; some one who could have access to the checkbook, to the punch, and also have a chance to copy the signature, if it was copied."

"All that is quite clear, but how to proceed?"

"I instructed you to send me a list of all the checks which had been paid out on John Wood's account, giving their dates, numbers, and amounts. I also asked you to procure for me from the Harlem National Bank a similar list of checks paid on order of Carl Grasse. These two lists you sent to me, and they have been very useful. As soon as you left me, and whilst awaiting your lists, I tried some experiments with the forged checks. First I argued that if the signatures were

traced, having been made, as it were, from a model, it would follow necessarily that they would exactly coincide if superimposed the one upon the other. Now whilst a man from habit will write his name very similarly a thousand times, I doubt if in a million times he would, or could, exactly reproduce his signature. The test of placing one over the other and examining with transmitted light satisfied me that they were not tracings. I compared each check with each of the others, and with the genuine one which you also left with me. No two were exact counterparts of one another. Still this did not completely prove that they were not tracings, for an artistic criminal might have gone so far as to trace each check from a different model, thus avoiding identity whilst preserving similarity."

"Mr. Barnes," said Mr. West, admiringly, "you delight me with your care in reasoning out your point."

"Mr. West, in speculating upon circumstantial evidence the most thorough care must be used, if one would avoid arresting the innocent. Nothing, to my mind, is stronger proof against a criminal than a complete chain of circumstantial evidence, but again, nothing is so misleading if at any stage a mistake, an omission, or a misconstruction be allowed to occur. In this case, then, as I was starting out to prove what was merely a suspicion, I determined to be most careful, for indeed I dislike following up suspicion at any time. A suspicion is a prejudgment, and may prove a hindrance to correct reasoning. Not entirely satisfied, therefore, I took the next step. A tracing can be made in either of two ways: with a lead-pencil, or with a stylus of glass or agate. The former leaves a deposit of the lead, whilst the latter makes an indentation upon the paper. In the first case the forger will attempt to remove the lead with an erasing rubber, but will not succeed thoroughly, because some of it will be covered by the ink, and because of the danger of injuring the surface of the paper. In the latter instance, if he be a very thoughtful man, he might undertake to remove the indentation by rubbing the opposite side with the end of his knife or with an ivory paper-cutter. In either case a careful scrutiny with a strong glass would show the burnishing upon the reverse side. I could find nothing of the sort. Taking one of the checks I applied a solution to remove the ink. A thorough examination disclosed that there was no sign either of the graphite, or of the indentation from the stylus. In fact, I became satisfied that the signatures had not been traced."

"But what did that prove? They might have been imitations made by a clever penman."

"They might have been, but I doubted it; and since you ask, I will give my reasons. In the first place, the signatures were accepted at your bank not once, but four times. It would be a remarkably clever man to deceive experts so well. However, I did not abandon this possibility until further developments showed

conclusively to my mind that it would be a waste of time to follow up that line of research. Had it been necessary to do so, I should have discovered who in the place had the opportunity to do the work, and by examining their past I should have received a hint as to which of these was most likely to be my man. For any man who could have the ability to commit such a clever forgery must have acquired it as a sequence of special skill and aptitude with his pen of which his friends would be cognizant. Once I looked up such a man, and found that as a boy he had forged his parents' names to excuses for absences from school. Later he turned to higher things. In this instance I was satisfied that the only person having the access to materials, the knowledge of the financial condition of the concern, and the ability to write the checks, was Mr. John Wood himself."

"John Wood!" exclaimed the cashier. "Impossible! Why, that would mean that—"

"Nothing is impossible, Mr. West. I know what you would say. That it involved his having an accomplice in this Carl Grasse? Well, that is what I suspected, and that is why I asked for an additional reward for the recovery of the funds. If I could prove that John Wood made the checks himself, they ceased to be forgeries in one sense, and the bank could rightfully charge the amounts against his account. But let me tell you why I abandoned your theory that an expert penman was at work. Observe that though you would have honored a check for forty thousand dollars drawn by John Wood, yet the forgeries were four in number. That showed that the man was not afraid of arousing your suspicion. The only man who could feel absolutely sure upon that point was John Wood. But there is another pretty point. These checks being spurious, and yet being numbered, could arouse your suspicion in two ways. If the numbers upon them greatly varied from those upon genuine checks coming in at the same time, the fraud would have been detected quickly. On the other hand, he could not give you correct numbers without being either in collusion with his bookkeeper or else duplicating the numbering of other checks. That the latter course was pursued, exempted the bookkeeper. All the numbers on the forged checks were duplicates of those on genuine ones."

"But, Mr. Barnes, that did not arouse our suspicion, because—"

"Just so," interrupted Mr. Barnes, "but let me tell you why, as the *why* is a very significant link in our chain. Your list of this man's checks helped me there. About a year ago Carl Grasse appeared upon the scene in Harlem, buying out a beer-garden, and starting an account in the Harlem National Bank. Now observe that prior to that time, from the first check sent to you by Wood, the strictest regularity as to numbering obtained. There is not a break or a skip anywhere. But in February, the month after Carl Grasse moved to Harlem, there is a duplication in Wood's checks. Two have the same numbering, but both are for trifling amounts, sixteen dollars in one instance and forty in the other. You

possibly passed it over. Next month, I find two duplications, and from then on this apparent mistake happens no less than ten times."

"Mr. Barnes, the bookkeepers did notice this, and we spoke to Mr. Wood, but he said it was simply a clerical error of his own due to haste in business hours."

"Exactly, but he was paving the way for his big coup. He was disarming you of suspicion. This one fact satisfied me that I was on the right track, but your list gave me even better corroboration. On February 1st I find that Wood cashed a check payable to himself for ten thousand and fifty-nine dollars. On February 2d, Carl Grasse opened an account with the Harlem Bank, depositing ten thousand dollars, paying in the amount, in cash. This might seem but a coincidence, but by looking over the books of the beer-garden, which is still in existence, Grasse having sold it out, I find that on February 2d, Grasse paid his employees just fifty-nine dollars. The difference, you see, between Wood's draft and Grasse's deposit."

"It certainly seems to connect the two, when we remember that the final forgeries were checks signed by Wood in favor of Grasse."

"Precisely, but follow this a little further. For several months there is nothing to connect the two so far as their banking goes, but note that during this lapse Grasse does not draw a single check in favor of himself, nor does he deposit any checks from others. His transactions with his customers are strictly cash, and his checks are all to dealers, who supply him with his stock. None of these are for large amounts, and his balance does not exceed twelve thousand dollars at any time. On October 1st he deposited five thousand dollars in cash. On the day before that, Wood drew that amount out of your bank. On the 12th, this is repeated by both, and on the 14th, Grasse cashes a check for twelve thousand dollars, taking cash. This goes through successfully, and the Harlem Bank is made to see that Grasse commands large amounts and uses large amounts. This is repeated in varying amounts in November, and again in December, the bank by this time being quite ready to pay out money to Grasse. On January 2d, Wood has his check account balanced. On the 3d, Grasse deposits Wood's check for ten thousand dollars. This goes through the Clearing-House, and is accepted by your bank. The Harlem Bank is therefore satisfied of its authenticity. On the 5th, Grasse deposits check number two, and at the same time cashes a check for ten thousand dollars. The second spurious check goes through all right, and on the 10th and 15th, the transactions are repeated. On the 20th, Grasse explains to the Harlem Bank that he has sold his business, and is going home to Germany. He closes his account, taking out his money, and disappears from the scene. You are forty thousand dollars out by a clever swindle, with nothing to prove your suspicions save a few coincidences in the banking records of the two men."

"But assuredly, Mr. Barnes, enough evidence upon which to arrest Mr. Wood?"

"To arrest him, yes. But to convict him? That is another affair. Without conviction you do not recover your money. No, my work was by no means finished. I first sought to follow Grasse. I did not have far to go. At the Hamburg-American line I found him booked, but investigation showed that he never sailed. The ticket which he bought has never been taken up."

"Then the accomplice is still in this country?"

"No; the accomplice is not in this country," said Mr. Barnes, dryly. "Don't get ahead of the story. At this stage of the game I made some singular discoveries. I found, for example, that Carl Grasse slept over his saloon, but that he frequently would be absent all night. I also learned that when he did sleep there, he would leave about nine o'clock in the morning for that mysterious realm, 'down-town.' When he slept elsewhere, he usually reached the saloon at eight, and still went 'down-town' at nine. It was his general custom to get back about five in the afternoon. Extending my researches in the direction of John Wood, I learned that he was customarily at his office at ten o'clock, seldom leaving before four. Moreover, at his apartment the janitor told me that he frequently slept elsewhere, and that when he passed the night at that place, he would leave about seven in the morning. Do you follow me?"

"Do you mean that John Wood and Carl Grasse are one and the same person?"

"That idea entered my mind about this time. Up at the saloon I found some other small evidences that this was a probability. You see, a man may disguise his personal appearance, but it is difficult for him to change his habits with his clothing. For example, I found that Mr. Wood always uses Carter's writing fluid, and Mr. Grasse had the same predilection, as the empty bottles attest. Moreover, the bottles are of the same size in both places. Next I observe that both men used the same make of stub pens. Again note that though Carl Grasse is a German name and the man was keeping a beer saloon, he was never seen to drink beer himself. John Wood has the same antipathy to malt. But most singular is the fact that this man, who so carefully laid his plans, should have actually bought a check-punching stamp of the same make and style of figures as that used in the Wood establishment."

"Perhaps he did that so that he could make the spurious checks up-town instead of down-town, where he might be discovered."

"More than likely, but he should have taken it away with him. There is always some little detail of this kind that even the most skilful overlooks. He probably thought that the similarity of the instruments would never be detected, or made to count against him. It is nothing in itself, but as a link in a chain it mends a break. There was one fact, however, at wide variance with the

theory of the identity of the two men. Wood is of ordinary build, with black hair and smooth-shaven face. Grasse is described as very stout, with red hair and whiskers. Of course, following the theory of impersonation, if Wood transformed himself into a stout man, totally different clothing would be needed for the two parts which he played. I found that Wood always dressed in the finest broadcloth, whilst Grasse wore conspicuous plaids. Supposing that he wore a red wig and false whiskers, I determined to find the man from whom he had procured them. I guessed that he would avoid any well-known place, and I began my hunt in the costumers' shops on Third Avenue. I went to several without obtaining any clue, when at last fortune favored me. I found a place where, upon their books, in last January was a record of 'red wig and whiskers' for the same customer. Moreover, they had furnished this person with a 'make-up' for a fat German, giving him the necessary 'pads,' as they are called, a suit of underwear wadded so as to increase the proportion of the body. Can you guess what I did next?"

"I think not."

"It was an inspiration. I ordered a similar outfit for myself, including the plaid suit. This morning they were delivered to me, and, dressed in them, I induced the costumer to go with me to Wood's place. As soon as I was shown into his presence, I began to talk in a most excited, angry tone. I said 'Mr. Wood, I come for satisfaction. I am Carl Grasse, the man you have been personating up-town. I am the man whose name you forged to the back of your own checks. And this is the costumer who sold you the disguise. Am I not right?' This last speech I addressed to the costumer, who, to my intense satisfaction, said, 'Yes, that is the gentleman; but I did not know he was going to impersonate anybody.'"

"What happened then?" asked the cashier.

"Well," said Mr. Barnes, "I had better luck than I had expected, though, in line with my hopes. You see, my sudden appearance before him, my words, and my rapid speech, all tended to confuse him. He suddenly heard himself accused of forging the name of 'Carl Grasse,' and for the moment thought only of defending himself from that charge. He was utterly taken back, and stammered out, 'I did not forge anybody's name. The checks had my own signature, and the endorsement— that was "Carl Grasse." There is no such person.' Then suddenly seeing that he was making a mistake and incriminating himself, he exclaimed, 'Who the devil are you?'

" 'I am a detective,' I answered, quickly seizing his arms and putting on a pair of manacles, 'and I arrest you for swindling the Fulton Bank, whether your offense be forgery or not.' That settled him. He wilted and began to cry for mercy. He even offered me money to let him escape. I delivered him to the Central Office officials, and since then the Inspector has obtained a voluntary confession from him. Are you satisfied, Mr. West?"

"I am more than satisfied. I am amazed. Mr. Barnes, you are a genius."
"Not at all, Mr. West, I am a detective."

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14: MS Found in a Bottle

Edgar Allan Poe

1809-1849

Baltimore Saturday Visitor 19 Oct, 1833

Qui n'a plus qu'un moment à vivre
N'a plus rien à dissimuler.
—*Quinault: Atys*.

OF MY COUNTRY and of my family I have little to say. Ill usage and length of years have driven me from the one, and estranged me from the other. Hereditary wealth afforded me an education of no common order, and a contemplative turn of mind enabled me to methodise the stores which early study very diligently garnered up. Beyond all things, the works of the German moralists gave me great delight; not from any ill-advised admiration of their eloquent madness, but from the ease with which my habits of rigid thought enabled me to detect their falsities. I have often been reproached with the aridity of my genius; a deficiency of imagination has been imputed to me as a crime; and the Pyrrhonism of my opinions has at all times rendered me notorious. Indeed, a strong relish for physical philosophy has, I fear, tinctured my mind with a very common error of this age— I mean the habit of referring occurrences, even the least susceptible of such reference, to the principles of that science. Upon the whole, no person could be less liable than myself to be led away from the severe precincts of truth by the *ignes fatui* of superstition. I have thought proper to premise thus much, lest the incredible tale I have to tell should be considered rather the raving of a crude imagination, than the positive experience of a mind to which the reveries of fancy have been a dead letter and a nullity.

After many years spent in foreign travel, I sailed in the year 18—, from the port of Batavia, in the rich and populous island of Java, on a voyage to the Archipelago of the Sunda islands. I went as passenger— having no other inducement than a kind of nervous restlessness which haunted me as a fiend.

Our vessel was a beautiful ship of about four hundred tons, copper-fastened, and built at Bombay of Malabar teak. She was freighted with cotton-wool and oil, from the Lachadive islands. We had also on board coir, jaggeree, ghee, cocoa-nuts, and a few cases of opium. The stowage was clumsily done, and the vessel consequently crank.

We got under way with a mere breath of wind, and for many days stood along the eastern coast of Java, without any other incident to beguile the monotony of our course than the occasional meeting with some of the small grabs of the Archipelago to which we were bound.

One evening, leaning over the taffrail, I observed a very singular, isolated cloud, to the N. W. It was remarkable, as well for its color, as from its being the first we had seen since our departure from Batavia. I watched it attentively until sunset, when it spread all at once to the eastward and westward, girting in the horizon with a narrow strip of vapor, and looking like a long line of low beach. My notice was soon afterwards attracted by the dusky-red appearance of the moon, and the peculiar character of the sea. The latter was undergoing a rapid change, and the water seemed more than usually transparent. Although I could distinctly see the bottom, yet, heaving the lead, I found the ship in fifteen fathoms. The air now became intolerably hot, and was loaded with spiral exhalations similar to those arising from heated iron. As night came on, every breath of wind died away, and a more entire calm it is impossible to conceive. The flame of a candle burned upon the poop without the least perceptible motion, and a long hair, held between the finger and thumb, hung without the possibility of detecting a vibration. However, as the captain said he could perceive no indication of danger, and as we were drifting in bodily to shore, he ordered the sails to be furled, and the anchor let go. No watch was set, and the crew, consisting principally of Malays, stretched themselves deliberately upon deck. I went below— not without a full presentiment of evil. Indeed, every appearance warranted me in apprehending a Simoon. I told the captain my fears; but he paid no attention to what I said, and left me without deigning to give a reply. My uneasiness, however, prevented me from sleeping, and about midnight I went upon deck. As I placed my foot upon the upper step of the companion-ladder, I was startled by a loud, humming noise, like that occasioned by the rapid revolution of a mill-wheel, and before I could ascertain its meaning, I found the ship quivering to its centre. In the next instant, a wilderness of foam hurled us upon our beam-ends, and, rushing over us fore and aft, swept the entire decks from stem to stern.

The extreme fury of the blast proved, in a great measure, the salvation of the ship. Although completely water-logged, yet, as her masts had gone by the board, she rose, after a minute, heavily from the sea, and, staggering awhile beneath the immense pressure of the tempest, finally righted.

By what miracle I escaped destruction, it is impossible to say. Stunned by the shock of the water, I found myself, upon recovery, jammed in between the stern-post and rudder. With great difficulty I gained my feet, and looking dizzily around, was at first struck with the idea of our being among breakers; so terrific, beyond the wildest imagination, was the whirlpool of mountainous and foaming ocean within which we were ingulfed. After a while, I heard the voice of an old Swede, who had shipped with us at the moment of our leaving port. I hallooed to him with all my strength, and presently he came reeling aft. We soon discovered that we were the sole survivors of the accident. All on deck, with the

exception of ourselves, had been swept overboard; the captain and mates must have perished as they slept, for the cabins were deluged with water. Without assistance, we could expect to do little for the security of the ship, and our exertions were at first paralyzed by the momentary expectation of going down. Our cable had, of course, parted like pack-thread, at the first breath of the hurricane, or we should have been instantaneously overwhelmed. We scudded with frightful velocity before the sea, and the water made clear breaches over us. The frame-work of our stern was shattered excessively, and, in almost every respect, we had received considerable injury; but to our extreme joy we found the pumps unchoked, and that we had made no great shifting of our ballast. The main fury of the blast had already blown over, and we apprehended little danger from the violence of the wind; but we looked forward to its total cessation with dismay; well believing, that, in our shattered condition, we should inevitably perish in the tremendous swell which would ensue. But this very just apprehension seemed by no means likely to be soon verified. For five entire days and nights— during which our only subsistence was a small quantity of jaggeree, procured with great difficulty from the forecastle— the hulk flew at a rate defying computation, before rapidly succeeding flaws of wind, which, without equalling the first violence of the Simoon, were still more terrific than any tempest I had before encountered. Our course for the first four days was, with trifling variations, S. E. and by S.; and we must have run down the coast of New Holland. On the fifth day the cold became extreme, although the wind had hauled round a point more to the northward. The sun arose with a sickly yellow lustre, and clambered a very few degrees above the horizon— emitting no decisive light. There were no clouds apparent, yet the wind was upon the increase, and blew with a fitful and unsteady fury. About noon, as nearly as we could guess, our attention was again arrested by the appearance of the sun. It gave out no light, properly so called, but a dull and sullen glow without reflection, as if all its rays were polarized. Just before sinking within the turgid sea, its central fires suddenly went out, as if hurriedly extinguished by some unaccountable power. It was a dim, silver-like rim, alone, as it rushed down the unfathomable ocean.

We waited in vain for the arrival of the sixth day— that day to me has not arrived—to the Swede, never did arrive. Thenceforward we were enshrouded in pitchy darkness, so that we could not have seen an object at twenty paces from the ship. Eternal night continued to envelop us, all unrelieved by the phosphoric sea-brilliancy to which we had been accustomed in the tropics. We observed too, that, although the tempest continued to rage with unabated violence, there was no longer to be discovered the usual appearance of surf, or foam, which had hitherto attended us. All around were horror, and thick gloom, and a black sweltering desert of ebony. Superstitious terror crept by degrees into the spirit

of the old Swede, and my own soul was wrapped up in silent wonder. We neglected all care of the ship, as worse than useless, and securing ourselves, as well as possible, to the stump of the mizen-mast, looked out bitterly into the world of ocean. We had no means of calculating time, nor could we form any guess of our situation. We were, however, well aware of having made farther to the southward than any previous navigators, and felt great amazement at not meeting with the usual impediments of ice. In the meantime every moment threatened to be our last— every mountainous billow hurried to overwhelm us. The swell surpassed anything I had imagined possible, and that we were not instantly buried is a miracle. My companion spoke of the lightness of our cargo, and reminded me of the excellent qualities of our ship; but I could not help feeling the utter hopelessness of hope itself, and prepared myself gloomily for that death which I thought nothing could defer beyond an hour, as, with every knot of way the ship made, the swelling of the black stupendous seas became more dismally appalling. At times we gasped for breath at an elevation beyond the albatross—at times became dizzy with the velocity of our descent into some watery hell, where the air grew stagnant, and no sound disturbed the slumbers of the kraken.

We were at the bottom of one of these abysses, when a quick scream from my companion broke fearfully upon the night. “See! see!” cried he, shrieking in my ears, “Almighty God! see! see!” As he spoke, I became aware of a dull, sullen glare of red light which streamed down the sides of the vast chasm where we lay, and threw a fitful brilliancy upon our deck. Casting my eyes upwards, I beheld a spectacle which froze the current of my blood. At a terrific height directly above us, and upon the very verge of the precipitous descent, hovered a gigantic ship, of perhaps four thousand tons. Although upreared upon the summit of a wave more than a hundred times her own altitude, her apparent size still exceeded that of any ship of the line or East Indiaman in existence. Her huge hull was of a deep dingy black, unrelieved by any of the customary carvings of a ship. A single row of brass cannon protruded from her open ports, and dashed from their polished surfaces the fires of innumerable battle-lanterns, which swung to and fro about her rigging. But what mainly inspired us with horror and astonishment, was that she bore up under a press of sail in the very teeth of that supernatural sea, and of that ungovernable hurricane. When we first discovered her, her bows were alone to be seen, as she rose slowly from the dim and horrible gulf beyond her. For a moment of intense terror she paused upon the giddy pinnacle, as if in contemplation of her own sublimity, then trembled and tottered, and— came down.

At this instant, I know not what sudden self-possession came over my spirit. Staggering as far aft as I could, I awaited fearlessly the ruin that was to overwhelm. Our own vessel was at length ceasing from her struggles, and

sinking with her head to the sea. The shock of the descending mass struck her, consequently, in that portion of her frame which was already under water, and the inevitable result was to hurl me, with irresistible violence, upon the rigging of the stranger.

As I fell, the ship hove in stays, and went about; and to the confusion ensuing I attributed my escape from the notice of the crew. With little difficulty I made my way, unperceived, to the main hatchway, which was partially open, and soon found an opportunity of secreting myself in the hold. Why I did so I can hardly tell. An indefinite sense of awe, which at first sight of the navigators of the ship had taken hold of my mind, was perhaps the principle of my concealment. I was unwilling to trust myself with a race of people who had offered, to the cursory glance I had taken, so many points of vague novelty, doubt, and apprehension. I therefore thought proper to contrive a hiding-place in the hold. This I did by removing a small portion of the shifting-boards, in such a manner as to afford me a convenient retreat between the huge timbers of the ship.

I had scarcely completed my work, when a footstep in the hold forced me to make use of it. A man passed by my place of concealment with a feeble and unsteady gait. I could not see his face, but had an opportunity of observing his general appearance. There was about it an evidence of great age and infirmity. His knees tottered beneath a load of years, and his entire frame quivered under the burthen. He muttered to himself, in a low broken tone, some words of a language which I could not understand, and groped in a corner among a pile of singular-looking instruments, and decayed charts of navigation. His manner was a wild mixture of the peevishness of second childhood and the solemn dignity of a God. He at length went on deck, and I saw him no more.

A FEELING, for which I have no name, has taken possession of my soul— a sensation which will admit of no analysis, to which the lessons of by-gone time are inadequate, and for which I fear futurity itself will offer me no key. To a mind constituted like my own, the latter consideration is an evil. I shall never— I know that I shall never—be satisfied with regard to the nature of my conceptions. Yet it is not wonderful that these conceptions are indefinite, since they have their origin in sources so utterly novel. A new sense— a new entity is added to my soul.

IT IS LONG since I first trod the deck of this terrible ship, and the rays of my destiny are, I think, gathering to a focus. Incomprehensible men! Wrapped up in meditations of a kind which I cannot divine, they pass me by unnoticed. Concealment is utter folly on my part, for the people *will not* see. It was but just now that I passed directly before the eyes of the mate; it was no long while ago

that I ventured into the captain's own private cabin, and took thence the materials with which I write, and have written. I shall from time to time continue this journal. It is true that I may not find an opportunity of transmitting it to the world, but I will not fail to make the endeavor. At the last moment I will enclose the MS. in a bottle, and cast it within the sea.

AN INCIDENT has occurred which has given me new room for meditation. Are such things the operation of ungoverned chance? I had ventured upon deck and thrown myself down, without attracting any notice, among a pile of ratlin-stuff and old sails, in the bottom of the yawl. While musing upon the singularity of my fate, I unwittingly daubed with a tar-brush the edges of a neatly-folded studding-sail which lay near me on a barrel. The studding-sail is now bent upon the ship, and the thoughtless touches of the brush are spread out into the word *Discovery*.

I have made many observations lately upon the structure of the vessel. Although well armed, she is not, I think, a ship of war. Her rigging, build, and general equipment, all negative a supposition of this kind. What she *is not*, I can easily perceive; what she *is*, I fear it is impossible to say. I know not how it is, but in scrutinizing her strange model and singular cast of spars, her huge size and overgrown suits of canvass, her severely simple bow and antiquated stern, there will occasionally flash across my mind a sensation of familiar things, and there is always mixed up with such indistinct shadows of recollection, an unaccountable memory of old foreign chronicles and ages long ago.

I have been looking at the timbers of the ship. She is built of a material to which I am a stranger. There is a peculiar character about the wood which strikes me as rendering it unfit for the purpose to which it has been applied. I mean its extreme *porousness*, considered independently of the worm-eaten condition which is a consequence of navigation in these seas, and apart from the rottenness attendant upon age. It will appear perhaps an observation somewhat over-curious, but this wood would have every characteristic of Spanish oak, if Spanish oak were distended by any unnatural means.

In reading the above sentence, a curious apothegm of an old weather-beaten Dutch navigator comes full upon my recollection. "It is as sure," he was wont to say, when any doubt was entertained of his veracity, "as sure as there is a sea where the ship itself will grow in bulk like the living body of the seaman."

About an hour ago, I made bold to thrust myself among a group of the crew. They paid me no manner of attention, and, although I stood in the very midst of them all, seemed utterly unconscious of my presence. Like the one I had at first seen in the hold, they all bore about them the marks of a hoary old age. Their knees trembled with infirmity; their shoulders were bent double with decrepitude; their shrivelled skins rattled in the wind; their voices were low,

tremulous, and broken; their eyes glistened with the rheum of years; and their gray hairs streamed terribly in the tempest. Around them, on every part of the deck, lay scattered mathematical instruments of the most quaint and obsolete construction.

I MENTIONED, some time ago, the bending of a studding-sail. From that period, the ship, being thrown dead off the wind, has continued her terrific course due south, with every rag of canvass packed upon her, from her trucks to her lower studding-sail booms, and rolling every moment her top-gallant yard-arms into the most appalling hell of water which it can enter into the mind of man to imagine. I have just left the deck, where I find it impossible to maintain a footing, although the crew seem to experience little inconvenience. It appears to me a miracle of miracles that our enormous bulk is not swallowed up at once and for ever. We are surely doomed to hover continually upon the brink of eternity, without taking a final plunge into the abyss. From billows a thousand times more stupendous than any I have ever seen, we glide away with the facility of the arrowy sea-gull; and the colossal waters rear their heads above us like demons of the deep, but like demons confined to simple threats, and forbidden to destroy. I am led to attribute these frequent escapes to the only natural cause which can account for such effect. I must suppose the ship to be within the influence of some strong current, or impetuous under-tow.

I have seen the captain face to face, and in his own cabin— but, as I expected, he paid me no attention. Although in his appearance there is, to a casual observer, nothing which might bespeak him more or less than man, still, a feeling of irrepressible reverence and awe mingled with the sensation of wonder with which I regarded him. In stature, he is nearly my own height; that is, about five feet eight inches. He is of a well-knit and compact frame of body, neither robust nor remarkable otherwise. But it is the singularity of the expression which reigns upon the face— it is the intense, the wonderful, the thrilling evidence of old age, so utter, so extreme, which excites within my spirit a sense— a sentiment ineffable. His forehead, although little wrinkled, seems to bear upon it the stamp of a myriad of years. His gray hairs are records of the past, and his grayer eyes are sybils of the future. The cabin floor was thickly strewn with strange, iron-clasped folios, and mouldering instruments of science, and obsolete long-forgotten charts. His head was bowed down upon his hands, and he pored, with a fiery, unquiet eye, over a paper which I took to be a commission, and which, at all events, bore the signature of a monarch. He muttered to himself— as did the first seaman whom I saw in the hold— some low peevish syllables of a foreign tongue; and although the speaker was close at my elbow, his voice seemed to reach my ears from the distance of a mile.

The ship and all in it are imbued with the spirit of Eld. The crew glide to and fro like the ghosts of buried centuries; their eyes have an eager and uneasy meaning; and when their figures fall athwart my path in the wild glare of the battle-lanterns, I feel as I have never felt before, although I have been all my life a dealer in antiquities, and have imbibed the shadows of fallen columns at Balbec, and Tadmor, and Persepolis, until my very soul has become a ruin.

WHEN I look around me, I feel ashamed of my former apprehensions. If I trembled at the blast which has hitherto attended us, shall I not stand aghast at a warring of wind and ocean, to convey any idea of which, the words tornado and simoon are trivial and ineffective? All in the immediate vicinity of the ship is the blackness of eternal night, and a chaos of foamless water; but, about a league on either side of us, may be seen, indistinctly and at intervals, stupendous ramparts of ice, towering away into the desolate sky, and looking like the walls of the universe.

As I imagined, the ship proves to be in a current— if that appellation can properly be given to a tide which, howling and shrieking by the white ice, thunders on to the southward with a velocity like the headlong dashing of a cataract.

To conceive the horror of my sensations is, I presume, utterly impossible; yet a curiosity to penetrate the mysteries of these awful regions, predominates even over my despair, and will reconcile me to the most hideous aspect of death. It is evident that we are hurrying onwards to some exciting knowledge— some never-to-be-imparted secret, whose attainment is destruction. Perhaps this current leads us to the southern pole itself. It must be confessed that a supposition apparently so wild has every probability in its favor.

THE CREW pace the deck with unquiet and tremulous step; but there is upon their countenances an expression more of the eagerness of hope than of the apathy of despair.

In the meantime the wind is still in our poop, and, as we carry a crowd of canvass, the ship is at times lifted bodily from out the sea! Oh, horror upon horror!— the ice opens suddenly to the right, and to the left, and we are whirling dizzily, in immense concentric circles, round and round the borders of a gigantic amphitheatre, the summit of whose walls is lost in the darkness and the distance. But little time will be left me to ponder upon my destiny! The circles rapidly grow small— we are plunging madly within the grasp of the whirlpool— and amid a roaring, and bellowing, and thundering of ocean and of tempest, the ship is quivering— oh God! and— *going down*!

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Note.—The “MS. Found in a Bottle,” was originally published in 1831; and it was not until many years afterwards that I became acquainted with the maps of Mercator, in which the ocean is represented as rushing, by four mouths, into the (northern) Polar Gulf, to be absorbed into the bowels of the earth; the Pole itself being represented by a black rock, towering to a prodigious height.

15: The Miracle Of The *'White Wolf'*

A. T. Quiller-Couch

1863-1944

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1. The Tale of Snorri Gamlason

IN the early summer of 1358, with the breaking up of the ice, there came to Brattahlid, in Greenland, a merchant-ship from Norway, with provisions for the Christian settlements on the coast. The master's name was Snorri Gamlason, and it happened that, as he sailed into Eric's Fiord and warped alongside the quay, word was brought to him that the Bishop of Garda had arrived that day in Brattahlid, to hold a confirmation. Whereupon this Snorri went ashore at once, and, getting audience of the Bishop, gave him a little book, with an account of how he had come by it.

The book was written in Danish, and Snorri could not understand a word of it, being indeed unable to read or to write; but he told this tale:

HIS SHIP, about three weeks before, had run into a calm, which lasted for three days and two nights, and with a northerly drift she fell away, little by little, towards a range of icebergs which stretched across and ahead of them in a solid chain. But about noon of the third day the colour of the sky warned him of a worse peril, and soon there came up from the westward a bank of fog, with snow in it, and a wind that increased until they began to hear the ice grinding and breaking up— as it seemed— all around them. Snorri steered at first for the southward, where had been open water; but by and by found that even here were drifting bergs. He therefore put his helm down and felt his way through the weather by short boards, and so, with the most of his men stationed forward to keep a look-out, fenced, as it were, with the danger, steering and tacking, until by God's grace the fog lifted, and the wind blew gently once more.

And now in the clear sunshine he saw that the storm had been more violent than any had supposed; since the wall of ice, which before had been solid, was now burst and riven in many places, and in particular to the eastward, where a broad path of water lay before them almost like a canal, but winding here and there. Towards this Snorri steered, and entered it with a fair breeze.

They had come, he said, but to the second bend of this waterway, when a seaman, who had climbed the mast on the chance of spying an outlet, called out in surprise that there was a ship ahead of them, but two miles off, and running down the channel before the wind, even as they. At first he found no credit for this tale, and even when those on deck spied her mast and yard overtopping a

gap between two bergs, they could only set it down for a mirage or cheat of eyesight in the clear weather.

But by and by, said Snorri, they could not doubt they were in chase of a ship, and, further, that they were fast overtaking her. For she steered with no method, and shook with every slant of wind, and anon went off before it like a helpless thing, until in the end she was fetched up by the jutting foot of a berg, and there shook, her one sail flapping with such noise that Snorri's men heard it, though yet a mile away.

They bore down upon her, and now took note that this sail of hers was ragged and frozen, so that it flapped like a jointed board, and that her rigging hung in all ways and untended, but stiff with rime; and drawing yet nearer, they saw an ice-line about her hull, so deep that her timbers seemed bitten through, and a great pile of frozen snow upon her poop, banked even above her tiller; but no helmsman, and no living soul upon her.

Then Snorri let lower his boat, and was rowed towards her; and, coming alongside, gave a hail, which was unanswered. But from the frozen pile by the tiller there stuck out a man's arm, ghastly to see. Snorri climbed on board by the waist, where her sides were low and a well reached aft from the mast to the poop. There was a cabin beneath the poop, and another and larger room under the deck forward, between the step of the mast and the bows. Into each of these he broke with axes and bars, and in the one found nothing but some cooking-pots and bedding; but in the other— that is, the after-cabin— the door, as he burst it in, almost fell against a young man seated by a bed. So life-like was he that Snorri called aloud in the doorway; but anon, peering into the gloomy place, he perceived the body to be frozen upright and stiff, and that on the bed lay another body, of a lady slight and young, and very fair. She, too, was dead and frozen; yet her cheeks, albeit white as the pillow against which they rested, had not lost their roundness. Snorri took note also of her dress and of the coverlet reaching from the bed's foot to her waist, that they were of silk for the most part, and richly embroidered, and her shift and the bed-sheets about her of fine linen. The man's dress was poor and coarse by comparison; yet he carried a sword, and was plainly of gentle nurture. The sword Snorri drew from its sheath and brought away; also he took a small box of jewels; but little else could he find on the ship, and no food of any kind.

His design was to leave the ship as he found it, carrying away only these tokens that his story, when he arrived at Brattahlid, might be received with faith; and to direct where the ship might be sought for. But as he quitted the cabin some of his men shouted from the deck, where they had discovered yet another body frozen in a drift. This was an old man seated with crossed legs and leaning against the mast, having an ink-horn slung about his neck, and almost

hidden by his grey beard, and on his knee a book, which he held with a thumb frozen between two pages.

This was the book which Snorri had brought to Brattahlid, and which the Bishop of Garda read aloud to him that same afternoon, translating as he went; the ink being fresh, the writing clerkly, and scarcely a page damaged by the weather. It bore no title; but the Bishop, who afterwards caused his secretary to take a copy of the tale, gave it a very long one, beginning: 'God's mercy shown in a Miracle upon certain castaways from Jutland, at the Feast of the Nativity of His Blessed Son, our Lord, in the year MCCCLVII, whereby He made dead trees to put forth in leaf, and comforted desperate men with summer in the midst of the Frozen Sea'... with much beside. But all this appears in the tale, which I will head only with the name of the writer.

2: Peter Kurt's Manuscript

NOW THAT our troubles are over, and I sit by the mast of our late unhappy ship, not knowing if I am on earth or in paradise, but full-fed and warm in all my limbs, yea pierced and glowing with the love of Almighty God, I am resolved to take pen and use my unfrozen ink in telling out of what misery His hand hath led us to this present Paradise.

I who write this am Peter Kurt, and I was the steward of my master Ebbe while he dwelt in his own castle of Nebbegaard. Poor he was then, and poor, I suppose, he is still in all but love and the favour of God; but in those days the love was but an old servant's (to wit, my own), and the favour of God not evident, but the poverty, on the other hand, bitterly apparent in all our housekeeping.

We lived alone, with a handful of servants— sometimes as few as three— in the castle which stands between the sandhills and the woods, as you sail into Veile Fiord. All these woods, as far away as to Rosenvold, had been the good knight his father's, but were lost to us before Ebbe's birth, and leased on pledge to the Knight Borre, of Egeskov, of whom I am to tell; and with them went all the crew of verderers, huntsmen, grooms, prickers, and ostringers that had kept Nebbegaard cheerful the year round. His mother had died at my master's birth, and the knight himself but two years after, so that the lad grew up in his poverty with no heritage but a few barren acres of sand, a tumbling house, and his father's sword, and small prospect of winning the broad lands out of Borre's clutches.

Nevertheless, under my tutoring he grew into a tall lad and a bold, a good swordsman, skilful at the tilt and in handling a boat; but not talkative or free in his address of strangers. The most of his days he spent in fishing, or in the making and mending of gear; and his evenings, after our lesson in sword-play, in

the reading of books (of which Nebbegaard had good store), and specially of the Icelanders, skalds and sagamen; also at times in the study of Latin with me, who had been bred to the priesthood, but left it for love of his father, my foster-brother, and now had no ambition of my own but to serve this lad and make him as good a man.

But there were days when he would have naught to do with fishing or with books; dark days when I forbore and left him to mope by the dunes, or in the great garden which had been his mother's, but was now a wilderness untended. And it was there that he first met with the lady Mette.

For as he walked there one morning, a little before noon, a swift shadow passed overhead between him and the sun, and almost before he could glance upward a body came dropping out of the sky and fell with a thud among the rose-bushes by the eastern wall. It was a heron, and after it swooped the bird which had murdered it; a white ger-falcon of the kind which breeds in Greenland, but a trained bird, as he knew by the sound of the bells on her legs as she plunged through the bushes. Ebbe ran at once to the corner where the birds struggled; but as he picked up the pelt he happened to glance towards the western wall, and in the gateway there stood a maiden with her hand on the bridle of a white palfrey. Her dog came running towards Ebbe as he stood. He beat it off, and carrying the pelt across to its mistress, waited a moment silently, cap in hand, while she called the great falcon back to its lure and leashed it to her wrist, which seemed all too slight for the weight.

Then, as Ebbe held out the dead heron, she shook her head and laughed. 'I am not sure, sir, that I have any right to it. We flushed it yonder between the wood and the sandhills, and, though I did not stay to consider, I think it must belong to the owner of the shore-land.'

'It is true,' said Ebbe, 'that I own the shore-land, and the forest, too, if law could enforce right. But for the bird you are welcome to it, and to as many more as you care to kill.'

Upon this she knit her brows. 'The forest? But I thought that the forest was my father's? My name,' said she, 'is Mette, and my father is the Knight Borre, of Egeskov.'

'I am Ebbe of Nebbegaard, and,' said he, perceiving the mirth in her eyes, 'you have heard the rhyme upon me:

'Ebbe from Nebbe, with all his men good,
Has neither food nor firing-wood.'

'I had not meant to be discourteous,' said she contritely; 'but tell me more of these forest-lands.'

'Nay,' answered Ebbe, 'hither comes riding your father with his men. Ask him for the story, and when he has told it you may know why I cannot make him or his daughter welcome at Nebbegaard.'

To this she made no reply, but with her hand on the palfrey's bridle went slowly back to meet her father, who reined up at a little distance and waited, offering Ebbe no salutation. Then a groom helped her to the saddle, and the company rode away towards Egeskov, leaving the lad with the dead bird in his hand.

For weeks after this meeting he moped more than usual. He had known before that Sir Borre would leave no son, and that the lands of Nebbegaard, if ever to be won back, must be wrested from a woman— and this had ever troubled him. It troubled me the less because I hoped there might be another way than force; and even if it should come to that, Sir Borre's past treachery had killed in me all kindness towards his house, male or female.

He and my old master and five other knights of the eastern coast had been heavily oppressed by the Lord of Trelde, Lars Trolle, who owned many ships and, though no better than a pirate, claimed the right of levying tribute along the shore that faces Funen, upon pretence of protecting it. After enduring many raids and paying toll under threat for years, these seven knights banded together to rid themselves of this robber; but word of their meetings being carried to Trolle, he came secretly one night to Nebbegaard with three ships' crews, broke down the doors, and finding the seven assembled in debate, made them prisoners and held them at ransom. My master, a poor man, could only purchase release by the help of his comrade, Borre, who found the ransom, but took in exchange the lands of Nebbegaard, to hold them until repaid out of their revenues; but of these he could never after be brought to give an account. We on our side had lost the power to enforce it, and behind his own strength he could now threaten us with Lars Trolle's, to whom he had been reconciled.

Therefore I felt no tenderness for Sir Borre's house, if by any means our estates could be recovered. But after this meeting with Sir Borre's daughter, I could see that my young lord went heavily troubled; and I began to think of other means than force.

It may have been six months later that word came to us of great stir and bustle at Egeskov. Sir Borre, being aged, and anxious to see his daughter married before he died, had proclaimed a Bride-show. Now the custom is, and the rule, that any suitor (so he be of gentle birth) may offer himself in these contests; nor will the parents begin to bargain until he has approved himself— a wise plan, since it lessens the disputing, which else might be endless. So when this news reached us I looked at my master, and he, perceiving what I would say, answered it.

'If Holgar will carry me,' said he, 'we will ride to Egeskov.'

This Holgar was a stout roan horse, foaled at Nebbegaard, but now well advanced in years, and the last of that red stock for which our stables had been famous.

'He will carry you thither,' said I; 'and, by God's grace, bring you home with a bride behind you.'

Upon this my master hung his head. 'Peter,' he said, 'do not think I attempt this because it is the easier way.'

'It comes easier than fighting with a woman,' I answered. 'But you will find it hard enow when the old man begins to haggle.'

I did not know then that the lad's heart was honestly given to this maid; but so it was, and had been from the moment when she stood before him in the gateway.

So to Egeskov we rode, and there found no less than forty suitors assembled, and some with a hundred servants in retinue. Sir Borre received us with no care to hide his scorn, though the hour had not come for putting it into words; and truly my master's arms were old-fashioned, and with the dents they had honourably taken when they cased his father, made a poor battered show, for all my scouring.

Nevertheless, I had no fear when his turn came to ride the ring. Three rides had each wooer under the lady Mette's eyes, and three rings Ebbe carried off and laid on the cushion before her. She stooped and passed about his neck the gold chain which she held for the prize; but I think they exchanged no looks. Only one other rider brought two rings, and this was a son of Lars Trolle, Olaf by name, a tall young knight, and well-favoured, but disdainful; whom I knew Sir Borre must favour if he could.

I could not see that the maiden favoured him above the rest, yet I kept a close eye upon this youth, and must own that in the jousting which followed he carried himself well. For this the most of the wooers had fresh horses, and I drew a long breath when, at the close of the third course, my master, with two others, remained in the lists. For it had been announced to us that the last courses should be ridden on the morrow. But now Sir Borre behaved very treacherously, for perceiving (as I am sure) that the horse Holgar was overwearied and panting, he gave word that the sport should not be stayed. More by grace of Heaven it was than by force of riding that Ebbe unhorsed his next man, a knight's son from Smalling; but in the last course, which he rode against Olaf of Trolle, who had stood a bye, his good honest beast came to the tilt-cloth with knees trembling, and at a touch rolled over, though between the two lances (I will swear) there was nothing to choose. I was quick to pick up my dear lad; but he would have none or my comfort, and limped away from the lists as one who had borne himself shamefully. Yes, and my own heart was hot as I led Holgar back to stable, without waiting to see the prize claimed by one who, though a fair fighter, had not won it without foul aid.

Having stalled Holgar I had much ado to find his master again, and endless work to persuade him to quit his sulks and join the other suitors in the hall that

night, when each presented his bride-gift. Even when I had won him over, he refused to take the coffer I placed in his hands, though it held his mother's jewels, few but precious. But entering with the last, as became his humble rank of esquire, he laid nothing at the lady's feet save his sword and the chain that she herself had given him.

'You bring little, Squire Ebbe,' said Knight Borre, from his seat beside his daughter.

'I bring what is most precious in the world to me,' said Ebbe.

'Your lance is broken, I believe?' said the old knight scornfully.

'My lance is not broken,' he answered; 'else you should have it to match your word.' And rising, without a look at Mette, whose eyes were downcast, he strode back to the door.

I had now given up hope, for the maid showed no sign of kindness, and the old man and the youth were like two dogs— the very sight of the one set the other growling. Yet— since to leave in a huff would have been discourteous— I prevailed on my master to bide over the morrow, and even to mount Holgar and ride forth to the hunt which was to close the Bride-show. He mounted, indeed, but kept apart and well behind Mette and her brisk group of wooers. For, apart from his lack of inclination, his horse was not yet recovered; and by and by, as the prickers started a deer, the hunt swept ahead of him and left him riding alone.

He had a mind to turn aside and ride straight back to Nebbegaard, whither he had sent me on to announce him (and dismally enough I obeyed), when at the end of a green glade he spied Mette returning alone on her white palfrey.

'For I am tired of this hunting,' she told him, as she came near. 'And you? Does it weary you also, that you lag so far behind?'

'It would never weary me,' he answered; 'but I have a weary horse.'

'Then let us exchange,' said she. 'Though mine is but a palfrey, it would carry you better. Your roan betrayed you yesterday, and it is better to borrow than to miss excelling.'

'My house,' answered Ebbe, still sulkily, 'has had enough borrowing of Egeskov; and my horse may be valueless, but he is one of the few things dear to me, and I must keep him.'

'Truly then,' said she, 'your words were naught, last night, when you professed to offer me the gifts most precious to you in the world.'

And before he could reply to this, she had pricked on and was lost in the woodland.

Ebbe sat for a while as she left him, considering, at the crossing of two glades. Then he twitched Holgar's rein and turned back towards Nebbegaard. But at the edge of the wood, spying a shepherd seated below in the plain by his flock, he rode down to the man, and called to him and said:

'Go this evening to Egeskov and greet the lady Mette, and say to her that Ebbe of Nebbegaard could not barter his good horse, the last of his father's stable. But that she may know he was honest in offering her the thing most precious to him, tell her further what thou hast seen.'

So saying, he alighted off Holgar, and, smoothing his neck, whispered a word in his ear. And the old horse turned his muzzle and rubbed it against his master's left palm, whose right gripped a dagger and drove it straight for the heart. This was the end of the roan stock of Nebbegaard.

My master Ebbe reached home that night with the mire thick on his boots. Having fed him, I went to the stables, and finding no Holgar made sure that he had killed the poor beast in wrath for his discomfiture at the tilt. The true reason he gave me many days after. I misjudged him, judging him by his father's temper.

On the morrow of the Bride-show the suitors took their leave of Egeskov, under promise to return again at the month's end and hear how the lady Mette had chosen. So they went their ways, none doubting that the fortunate one would be Olaf of Trelde; and, for me, I blamed myself that we had ever gone to Egeskov.

But on the third morning after the Bride-show I changed this advice very suddenly; for going at six of the morning to unlock our postern gate, as my custom was, I found a tall black stallion tethered there and left without a keeper. His harness was of red leather, and each broad crimson rein bore certain words embroidered: on the one, 'A Straight Quarrel is Soonest Mended'; on the other, 'Who Will Dare Learns Swiftness.'

Little time I lost in calling my master to admire, and having read what was written, he looked in my eyes and said: 'I go back to Egeskov.'

'That is well done,' said I; 'may the Almighty God prosper it!'

'But,' said he doubtfully, 'if I determine on a strange thing, will you help me, Peter? I may need a dozen men; men without wives to miss them.'

'I can yet find a dozen such along the fiord,' I answered.

'And we go on a long journey, perhaps never to return to Nebbegaard.'

'Dear master,' said I, 'what matter where my old bones lie after they have done serving you?' He kissed me and rode away to Egeskov.

'I thought that the Squire of Nebbe had done with us,' Sir Borre began to sneer, when Ebbe found audience. 'But the Bride-show is over, my man, and I give not my answer for a month yet.'

'Your word is long to pledge, and longer to redeem,' said Ebbe. 'I know that, were I to wait a twelve-month, you would not of free will give me Mette.'

'Ah, you know that, do you? Well, then, you are right, Master Lackland, and the greater your impudence in hoping to wile from me through my daughter what you could not take by force.'

Ebbe replied: 'I was prepared to find it difficult, but let that pass. As touching my lack of land, I have Nebbegaard left; a poor estate and barren, yet I think you would be glad of it, to add to the lands of which you robbed us.'

'Well,' said Borre, 'I would give a certain price for it, but not my daughter, nor anything near so precious to me.'

'Give me one long ship,' said Ebbe; 'the swiftest of your seven which ride in the strait between Egeskov and Stryb. You shall take Nebbegaard for her, since I am weary of living at home and care little to live at all without Mette.'

Borre's eyes shone with greed. 'I commend you,' said he; 'for a stout lad there is nothing like risking his life to win a fortune. Give me the deeds belonging to Nebbegaard, and you shall have my ship *Gold Mary*.'

'By your leave,' said Ebbe, 'I have spent some time in watching your ships upon the fiord; and the ship in my mind was the *White Wolf*.'

Sir Borre laughed to find himself outwitted, for the *White Wolf* could outsail all his fleet. But in any case he had the better of the bargain and could afford to show some good-humour. Moreover, though he knew not that Mette had any tenderness for this youth, his spirits rose at the prospect of getting him out of the way.

So the bargain was struck, and as Nebbe rode homewards to his castle for the last time, he met the shepherd who had taken his former message. The man was waiting for him, and (as you guess) by Mette's orders.

'Tell the lady Mette,' said Ebbe, 'that I have sold Nebbegaard for the *White Wolf*, and that two nights from now my men will be aboard of her; also that I sup with her father that evening before the boat takes me off from the Bent Ness.'

So it was that two nights later Ebbe supped at Egeskov, and was kept drinking by the old knight for an hour maybe after the lady Mette had risen and left the hall for her own chamber.

And at the end, after the last speeding-cup, needs must Sir Borre (who had grown friendly beyond all belief) see him to the gate and stand there bare-headed among his torch-bearers while my master mounted the black stallion that was to bear him to Bent Ness, three miles away, where I waited with the boat.

But as Ebbe shook his rein, and moved out of the torchlight, came the damsel Mette stealing out of the shadow upon the far side of the house. He reached down a hand, and she took it, and sprang up behind him.

'For this bout, Sir Borre, I came with a fresh horse!' called my master blithely; and so, striking spur, galloped off into the dark.

Little chance had Sir Borre to overtake them. The stallion was swift, our boat waiting in the lee of the Ness, the wind southerly and fresh, the *White Wolf* ready for sea, with sail hoisted and but one small anchor to get on board or cut

away if need were. But there was no need. Before the men of Egeskov reached the Ness and found there the black stallion roaming, its riders were sailing out of the Strait with a merry breeze. So began our voyage.

My master was minded to sail for Norway and take service under the king. But first, coming to the island of Laesö, he must put ashore and seek a priest, by whom he and the lady Mette were safely made man and wife. Two days he spent at the island, and then, with fresh store of provisions, we headed northward again.

It was past Skagen that our troubles began, with a furious wind from the north-east against which there was no contending, so that we ran from it and were driven for two days and a night into the wide sea. Even when it lessened, the wind held in the east; and we, who could handle the ship, but knew little of reckoning, crept northward again in the hope to sight the coast of Norway. For two days we held on at this, lying close by the wind, and in good spirits, although our progress was not much; but on the third blew another gale— this time from the south-east— and for a week gale followed gale, and we went in deadly peril, yet never losing hope. The worst was the darkness, for the year was now drawing towards Yule, and as we pressed farther north we lost almost all sight of the sun.

At length, with the darkness and the bitter cold and our stores running low, we resolved to let the wind take us with what swiftness it might to whatsoever land it listed; and so ran westward, with darkness closing upon us, and famine and a great despair.

But the lady Mette did not lose heart; and the worst of all (our failing cupboard) we kept from her, so that she never lacked for plenty. Truly her cheerfulness paid us back, and her love for my master, the like of which I had not seen in this world; no, nor dreamed of. Hand in hand this pair would sit, watching the ice which was our prison and the great North Lights, she close against Ebbe's side for warmth, and (I believe) as happy as a bird; he trembling for the end. The worst was to see her at table, pressing food to his mouth and wondering at his little hunger; while his whole body cried out for the meat, only it could not be spared.

Though she must know soon, none of us had the bowels to tell her; and not out of pity alone, but because with her must die out the last spark by which we warmed ourselves.

But there came a morning— I write it as of a time long ago, and yet it was but yesterday, praise be unto God!— there came a morning when I awoke and found that two of our men had died in the night, of frost and famine. They must be hidden before my mistress discovered aught; and so before her hour of waking we weighted and dropped the bodies overside into deep water; for the ice had not yet wholly closed about us. Now as I stooped, I suppose that my legs

gave way beneath me. At any rate, I fell; and in falling struck my head against the bulwarks, and opened my eyes in that unending dusk to find the lady Mette stooping over me.

Then somehow I was aware that she had called for wine to force down my throat, and had been told that there was no wine; and also that with this answer had come to her the knowledge, full and sudden, of our case. Better had we done to trust her than to hide it all this while: for she turned to Ebbe, who stood at her shoulder, and 'Is not this the feast of Yule?' she asked. My master bent his head, but without answering.

'Ah!' she cried to him. 'Now I know what I have longed to know, that your love is less than mine, for you can love yet be doubtful of miracles; while to me, now that I have loved, no miracle can be aught but small!' She bowed herself over me. 'Art dying, old friend? Look up and learn that God, being Love, deserts not lovers.'

Then she stooped and gathered, as I thought, a handful of snow from the deck; but lo! when she pressed it to my lips, and I tasted, it was heavenly manna.

And looking up past her face I saw the ribbons of the North Lights fade in a great and wide sunlight, bathing the deck and my frozen limbs. Nor did they feel it only, but on the wind came the noise of bergs rending, springs breaking, birds singing, many and curious. And with that, as I am a sinful man, I gazed up into green leaves; for either we had sailed into Paradise or the timbers of the *White Wolf* were swelling with sap and pushing forth bough upon bough. Yea, and there were roses at the mast's foot, and my fingers, as I stretched them, dabbled in mosses. While I lay there, breathing softly, as one who dreams and fears to awake, I heard her voice talking among the noises of birds and brooks, and by the scene it seemed to be in a garden; but whether it spake to me or to Ebbe I knew not, nor cared. 'The Lord is my Shepherd, and guides me,' it said, 'wherefore I lack nothing. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: He leadeth me by comfortable streams: He reviveth my soul. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no harm: Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me.' But, a little after, I knew that the voice spake to my master, for it said: 'Let us go forth into the field, O beloved: let us lodge in the villages: let us get up betimes to the vineyard and see if the vine have budded, if its blossom be open, the pomegranates in flower. Even there will I give thee my love.' Then looking again I saw that the two had gone from me and left me alone.

But, blessed be God, they took not away the vision, and now I know certainly that it is no cheat. For here sit I, dipping my pen into the unfrozen ink, and, when a word will not come, looking up into the broad branches and listening to the birds till I forget my story. It is long since they left me; but I am full fed, and

the ship floats pleasantly. After so much misery I am as one rocked on the bosom of God; and the pine resin has a pleasant smell.

—

THE COURTSHIP of Ebbe, the poor esquire of Nebbegaard, and the maiden Mette is a traditional tale of West Jutland. A version of it was Englished by Thorpe from Carit Etlar's Eventyr og Folkesagen fra Jylland*: but this, while it tells of Ebbe's adventures at the 'Bride-show,' and afterwards at the hunting-party, contains no account of the lovers' escape and voyage, or of the miracle which brought them comfort at the last. Indeed, Master Kurt contradicts the common tale in many ways, but above all in his ending, wherein (although he narrates a miracle) I find him worthy of belief.*

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16: Picture Stuff

Raoul F. Whitfield

1896-1945

Blue Book magazine, March 1928

RUSS HEALY'S dislike for camera-men and cameras dated from those air-seconds, six months ago, during which he had fumbled for the rip-cord of his Irving seat-pack 'chute, while tumbling down from the wreckage of the DeHaviland he had been piloting. That D.H. had been airworthy until the pilot of the camera-ship had crashed her tail assembly, five thousand feet above the earth. With all the air in the sky he had banked into the D.H., just after his camera-man had shot Al Rodger's jump from a wing of Healy's ship. And right then the veteran had com menced to dislike camera-ship pilots. The fact that all of them had got down on 'chutes didn't make any difference. The fact that Russ hadn't been flying his pet Jenny, the "Old Lady," didn't help much. Russ was off the shoot stuff.

"No more for me!" he'd say. "The pilots these camera boys get to fly 'em are crazy. And the crank-boys are crazier. When I see a movie ship in the air— I nose down and land. Let 'em have the sky— that's me!"

The outfit just grinned. Russ Healy is a long, lanky veteran. Two thousand air hours, with a bit of every type of flying thrown in— he knows his stuff. There had been a time when he'd almost gone "film-flying" himself. But no more. When a fellow's 'chute opens only a hundred feet off the ground—he does some thinking.

Bob Brooks, boss of the Brooks' Flying Circus, humored Russ. He let him handle the jump-off ship, and the upper plane in the air-transfer stuff. But he kept him away when they were cranking something. That is, he did until we hit Bakersfield. Then things went bad. They go like that in a flying outfit. Quiet for a few months— and then everything pops the wrong way.

That was what happened at Bakersfield. Sid Lunn blew a front left tire in a forced landing, and when we pulled him out of the wreckage he had a busted leg. Charlie Ryan taxied into a couple of carelessly-deposited fuel cans and the plane nosed over. He came out with head cuts that would stop his flying for a week. And to top the three-day session off, Mel Duncan went up in a Laco Special, and the engine cut out, went dead. It was a night flight, and Mel was too far from the field to glide in. He cut loose a flare which didn't light. So Mel stepped over the side and let the plane go. The 'chute let him down hard and gave him a nasty drag. They flivvered him into the Bakersfield hospital with a couple of broken ribs and a fractured left wrist.

ON THE FOURTH DAY Russ and myself were sitting on a couple of empty oil cans and smoking pills. We were wondering who'd get it next, but we kept that guesswork to ourselves. It was a pretty quiet session until I happened to look up and spot Bob Brooks coming along with something decidedly nice.

"Hey!" I muttered. "Bob's wife is gettin' thin, Russ."

But it wasn't Bob's wife. It was a knickered lady with blonde hair and a pretty face. We saw that as they got up close; and we saw, also, that she carried a helmet and goggles in her left hand.

Russ groaned. "Here comes *more* trouble," he stated grimly. "Bob's had an idea."

They came up and we got off the oil cans. Brooks introduced the lady. Her name was Joan West, and she was better looking the closer you got to her, which isn't the usual thing. She gave us a smile that was one hundred per cent perfect. Bob started talking about the weather, about the latest flight across the Atlantic— about everything but what he wanted to tell us. Finally he got around to it.

"Miss West," he said cheerfully, "is going to work with us tomorrow."

I stiffened. Russ groaned. There was a little silence.

"That'll be great," I managed after a few seconds. "Fine."

RUSS managed something that was close to a smile. But he didn't say anything. Bob Brooks nodded his head.

"It ought to be good," he stated quietly. "Miss West is making a plane transfer— without the usual rope ladder. Wing to wing."

I regarded the girl with considerable admiration. There aren't many boys or girls doing it that way. A rope ladder dangling from the plane above means clearance. Either ship can hit a bump— drop or rise— and have air. But in order to go from plane to plane *without* a rope ladder, that means one wing-tip must come within four or five feet of the other. It's a tough way of shifting ships.

Russ grunted. "First time you've done it that way, Miss West?" he asked grimly.

The girl laughed.

"It'll be the second," she said slowly. "I tried it one other time, but the ships—"

"Yeah— it'll be a good one," Bob cut in sort of loudly, and I figured right away that he was trying to cover something up. But so did Russ Healy.

"*What* happened the other time?" he asked.

The girl looked at Bob, then at me. She spoke in a cheerful tone.

"The ships got tangled up," she stated. "But the pilots weren't as expert, I'm sure, as you men."

I grinned. Bob Brooks grinned. Russ Healy nodded his head slowly.

"Maybe not," he agreed, but his tone wasn't exactly convincing.

"We'll work it this way—" Bob said slowly. "Mac, here— he'll fly Miss West up in a D.H. She'll do some wing work, and then you get off in the Old Lady, Russ. She'll work off the left wing. You get your right wing just over it. We'll rig on a wood loop-grip for her, and she'll swing off and climb up. A few more stunts on the upper surface— then you can come down."

"If not sooner," Russ muttered. "Well, you're the boss."

Bob nodded. "Now, the camera-ship'll be winging as close in as—"

Russ let out a roar. The girl looked startled. Bob stopped talking.

"Nothing doing!" Russ snapped grimly. "What do you mean, camera-ship?"

Bob spoke sharply. "I wouldn't ask you to do it, Russ— only we've got three pilots on the injured list and—"

"And you want a couple more fixed the same way!" Russ cut in. "Nothing doing!"

The girl laughed again. Only this time her laugh wasn't so pleasant.

"We'll all have 'chutes," she said icily. "I wouldn't worry, Mr. Healy."

Russ was getting sort of white around the lips. I could see that he was thinking back, remembering.

"Nothing doing!" he muttered for the third time. "If you keep the camera-ship out of the air, boss—"

"We're doing it *for* them!" Bob cut in. "The *National News* people want something snappy. We're in this business to make money— and this means we'll make some. You've got to fly the high plane, Russ."

I knew right away that Brooks had made a mistake. Russ' eyes and his words got cold.

"There's only one thing I've *got* to do," he stated grimly. "And I'll do that in a natural way if I don't fall for this picture stuff."

The girl had a derisive expression.

"Maybe it's just as well," she said slowly. "If that wreck over there is the one he was going to fly— I doubt if it could get enough altitude for me to pull the stunt!"

I held my breath. Russ Healy was rigid; his eyes narrowed to little slits. If a man had made that statement about the Old Lady, there would have been plenty of action.

The Old Lady was an ancient Jenny. She was battered and patched, oil-stained and weather-beaten. But Russ had worked over the old Hall-Scott engine. He'd redoped the wings and fuselage fabric again and again. He'd kept that Jenny in the air year after year— and he loved her. She'd let him down once or twice, but she'd always done it decently, given him a fair break. When any human slammed the Old Lady—

"Boss," Russ' voice was grim but steady, "I don't like picture stuff. You know that. But there's something else I don't like, too. I'll fly the Old Lady tomorrow!" He looked the girl squarely in the eyes.

"I'll let you climb up on one of the Old Lady's wings tomorrow," he said grimly. "And when you get aboard, and get through playing around on the wing— you just tuck yourself in the rear cockpit. Lady— won't we have fun!"

Then, abruptly, Russ turned his back on us and walked away. I stared at Bob, and he stared at me. Joan West shrugged her slender shoulders, and laughed. It was supposed to be sort of a gay laugh— but somehow it didn't seem to register that way. Bob spoke.

"He'll be all right by tomorrow, Miss West. Russ is all right. A camera-ship tangled with him six months ago— and he's off them. But he'll be all right. You stirred him up."

There was plenty of truth in that statement. The girl sure had stirred Russ up!

"But what did he mean? What will he do, after I make the transfer?"

Her voice trembled slightly. Brooks was trying to think of a good answer, and I couldn't help getting in a little dig.

"It'll be all right," I said slowly. "We'll all have 'chutes, won't we?"

THE GIRL wasn't around in the evening, and just before dark, when the air was pretty calm, Russ and I took a couple of ships up and played around a bit. Russ had the Old Lady and he had her within three feet of my left wing-tip several times. When we came down Bob grinned at us.

"It'll go fine!" he stated enthusiastically. "She could have reached up and made the transfer a half dozen times— just now."

Russ nodded. "Sure she could," he returned grimly. "But there wasn't any camera-ship in the air."

Bob eyed Russ narrowly. "Look here," he said slowly. "This little girl's all right, Russ. The camera people picked her for the stunt— she didn't pick them. I don't like the way you talked to her today."

Russ swore softly. "How about the way she talked to *me*?" he asked. "She thinks the Old Lady is an air wreck. And I aim to show her that—"

"Oh, that— you don't worry me any there," Bob cut in. "That lady has looped a ship sixty-two times in succession. She jumped twelve times. You can't scare her any. I'm not bothering about that any. But she's a lady and—"

"So's the Jenny!" Russ interrupted grimly. "She's no wreck, that plane. Lady West said she doubted if that Jenny could get altitude. Well, I hope she dresses warm tomorrow."

I stared at Russ. That was the bunk. The ceiling of the Old Lady wasn't so much that either Russ or the girl would be apt to catch even a mild cold, and he knew it. So did Bob Brooks. He shook his head slowly.

"It's a nice job, this transfer," he said slowly. "And we need the coin. Don't muss it up, either of you fellows."

"Give the same advice to the camera-ship pilot," Russ muttered. "He'll need it most."

Bob had started away, but he turned around, a grin on his face.

"Not *that* boy," he said quietly. "He's the guy who gave Miss West that little sparkler she's wearing on a certain finger."

I chuckled. Russ Healy groaned.

"Makes it worse yet!" he stated. "He'll be nervous when she starts to grab for the loop on the Old Lady's wing-tip. Well, maybe she'll get sick before tomorrow, or something."

I grinned. "That queers your game, Russ," I stated as Bob walked away. "If you pull anything funny after the girl gets aboard the Old Lady— that camera-ship pilot will be waiting for you to come down."

Russ Healy's eyes were narrowed. He had a peculiar expression on his lean, browned face.

"Mac," he said slowly, "they can say things about me—but not about that Jenny. The Old Lady is all right. When they talk like that girl talked— I've got to show them they're wrong. Tomorrow— I'm showing her."

I didn't like his tone. It was a little too grim. "How?" I asked curiously.

But Russ just lighted another pill and glanced up toward the darkening sky.

"Maybe we'll get a break, Mac," he returned after a little silence. "*Maybe* the picture stuff will go all right. And if it does— well, you'll see how a certain clever little lady learns something about the Jenny."

"Remember, Russ,"—my voice was almost persuasive,—"she's a woman."

Russ sighed heavily. But when he spoke his tone was hard.

"Ain't it the truth!" he stated.

IT WAS about ten minutes of four, and there was a pretty fair crowd on the field which we were using for the outfit. The Old Lady was on the deadline, and I had the DeHaviland that I was going to pilot alongside of her. The camera-ship had flown up from Los Angeles, and was a racily-lined two-seater. She was resting on the other side of the battered Jenny.

Bob Brooks came along the deadline with the girl on one side and a short, good-looking chap on the other. As they neared the three ships Bob gestured toward them. Russ was fooling around with his pack-'chute and watching the three at the same time. So was I.

The good-looking bird halted, stared at the battered Jenny. I could see that he was taking in her patches, the slight sag of her under-carriage, the lack of varnish on her struts. With the D.H. and the camera-ship for contrast, the Old Lady looked more of a wreck than ever.

Russ Healy gave his pack-'chute a final pat, and moved toward the group. I tagged along. There was a broad grin on the short fellow's face as we came up.

"That the one you go up to, Joan?" he asked, and she nodded her head.

He groaned loudly. "When you get inside don't snap the safety-belt," he advised in a grim tone. "It'll be easier for you to go over the side when she starts to break up under the added weight of your one hundred and fifteen pounds."

The girl laughed. It was a musical laugh, but I could see it didn't sound that way to Russ Healy. He glared at the good-looking chap.

"Meet Steve Lott, Russ." It was Bob Brooks who spoke. "He's piloting the shoot-ship."

Russ nodded. But he didn't raise his right hand from his side. Lott kept right on grinning.

"If we're all set— let's go up and get it over with," Russ said slowly. "I don't like the job, anyway."

Lott grunted. "Shouldn't think you would," he agreed. "Not flying that piece of junk!"

I grabbed Russ by the right arm, and hung on. But the funny part of it was that he just sort of smiled. He stared at Lott, and then at the girl. When he spoke his words were addressed to her.

"I'm kind of sorry for you," he said slowly. "You might have picked out a *real* man."

Lott glared at Russ, and Bob Brooks started to talk fast and give final instructions. He wanted the stuff pulled at four thousand, so that the camera would get some of the earth detail in. And he wanted every one to take their time.

I saw that the girl was watching Russ a lot, and I felt kind of sorry for her. It looked to me as if she were a little scared. So just before she climbed into the rear cockpit of my D.H., I said a few words to her.

"Don't let Russ bother you," I told her. "He was just talking yesterday. And he's a flying fool."

She stiffened. Her chin came up a bit.

"I'm not afraid of him," she stated in a hard tone. "It's the wreck he's flying that worries me."

I started to tell her that the Old Lady was all right, and just then Russ started to rev her up. She had a roar like two ordinary planes, and there wasn't much use getting hoarse yelling at Miss West. Anyway, it was ten to one that she wouldn't be convinced.

She had her pack-'chute on, and adjusted her helmet. She wore no goggles. As she climbed into the rear cockpit of the DeHaviland, the camera-plane took off. I revved up the D.H.'s engine, and Russ taxied the Old Lady out. He waved a hand, and I waved back.

I jerked my head. Miss West had an expression of intense dislike on her fair face; it was directed toward the taxiing Jenny. I smiled grimly, muttered a sort of half-prayer— and advanced the throttle a few notches. The D.H. rolled out, and I gave her left rudder to get her nosed into the wind. Then I opened her up— and took off....

We were at four thousand— the three planes. I had the D.H. throttled down a bit, flying into the wind. We were approaching an airspot almost directly over the circus outfit's field. The camera-plane was off to the right, but not very far off. It had about twenty-five feet more altitude, and I could see the head and shoulders of the man who was making the shoot. He was standing in the rear cockpit, and his camera was mounted on a movable bracket.

I jerked my head, banked a bit— then straightened the D.H. out. The Old Lady was coming up from behind. Russ Healy had her within a half mile of the D.H. I twisted around, nodded my head to the girl.

"All right!" I snapped. "Let's go!"

She understood, of course, though it was doubtful if she heard my words above the roar of the engine's exhausts. The next thing I knew, she was working her way out along the lower wing surface. She moved along as if she were going somewhere— and without the slightest false effort. I grinned. The weaker sex? It was almost funny— that line!

The wind zipped her tight-fitting blouse close about her. She grasped first one strut, then the next. Out near the edge of the wing-tip, she suddenly threw back her head and laughed, waving a hand. I grinned back at her. As she reached up toward the loop on the upper surface I thought my ears picked up the blending of another engine roar with mine. Then the girl was swinging up—had vanished from sight.

I glanced to the right, saw that the camera-man in the rear cockpit of the third plane had started to crank. The D.H. was handling nicely; there was pretty fair air at four thousand.

My job was to keep the D.H. on even keel while the girl did her stuff on the upper wing, and it wasn't such a tough job. From time to time I glanced at the camera-man, cranking away. I could see Lott's helmeted head. The pilot of the third ship had her in pretty close; I guessed that Russ Healy was almost above me now— with the Old Lady.

Then, glancing to the left, I saw the battered Jenny. Russ waved a hand; the ship banked back over the D.H. I kept the nose of the plane lined up on the

horizon, corrected for even the slightest bump with the ailerons. We were just passing over the outfit's field— when it happened.

I felt the D.H. jerk madly around— to the right! There was a ripping, tearing sound. The joy-stick was twisted from my grip. The right wing surface warped before my eyes!

AS I CUT THE THROTTLE I realized what had happened. A wing of Healy's ship had tangled with mine. And the D.H. was finished— I knew that in one flashing second. And I knew, as my hands fumbled with the safety-belt, that the ships had freed themselves again.

I tried to hold the nose of the D.H. up— it wouldn't come up. As we went slowly into the first turns of a spin— a plane flashed downward, off to the right. No— *two* planes!

The Old Lady was going down tangled with the camera-plane! There had been a triple crash!

And even as I saw the two ships going down, in a slow spin and almost flatly— my eyes picked up the form of the girl. She was lying flat on the upper surface of the Old Lady's right wing. Lying motionlessly! She had made the transfer— and then had come the triple crash.

I STOOD UP in the cockpit, swung a leg over the side to the left, lower wing. We were spinning to the right, and I wanted to get clear on the outside. My right hand gripped the stick, trying to keep the D.H. from going into a tight spin, while my left groped for the dangling ring of the 'chute rip-cord.

It found it, and I hooked a finger through the ring. Then I let go of the stick, got my other leg out of the cockpit—let myself be wind-battered away from the ship.

I counted five— jerked the ring. There was the crackling sound of the pilot-'chute, as it snapped open— and almost immediately the greater crackling of the bigger spread of silk. The harness tightened about my body. My head was jerked upward. Then I was drifting, shaking off the effects of that plunge— and staring beyond the falling arc of my wing-warped plane.

The camera-ship and the Old Lady were above me. My drop had been faster than their slow-spinning fall. And they were close— too close for comfort. I could see things clearly. The girl was out of sight; I couldn't see above the upper wings of the Jenny. Even as I stared, two objects shot downward from the camera-ship. Lott and the camera-man were getting clear!

The camera-ship and the Old Lady were above me— too close for comfort. The girl was out of sight.

Their 'chutes functioned perfectly. They drifted down, within twenty feet of each other. I stared at the crashed, tangled planes. Why hadn't the girl jumped? And what was the matter with Russ Healy?

It hadn't been a wide-open crash. And I couldn't tell whose fault it had been. But I could guess— the nose of the camera-ship seemed jammed into the rear cockpit of the Jenny; her left wing slanted up over the tail-assembly of the Old Lady. It looked as if the camera-ship had banked to the left— and crashed the Jenny.

"Get clear!" I muttered hoarsely. "Get clear— you two!"

The tangled planes were spinning faster now. They were dropping below my drift-level, within fifty yards of me. I got a glimpse of Russ Healy's head. It moved. He wasn't out. I screamed at him.

"Get clear, Russ!"

The two ships were nosing down now, not dropping flatly. I could hear the wire scream. The prop of the camera-plane was splintered— but the Old Lady's seemed to be turning, throttled down to a low-revolution speed.

Then, with the ships below me, I saw the girl again. As I stared at her form, lying across the wing surface, I saw that her left arm was hooked through the loop placed there for stunting purposes. And I saw her move, raise her head slightly.

There was a crash— my D.H. had dug in. I looked down, saw the ship burst into flames. The field was less than a thousand feet below, the clipped grass seemed to be rising up at a tremendous speed. I stared down, kicking around in the 'chute harness, at the tangled ships again.

And I saw why the girl hadn't jumped. Dangling from her back, hanging over the trailing edge of the upper wing surface, was her 'chute pack. Even as I watched her right hand groped toward the harness, tried to find that rip-cord ring.

"Too late now!" I groaned. "Less than eight hundred feet—"

And then, suddenly, it happened. Once before I'd seen the same thing happen. And that had been in France. There was a jerking of the two ships— they drifted apart! The spin had flung them apart!

The camera-plane went instantly into a side-slip. I kicked around furiously, tried to watch the Old Lady. She nosed down, her left wing dropping under the weight of the girl. Then her nose came up, just as I thought she was going into a final spin— her left wing came up, too. I heard the roar of her exhausts. The Old Lady was trying to fly— was trying to fly out of it!

There was a second crash as the camera-plane struck the field. I flexed my legs— seventeen feet a second was my drop-speed. The force of a ten-foot drop would be my landing jolt. The earth came up— I struck heavily, rolled over once, crawled out from beneath the collapsing silk spread.

It took me ten seconds to get out from the harness. And as I freed myself— the Old Lady came in!

She was headed into the wind. Her fuselage, near the rear cockpit, was battered. The fabric was in shreds. But she was flying. And as her exhaust roar died, and her wheels and tail-skid touched the clipped grass, I raised my eyes. Still clinging to the wood loop, on the upper surface of the right wing, was the girl. The Old Lady had brought her down!

WE WERE grouped around Miss West. She was pale, and she spoke in a voice that was slightly shaken. But she spoke bravely. She was that kind.

"The crash came just as I lifted myself up over the wing surface of the Jenny. It nearly knocked me loose— twisted me around. I hung on, though— pulled myself up. But I ripped the 'chute pack loose from part of its harness. I wanted to get clear— couldn't find the rip-ring. So I lay there— and waited. You know the rest."

Bob Brooks nodded his head. Steve Lott said excitedly:

"Lord, it was close! I wanted to get in, get a perfect shot for the camera. We hit a bump— and I tried to zoom. But we crashed before she nosed up. All three ships got it. We'll stand the loss, of course— but—"

He stopped. He was too shaken to go on. The girl's eyes were on Russ Healy, who was frowning.

"I'm sorry!" she said simply. "No use saying what I think— you *know*. Man— that battered crate is—" She stopped, groped for a word, found it—"wonderful! Can she fly? I'm here— to tell you *she can*!"

RUSS SMILED, but he didn't say much. Later, while he was patching up the fuselage of the Old Lady, I caught him alone. It had been a tight jam for all of us. Two planes gone—and three of us using 'chutes. No pictures, of course. All smashed— all that had been taken. But if it hadn't been for Russ— and the Old Lady— Well, Joan West wouldn't laugh *that* way again at a battered plane.

I told Russ that, and then I asked a question. It had been worrying me a bit.

"Supposing things had gone right, Russ— what were you figuring on doing with the girl? How were you going to prove—"

Russ Healy grinned. "Mac," he said slowly, "I wasn't going to do a thing. What in hell *could* I do? That kid had nerve."

I chuckled. Russ Healy throwing a bluff! It was almost funny.

"She had nerve," he repeated grimly, "and believe me, Mac, that's what you've got to have— when it comes to picture stuff!"

———————

17: The Outcasts of Diamond Flat

Beatrice Grimshaw

1870-1953

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FOUR thousand feet aloft in the Queensland ranges, at Ramona, sun shone, day in, day out, through piny she-oaks and eucalyptus. The air had a crystalline quality, as if small diamonds had been broken and sprinkled through it. From the crests of the deep-forested ranges beyond, came breath of winds austere and pure.

In Ramona the one clean sandy street was populated by three horses, a cow or two, a dog, a loaded pack-mule tied to the hitching-rail of the hotel, and a man from "out back,"— as the interior was termed,— going up the steps by the rail.

Of course there were the "'cockatoos," but they did not count. They sat on the narrow bench that ran from front door to side door of the hotel, and even a casual passer-by could not have missed the resemblance that had caused a town wit to name these old-age pensioners after Queensland's commonest bird.

On their perch they dreamed and chattered, backs humped and white crests ruffling in the wind. Like cockatoos, they woke up and cackled, when anything of interest occurred; like cockatoos, they were funny, testy, a trifle pitiful. The bank manager of Ramona looked out at them from his window, and superiorly smiled. The fat young hotel proprietor told his barmaid that they were poor devils, and never had the price of a drink between pay-days. The butcher, hacking beef that was almost a drug in the market, reflected that he could spare them a steak or two; it would do some of them good.

None of them knew, or remembered if they did know, that among the row of pensioners living on Australia's grudged bounty were two former hotel proprietors, one bank cashier, who ought to have been a manager, a grocer, and a cattleman who had done more butchering than the butcher himself. They were all Ramona men; and they were— though no one seemed to know it— a row of beacons set upon a reef.

The wrecked buildings of half Ramona had been sunk upon that reef; the graveyard on the hill was full of its victims. And the name of it was Tin— placer tin.

If Ramona was dreamy, out of the world; if the sound of a motor horn was seldom heard there, and the shriek of a train whistle but once in twenty-four hours, nevertheless it seemed, in comparison with Diamond Flat, noisy, hot and fussy.

Diamond Flat was ten miles out. There, there was nothing at all but the she-oaks and the gums, and the grasses wimpling in the wind, and the small creek that leisurely ran across the flat.

You could stand beneath the balancing pale shadows, look far down to the valley of the Garmoyle River, and up through air like crystal, across the tumbling ranges, to the farthest vanishing peak of fairy blue, and see no creature but yourself: hear nothing but the immemorial wind-sounds in the grasses, and the tiny tattle of the creek. There was no one to blister you with the cruel curiosity of little country towns. There was no one to ask you what you were doing, and why. Utterly, you owned yourself.

A shaft in progress, and several abandoned, each with its heap of earth beside it, marked out the flat as metalliferous. One of the many small tin-bearing areas near the town of Ramona, that had been built by tin, carried on by it, and ruined by it in the end. Prices were down— but they were bound to rise. Mines were worked out— but new lodes would be struck, tomorrow or the day after. You and I were overdrawn at the bank, mortgaged up to the topmost rusty sheet of the roof— but next Christmas, next Easter, next wet season, next dry, we'd be rolling in money and taking trips Home. Hadn't we, you and I and the other man, made money out of the Gilda Mine, the Mount Jericho, the Tara? Hadn't we dropped it all back again, down the hole, with a full and lively faith in its resurrection?

SO the mine-owners and shareholders, in a big way. So, in a small way, the tin-scratchers of the bush, who located shows that were too small for the companies, worked them by own man-power, washed out in the nearest stream, and took the stuff to the tin-buyers of Ramona. And before them all, the rotting pleasure-houses of Ramona stood like beacons on a reef; and the gray, dwindling pensioners on the bench outside the hotel gave warning; and no one saw — or seeing, understood.

PERHAPS the man called Tiger came nearer seeing and understanding than any other of those scattered about the tin-bearing creeks and flats of Ramona district.

He reined his horse in now, as he came to the top of the last hill before Diamond Flat, and stayed for a minute, looking about him. Two tents, grayish-white, were just in view at the far end of the flat. Near them a man moved, busy with fire and supper.

"Lovely place— and an accursed hole," mused Tiger, and he set his horse to a canter.

The other man left the stone fireplace over which he had been bending, and came forward. "Any luck?" he said.

Tiger slung himself off the horse, unsaddled, and sent the brute away with a cheerful slap. "I'll not answer that," he replied, feeling in his pockets, "till we've opened the mail."

"Letter from the bank?" asked the other hopefully.

"No fear. Two newspapers, one bill, and— this." He held out an envelope of thick ivory paper, directed in neat penmanship to "*Julius Diamond, Esq., Ramona, North Queensland*." On the corner was "*Urgent and immediate*."

"Why didn't you open it?"

Tiger passed over that. "Open it, you," he said.

There was a minute's silence, while the other man, a dark lean fellow of middle height, ripped the envelope, drew out a sheet of paper, thick and smooth, and slowly, quietly, read its contents. Tiger did not look at him. He tapped the leg of his trousers with his riding-switch, and stared down the gorge that hid the Garmoyle River. The neighboring creek tinkled in the silence. A cricket, large as a child's fist, sprang its wooden rattle, and ceased.

"BEN," said the dark man, lifting his head and showing a narrow well-bred face, colored brown, lit by fine gray eyes, "Ben, you ought to have read this. It's a— it's a startler."

Tiger, or Ben, said nothing: the time had not yet come. He went on tapping his leg. The cricket churred again, spitefully, as if anxious to be attended to, and desperate of attracting attention.

"Look here: You and I have been mates in this place for ten months. How d'you like it? How d'you like the life?"

"Too damn' well," was Ben's answer.

"I don't know what you mean by that. I like it. It's the cleanest life in the world. It's the essentials, with all the flummery let go. It's something else besides, that neither of us could ever put into words ; but— the best thing on earth, better than money, or drink, or girls—"

"Wine, women and song! Well, one can have one's cake and eat it too, so far as that goes— with the remains of Ramona still above ground," finished Ben. "What put you on the talk of girls, anyhow?"

"The most amazing thing. My people have hunted me out. My uncle Julius died awhile ago, and left a crazy sort of will. There was only my young cousin Isabel to have the island and the plantation and the cattle station; and he's left things so that if she marries one of the name, shell have the whole; but if she doesn't, she's to have half, and her first cousin Kate's to have half, and both their husbands are to take the name of Diamond. He was always batty in the belfry about the name, and I'm the only male left; we've nearly died out. He was born in the old country, you know, and saw a lot of life; my granddad went through the family money, and nobody but Uncle Julius ever made any attempt

at picking up Humpty Dumpty again. He wrote the letter just before he died. I suppose one can understand the way he feels about it."

"One can," said Tiger. "What I can't understand is the way you seem to feel. You aren't exactly sending up rockets about it, are you?"

"Who, me? Oh, as for that— but it was a crazy sort of thing to send me a letter like that, when neither he nor Isabel has ever seen me! Bats in the belfry with a vengeance! No sane man would."

"Stop! He didn't; she was to deliver the letter, if she and her chaperon didn't object to the look of you: I'll swear that was it."

"But?

"Julius, she did deliver the letter— at least, she ran and put it in the post office; I saw her."

"But—"

"Stop a bit. You can kick me as much as you like, but the devil entered into me, and I let them think it was me."

Diamond made no hasty answer. He looked thoughtfully at his mate— read part of the letter a second time, then asked: "Why did you do that?"

"I suppose," said Ben deliberately, "because I'm a rotter. And because I heard her say something." He did not mention what the something was, and Julius did not ask,

"Well," he observed, "you've tangled things up a bit. Will you tell me exactly what happened? As to being a rotter, you're unjust to yourself— you always were."

Tiger looked at him humorously. Not for the first time, it came to Julius that his friend was physically far his superior. Tiger (who had won his nickname by a playful habit of killing tiger snakes by whirling them round and snapping off their heads, as one cracks a stock-whip) was tall, long-legged and long-armed, and tough as fencing-wire; he had greenish, brilliant eyes deep-set under black brows; his hard, clean skin was healthily freckled, and his hair, red as a rainy dawn, was so thick that nothing ever made it lie flat. He had a smile that disarmed even enemies, and won women to his side when he was most in the wrong.

MISS JOHNSON, the barmaid at the Ramona Hotel, had been known to say about Tiger: "It fair stops your thinkin', when he smiles at you; you just go cronk, and don't know what he's talkin' about."

Julius, not being a girl, kept his head against the insinuating Tiger; but even he was less inclined to blame when his mate, growing grave again, began the tale of the day.

"I went in for a drink," Tiger said, "and a yarn with Gracie, and a bite to eat. She said if I wouldn't mind having it in the dining-room with the others, I could

go in. She said they'd been asking the way to Diamond Flat— two ladies who'd come by train. And she called out, because she couldn't leave the bar: 'The gentleman from Diamond Flat.' And just as I was coming into the dining-room, I heard, the oldest of the two women say to the other: 'Bel, how do you like your husband?' And the young one said: 'For God's sake, shut up.'"

JULIUS stared at him, bewildered. "I think I see. But how—"

"Hold on a minute. Of course I pretended I'd heard nothing. We all had lunch together, and nobody said anything but, 'Your bread, I think,' and 'May I pass you the salt?' But we all kept looking at each other on the sly. Mrs. Sands was the old one— forty-five or so, a chatty little piece as a rule, I should think—"

"That would be my third cousin Mina Diamond, the one who married Hugh Sands in—"

"Yes. But yours was the beauty. Julius, do you reckon they've got any more like her in the family? Because if so, you'll wake up some morning and find me among your in-laws, sure as—"

"What's she like?"

"Aren't I telling you? Bit on the short side, but no worse for that; hair more like mine than yours—"

Julius nodded.

"Yes, there were always the two kinds: the red Diamonds and the black."

"Blue eyes, real blue; complexion like a clove pink; lips— well, she's your cousin; won't say all I'd like to. Figure like they make 'em nowadays, best brand. A bit more huggable than most, perhaps. Lace on her frock, and real pearls in her ears. Heiress, all right. And I fancy a bit of a little devil. But a girl is all the better for that."

"Your description," said Julius slowly, "sounds attractive." He looked at Tiger under his heavy eyelids.

Tiger went on:

"Since you asked me, you've had bonzer luck, and— and— of course, so has she if she happens to look at it that way."

"I should think," said Julius, still deliberately, "I should think the next in order would be a call on my cousin and Mrs. Sands."

"Yes," said Tiger, looking away. "And then things will be straightened out."

"Maybe. It's a mad business, altogether." Both men were talking on the surface of their minds; neither touching upon vital matters that lay unacknowledged and unspoken of, below.

"I don't know why you speak of it like that," Tiger broke in. "To have the offer of a raving, tearing little beauty, and a fortune—"

"She has probably half a dozen other suitors, and only came up here to prove a satisfactory negative."

"You talk exactly like a university professor."

"And," Julius went on, without answering, "even if she hadn't, which is hardly conceivable from your account, she would probably resent the position Uncle Julius has put her in. Why couldn't he marry and have children of his own, so that there wouldn't have been any need for this nonsense ?"

"For the matter of that," retorted Tiger, "why don't you? No, you're not going to do the talking now; "it's my turn to yap. If I said that I preferred a hole in the bush to a beauty and a fortune— which is just what you want to say but don't dare,— everyone would understand. I'm a bad lot. I've done most of those things which I ought not to have done, and if I've left anything undone, good, bad or indifferent, by gad, it was not my fault. I don't own my name—"

"You know that nobody—"

"Yes, as long as they haven't heard: no longer. Why shouldn't they mind? Don't you mind what sire and dam a race-horse had? Don't all of us illegitimates know that ours were rotten bad ones, or we wouldn't have been here? And I've been 'allowed to resign' from my regiment, and I've been in jail—"

"You know if you'd had the money to pay the fine— assault and battery isn't so—"

"Well, I hadn't, and I'm branded. All those things are true. I'm the one ought to go and hide my head down a tin scratcher's shaft, for good. But you,— the darling boy of your family: M. A. and poet, the very 'moral' of a husband for that naughty delightful Bel, if her uncle only knew,— you to go backing and filling about what the gods have sent! Julius Diamond, if you don't saddle up tomorrow and ride in to that hotel, I'll punch your head myself."

"Has it occurred to you," said the other, "that I know nothing about station or plantation work ?"

"It hasn't. Because you can ride near as well as I can— which is saying some thing— and you can learn anything you set your mind to, once you stop spouting and making poetry. Old Julius knew what he was about when he went looking for the Diamond blood. In men or horses, blood doesn't lie. Are you going to town tomorrow ?"

"If I go," said Julius, fixing on the other his large shrewd gray eyes, eyes of a poet and a dreamer, but with something of the man of the world showing out of them too, "you'll have to answer a question first, and no shuffling."

"Ask it."

"Have you by any chance fallen in love with my cousin Bel?"

"How the deuce do I know? I go soppy over every pretty woman I see."

"Well, I'll put it differently: Did she seem to be— attracted, by you? She— she went and posted that letter, you know."

"My good God, don't you know that girls get soppy on me just the same as I do about them? What would it matter if she had?"

"It would matter this much; that she'd be lying awake, maybe, tonight, thinking of and fixing her fancy on— you."

"Well, she could unfix it— for a whole fortune instead of a half, couldn't she?"

JULIUS was silent for so long that the other, staring across the rapidly darkening valley, began to wonder what was coming next. But when his mate did speak, he said only: "Did you remember the sausages?" And Tiger— Ben William Alexander Hope, to give him all his names, Christian names every one— understood that the subject, for the present, was dropped. That was Julius' way.

"Now," thought Tiger, taking the sausages out of their parcel, and stirring up the fire, "he'll brood and brood on it all night, just as he does when he's hatching a new poem, and the longer he broods, the less likely he is to show common sense. I wish it would rain."

For Diamond Flat, delightful during the fine weather that made up three-quarters of the Queensland year, was somewhat less than pleasant once the wet season began. But the "Wet" was not due for weeks: and the little lost green tableland in the lap of the ranges, fresh with the running of the constant creek, bright with magpie's songs and kookaburra's laughter, all alone and merry, away from the world, was the place of all others to hold a poet's heart.

One poet's heart it certainly did hold. And Tiger, the poet's 'mate'— word of significance in Australia, connoting love and faithfulness, matter-of-course self-sacrifice— Tiger, through the course of an unusually silent evening, could not make up his mind whether he was sorry or glad.

WITH morning, it seemed that the dam of Diamond's silence was broken; he became almost talkative.

"Ty," he said, over the remains of the sausages, "I've worried it out in my mind."

"Well?"

"The only thing to do— the only decent thing— is to pretend that no mistake has been made. We can easily do that. We're not supposed to know."

Ben, in a moment, saw that he was right. With that certainty came a slight darkening of the early morning splendor, a faint depression of spirit.

"Good-o," he answered curtly. "When do you start?"

"Aren't you coming too?"

"I'd only tangle things up— as you said." Not for the life of him could he keep back that gibe.

It went unnoticed. Julius was grave, determined, concentrated this morning, on himself. "I don't see," he said, standing very upright and slim, very neat in clean shirt and cords and leggings, beside his horse, "I don't see that I have any

right to deprive my cousin of half her inheritance, if she chooses to buy it by saddling herself with me. Anyhow, it's her right to look over the goods, and reject them if she doesn't fancy them. If you really won't come along, I wish you could find time to start a bit of a shaft in that place where we found the streak of tin under the stone: I fully believe you'd strike it rich thereabouts."

"We need to strike it rich somewhere or somehow," commented Tiger. "There's no letter from the bank, and we were overdrawn two pounds, last balance."

"We'll make it some day," declared Julius; "anyhow, there's fifteen shillings due me on a poem for the *Wanderer*."

"Your poetry won't keep the frying pan in grease," retorted Tiger. "Take my advice, and strike it rich in the Ramona Hotel."

Diamond, mounted and away, might have heard him, and might not; there was no time for an answer. Ben William Alexander Hope, frying-pan in hand, stood looking after him.

"Please the pigs, she does take a fancy to you!" he said— adding, illogically, as he scoured the pan with a copy of the *Garmoyle Courier*, "Damn you!"

Meanwhile, in the pea-soup-colored parlor of Gibbs' hotel in Ramona, Mina Sands and Bel had finished the usual meal of goat and ancient bullock— sharply criticized by Mina, who had a dainty palate— and were debating the possibility of finding a new walk to take for. the afternoon.

"I cannot," declared Mina, "I really cannot walk any more up the street, or down the street, or to the bridge and back. Ramona's getting on my nerves. I warn you, if you don't soon bring this affair to some conclusion, I shall have a repression or a complex, or whatever they call a fit of hysterics nowadays, and you'll have to take me home in a strait-jacket. Two days! It seems like eternity."

"I don't think," said Bel, "you'll have to wait much longer."

"The place may be a perfect sanatorium, but it isn't agreeing with you. You've lost half your color, and I heard you fidgeting about your room last night when you ought to have been asleep. As for me, I'm a wretched sleeper at all times; but you have no excuse— young and healthy and without a care in the world."

"Just so," answered her cousin. "Well, having come so far, it would be a pity to go without finishing the job. I can't say I'm in love with the idea of sharing the plantation with Kate and her possible husband. We can expect another call from Julius any time now, I'm sure; and if we both pass him, he can be asked to stay at the plantation and see how things settle themselves. That's the idea, isn't it?"

"Yes," said Mina, using her palm-leaf fan industriously, though the day was not warm. "If we both pass him. You promised to be guided by my advice, as a married woman and your elder, didn't you?"

"More or less, I did."

"And you haven't taken any sudden girlish fancy to Julius, have you?"

"I rather thought you had taken one to him yourself, yesterday. What are you driving at? What is Julius that he wasn't yesterday ?"

MINA cleared her throat delicately. "I— I don't know that I can tell you," she said, flirting her fan and immediately proceeding to tell. "I just happened to fall into conversation with the man who keeps the hotel, Gibbs, a very decent sort of fellow for his station; and he let drop quite a few things about Julius— Tiger, he called him; it seems they all do."

"What did he let drop?" Bel was sitting very still; her vivid color had faded, but she kept her eyes fixed firmly on Mina.

"There have been— scandals. Nobody quite knows what, but it seems he came up here to get out of the way. And he makes love more or less to every woman he sees. He paid attention to Miss Johnson, but she wouldn't have anything to do with him. Gibbs seemed rather sore about that matter. Perhaps— well, one mustn't forget that you're not a married woman, yet. But you can take it that he isn't exactly the sort of Diamond that Uncle Julius seems to have expected. If you'll listen to my advice, Bel, you'll go slow."

Bel, orphan, spoiled child, heiress, never in her bright life crossed until that day, looked wordlessly at Mina; and Mina shook. There was fury in those blue eyes: fury— and something else.

"I don't believe it," broke forth the girl. "I don't care. You're in love with him yourself, as much as any soppy middle-aged old cat can be— No, Mina, I don't mean that; I'm sorry. I don't know what I mean. You've been frightfully good to me, and I suppose you don't mean any harm, but— I— I wish Uncle Julius had been drowned before he ever made such a damned will!"

"Mr. Diamond to see you," came Gibbs' voice at the door.

Bel's fingers were instantly up, smoothing her curls, dashing away an angry tear from her cheek. Her color brightened; the laces on her breast heaved stormily, but she sat very still, and did not turn, as the door opened. Mina, however, glanced up; and her instant reaction was: "Good God!"

HE was no fool. At once she understood what had happened. It did not need Julius' unmistakable likeness to the Diamond family, plainly apparent through the disguise of different coloring, to explain the truth. There was something quiet and reliable about the aspect of this man; something romantic too (Mina distrusted romance), but none of the engaging irresponsibility, the nameless, luring glamour, that like a coat of many colors enwrapped the man called Tiger.... Tiger! Who, what was he? And how on earth had he come barging into Bel's galley, just at the wrong moment? Mina, thinking what all this might mean, was furious against him— and sore. ... She was not quite modern enough to

understand what the soreness might mean. Perhaps Grace Johnson, wise with the bitter wisdom of the woman who ministers to any one of the vices of men, could have told her.

ALL this passed in an eye-blink. She found herself on her feet, shaking hands with Julius, introducing him to Bel: "Julius Diamond, isn't it? This is your little cousin Isabel, come to stay a while in Ramona. I hope you'll be friends." And Julius, with nice tact, taking it at that, sitting down, making conversation, and herself playing the chaperon, very nicely. Everything suddenly nice— that was the word. Nice and proper, and quite as it should be. Old Julius, that shrewd eccentric, had justified his eccentricity completely. The Diamond blood held true. This was the right man.

Mina, fanning herself, content to drop out of the conversation, saw it all. The coconut plantation in the Fijis, the cattle station combined with it, the stately plantation house, the launches and the motors and the horses, the hundreds of native laborers, the town bungalow in Suva, the dinner parties and week-ends at Government House— she knew it all: she had had her share of it, in a second-cousinly, tolerated way. It would all go on, as it should go. And she, trusted confidante and aid to the match, would be twice as often at the Diamond place.... Oh, it would be a good thing all round, it would pay.

Tactfully she kept out of the conversation as far as possible, prudently made an occasion to slip off and leave the pair together. That was the way they did things in France, wasn't it? Introduced young folks, and hoped for the best. There was much to be said for the French and their methods....

Mina came back in time to see Julius rising to go. Warmly, she asked him if he would not come and stay at the hotel for a while. Julius considered this, and then begged to be excused. Nothing he would like better; but there was his mate, out at the mine.

"Oh, the mine," said Mrs. Sands negligently. "Now tell me about it." She spoke as one might speak to a child about his toys. Bel had vanished; the slim, grave Julius with the romantic eyes stood with his soft hat in his hands, at the door of the pea-soup-colored parlor, ready to go.

She was amazed at the flash brought out by her words; the sudden light in his face. "He didn't look like that at Bel," she thought, "not while I was in the room, anyhow." Then she realized that he was doing just what she, injudiciously, had asked him to do— telling about the mine.

How he had come up to Ramona by chance, from Garmoyle, where he was school-teaching. How he had looked for tin, in a spot where no one expected to find anything— no one but himself. How he had found it, five years ago. Spent his capital on it, almost all. Lived somehow— did a bit of literary work, paid his partner in shares only, but Hope was a capital fellow, never wanted anything,

stood by him like a trump. ('"Hope!" said Mina to herself. "The sort of name that sort of man would have.") How the mine had been developed, bit by bit; a small show, but a good one, promising infinitely more. Why, by next Easter at most, they'd be down to the real rich stuff, taking out a little fortune. Why, only last week he'd found a new show, more promising than the old. ("And 'promising' indeed the old one must be, after five years of nothing," mocked Mina silently.) There wasn't such a little mine in all the Ramona district as Diamond Flat. She and Bel must come out and see it. When would they come?

"Good God," said Mina to herself, "he's got it." She had not been the best part of a week in Ramona without knowing what "it" was, and what it did. Aloud she answered: "Any day you like: can one go in a car?"

"Oh, yes," laughed Julius, "but we tin-scratchers don't run to cars. May I expect you tomorrow?" She answered that he might, wondering the while why he did not say "we." Then he was gone.

Upstairs she hurried, to Bel's bedroom, and knocked on the door. She was suffering to talk it all over.

There was no answer.

Mina waited and listened. "She's in there," was her thought. "I can hear her washing her hands." Again she knocked, and this time the door opened. Bel appeared, smiling and very bright. Her cheeks had the deceptive freshness given by cold water, freely applied: she was powdered, and her lips had been newly rouged. But sharp-eyed Mina noted the swollen eyelids, saw the redness of the pretty nose beneath all that powder, and knew that Bel had been crying.

She decided not to notice it. "Julius wants us to come out and see the flat tomorrow," she said. "Will you order a car?"

BUT at Diamond Flat the cool of the evening was coming on: there had been heat today, not much, but just enough to remind a man how the pavements sizzled down in Port Garmoyle— how, far out in the Fijis, days away, warm blue shadows of coconuts swung over burning sands. Julius had never been there, but he had heard much of the islands and of Suva; its busy social life, its shops, its business houses— how the great plantations, farther out, were run; how system, efficiency, modern method, held sway in Viti and in Vanua Levu, even as in Victoria. How the great places prospered, how hard their prosperity was earned.

"I'm not afraid of work," he said to himself, looking at the shafts that pockmarked the flat, at the heaps of tailings, at the creek where he had labored so hard and long, washing out. He thought of the five years of being his own man. He remembered lonely dawns, with the kookaburras laughing, in a crystal sky.

"Oh, God!" he said, and put his face in his hands. It was his good-by to Diamond Flat.

By and by he looked up again, dry-eyed. '"She's the finest little girl in the world, bar none," he thought. "I like her damned well, and she seems to favor me enough, anyhow. And who am I to say that Bel's to have her inheritance cut in two? The family's calling, and I'll answer."

HE began to wonder where Tiger might be. There had been no sign of him when Julius returned an hour ago; and it was now near to dusk.

"Tiger!" he shouted. "Ben!"

A long way off some one "cooeyed" in reply. It was minutes before Tiger came in sight; minutes more before he reached the camp. Light had not yet failed; Julius could see the face of his mate. It had a queer, worn, hollow-eyed look about it; but Tiger as usual was smiling.

"You look what Gracie would call cronk," observed Julius.

"Been struck by lightning," explained Tiger. "It takes a little while to get over, but you do get over it, specially if you keep out of thunderstorms."

"I never did understand your brand of humor, but I suppose you mean well," answered his partner patiently. "Don't you want to hear about my call?"

"Dying to."

"Well—" said Julius, and stopped. What the deuce made Tiger look at him in such a way? "Well," he went on, "she— they're— coming here tomorrow. Mrs. Sands said something about asking me to stay at the plantation. I suppose that means only one thing: the Fiji boat leaves in three days."

"Quick work," said Tiger. "Almost as quick as lightning."

"You seem to have got lightning on the brain."

"Oh, not on the brain.... Going to show them the bag of tricks here, drop 'em down a shaft and so on?"

"I don't think," answered Julius with sudden bitterness, "that she or the other will care the shake of a lamb's tail about the whole blessed show."

NEVERTHELESS he waited with nervous anxiety, next day, for the arrival of the car.

He hoped the little old car would not break down or get bogged on the way. He wanted Bel and Mrs. Sands to see his darling, before he had to leave it. In years to come, when he was a planter and station-owner, Bel's husband, maybe the father of children, he desired that Bel should know what this, his first and best-loved child, had been like.

"But she'll never really know," the poet in him thought.

The car came early: there had been no breakdown.

Julius Diamond was man as well as poet; the sight of small Bel, sweet and bright-colored as any of the bush flowers round his home, stirred his heart. It wouldn't be his fault if he did not make her fond of him. He'd be good to her.

Mina, more like a peony than anything else in the way of flowers, led the way, looked at everything, cackled as was her custom, and covered over many awkward gaps. The young folk were shy of each other; yesterday's ease had vanished. Absently, as if she saw nothing, Bel made the round of the camp and the flat; uncomfortably, as one not sure of his audience, Julius showed her one thing and another, keeping, all the time, his eyes fixed on her face.

Why, she was more than pretty, more than beautiful! Eyes blue as the blue flames of a driftwood fire; curled russet hair short about her face and rainbowed with gold wherever the sun struck through; beautiful limbs shown candidly in the fashion of the day; a mouth fine-cornered, kissable— not all these things made Bel. "Flame," he thought, "Flame— not her eyes only; it's in her. It is Bel. Couldn't she flare, if the right man struck the match?" And he swore to himself that he would strike that light to kindle that flame.

Then, in a moment, he knew: For Bel's eyes, straying over his shoulder as he talked of things unheeded, widened and shone. And Julius, who had been blind before when Tiger talked of lightning-strokes, knew now upon whom the lightning had descended.

Ben Hope had told him, earlier, that he did not mean to meet the visitors. He would spend the day prospecting. And he had gone. That he had come back, Julius knew, even before he turned and saw his mate standing alone on the edge of the forest.

Had he called? Julius did not know; perhaps Bel did not, either. But she left her cousin, and went straight as a homing bird to the rotter, the nameless man!

They stood for a moment speaking together, and no one heard what they said. Almost immediately the she-oaks and brigalow hid them, and Julius was left alone on the flat.

Not quite alone! Mina wasted little time in letting him know that. She ran to him— he could hear her panting, and her corsets creaking.

"What's gone wrong?" she shrilled, out of breath. "Why have you let her go away with that— that—"

Julius, gathering himself together, spoke with dignity.

"Ben Hope is my best friend," he said. "We will go to the car and wait for them."

ONE were November, December; wet January had come.

In Port Garmoyle, four thousand feet below Ramona, eighty miles away, the power fans whimpered, the watered pavements steamed. The bar of the Bangor Hotel was dusk and almost cool; great blocks of ice reflected glassily the light

that sifted through louvered screens; cane-covered lounges, with white marble tables, invited customers to rest. Gracie the barmaid was serving champagne to a squatter at one of the little tables. It was permitted to her, in the case of champagne customers, to desert the counter if asked to do so— to sit down and share the wine.

"So you got tired of living up in the Never-Never, did you?" asked the squatter, filling her glass and his. "Ramona's no place for a pretty girl like you. No one to make love to you but the blasted tin-scratchers. You did right to come back to Garmoyle."

Gracie Johnson drank, set down her glass, and laughed a little. "I didn't do so bad out of Ramona," she said. "Why, I own a hundred and eighty shares in the Mount Jericho, and fifty in the Gilda, and I did own half of Diamond Flat, but I sold it."

THE squatter laughed, securely. His right to order champagne was founded on a rock that had nothing to do with metalliferous strata. He thought he knew something about the value of mining shares, compared with herds of cattle. But he said nothing.

Gracie went on, the champagne loosening her tongue. "Diamond Flat was given to me, free for nothing."

Her companion gave her a skeptical glance.

"You don't expect me to believe—"

Gracie held up a hand.

"Expect or not, it's true. There was a bloke, and he was tin-scratching with the other bloke, and a girl came along with her aunt to marry him—"

"The aunt?"

"No blooming fear. The girl had whips of money; a highty-tighty little piece, but— well, the wrong bloke came along and took a fancy to her, and she got soppy on him. But she was going to have the other bloke, if you understand me, because of course the aunt wanted it; and the bloke, he wouldn't say anything. I heard things— the doors don't fit... . Well, they went off to the Flat to fix it all up, and he came into town— the wrong bloke, I mean, if you understand me. And he came to me, and says he: 'Gracie, I want to get drunk as quick as I can.'

"So I felt sorry for him, because I had a sort of a feeling for him meself, and I went and got him Gibbs' special brandy instead of what he ordered. 'That'll do the trick,' says I to him. 'No one ever touches it but him and me.' He'd had two, and I was pouring the third, when I says, to console him like: 'Anyway, she was cryin' her eyes out for you, up there in the bedroom.' And he lets the bottle fall on the floor, and every drop of it went bust. And he says: 'Cross your heart and die, is that God's truth?' And I says: 'Cross me heart and die! You men are as ignorant as brute beasts, but us girls know one another!' So he up and onto his

horse, and I never saw him again. But when he went down to Garmoyle to marry her, he sent me the share-certificates of everything he had in Diamond Flat; and I had it, till I sold it to Gibbs."

The squatter whistled loud and long. "So that's the milk of the coconut in the story we've all been hearing," he said. "Well, she had pluck, to marry Tiger. Pretty much of a risk!"

"You don't understand," repeated Gracie, now glass-valiant. "It's chaps like him that settles down, and thankful to do it, once they've been through it all. A home and a job— what's that to a fellow who's had them? And a fellow like that other bloke, who maybe makes love to a girl once in a month of Sundays, with one foot in the stirrup all the time and an eye down the road— he can't tell what's what or when he's picked the right one. Tiger, he could."

"Your theory's as old as the hills, and as full of holes," said the squatter. "He may make drakes and ducks of the place. They've got the whole of it, I hear; the other heir died. And he may break her heart for her."

"I don't think," contradicted Gracie. "But anyhow, he was the man of her fancy— and you'd rather have your fancy man break your heart than not."

"It strikes me he was something of your fancy too, eh, Gracie? How did you come to let him go to another girl?"

"It happened," explained Gracie, with some stateliness, "that I was married to Gibbs of Ramona, just then. Private. And whatever I am, I'm no dog in the manger, if you understand me."

"What do you mean by 'just then'? What about now?"

"I got a divorce. A lawyer gentleman managed it for me. I had to do something, if you understand me; because Gibbs, he'd lost the hotel through mining, and he'd gone away tin-scratching in the bush. No lady could stand that."

"Who did he go with?"

"He went with the other bloke; and they're working Diamond Flat. Last time I was up in Ramona, I saw the other bloke, standing in the street and talkin' to those old chaps that sits on the seats outside the bars. One of them, old Micky Casey, he says— I heard him: 'Good morning, brother,' says he; and he laughed. But I reckon he's got his fancy, same as her, and doesn't mind paying for it. Some of you men would rather have freedom— and maybe a little mine in the wild country out back— than settle down and be respectable."

———————

18: The Eye-Witness

A Newspaper Story of a tragedy of the sea.

***Ernest O'Ferrall*, as by "Kodak"**

1881-1925

The Lone Hand, 1 Jan 1912

"NO, I don't give a hang for verse, either," said the news editor. He swung round on his chair, and dropped his pencil on his blotting-pad with his right hand, while he reached for his pipe with his left. "No man should write unless he's got something to say; and if he's got anything, it's a darned sight easier to put it in prose."

He scraped a match viciously along the rim of his desk, and held it to the charred bowl of his cherrywood. Havis, the sub-editor, temporarily unemployed, settled himself comfortably against the table, and waited until his brother-in-ink had finished firing up. The shaded electrics threw a flood of hard, white light on desks, chairs and littered floor; from the street below came the roar of passing trams, occasional cries, curiously distinct in the cool night air, and, at rarer intervals, the soft ring of hoofs.

"I admit that verse— or poetry, if you like— has its points; but they make no appeal to me. I used to readverse, but I don't now, and I don't believe the public does either. They'll listen to a good comedian or a good balladist singing any sort of balderdash; but it's no use giving them rhymed stuff to read."

'"Exactly!" chimed in the sub. "I had a hammer-and-tongs go with old Jack Western the other day about it. I believe he'd write his leaders in verse if they'd let him. One of the things he tried to ram down my throat was that a description could be better done in verse— especially if it was something to do with the sea."

The news editor laughed. "If he can show me anything better in verse than Crane's 'Open Boat' I'll promise him to read it."

"I see you're quite hopeless, like myself," remarked the sub. cheerily, as he walked out.

"I am," agreed the news editor, grimly, and took up his pencil.

In five minutes' time the sub. Was back again, wearing his busy look.

"Young Hampden has just rung up from the *Globe*. He has some good fresh stuff about that murder. Wants to know if he can have half a column."

"Confound young Hampden," retorted the news editor, with the utmost placidity. "Does he think the *Call* is the *Evening Skull*? Tell him he can have two sticks if he gets his stuff in early enough."

The sub. repaired to the 'phone, and immediately returned. "He says it is a big thing, and that he's sure the *Globe* will give it at least half."

"Tell him he can have his half then," grumbled the news editor, and turned away as though he had been robbed of something very precious— which, of course, was the case. There is nothing more precious than space.

Half an hour later, when the pulse of the office had quickened to about 120 a minute, and neither the news editor nor anyone else had a second to squander, a burly, fresh-complexioned young giant, preceded by a nervous messenger, walked into the news editor's room, and tramped over the litter of papers towards the desk.

The news editor whirled round on his chair. "What is it?" he enquired, sharply.

The giant sat down unasked. "I want to put something in your paper," he said, simply.

The news editor had met his sort of new-chum before; but he decided to give him a minute— or forty seconds, anyhow.

"What is it?"

The stranger tapped the editor's desk impressively with a stubby forefinger. "A true story of the sea, sir. I'm a deck-hand on the steamer *Penguin*, now anchored in Chowder Bay, I think you call it. I came up the harbor just now in the police boat with the captain, who's gone out to see a dying relation. I'm just telling you this, sir, to show you that what I'm going to tell you is the truth."

"Well?"

"You haven't heard anything at all, sir, of the lost steamer *Sultan*, have you?"

The news editor sat up. "Not a word! Do you know anything?"

The man from the sea prodded the desk excitedly. "She was blown up by her Chinese crew out there"— indicating the Pacific— "two weeks ago. They mutinied, murdered the white officers, set her on fire, and cleared out in the boats. We picked up a boat-load of the swine last Wednesday week as we were making for the smoke of the burning ship. They lied to us, of course; but we didn't like the look of things when we saw they had no white officer in charge. We took the dozen of 'em aboard, and made for the poor old *Sultan* at full speed. In their hurry they had messed up the job of firing her, and the second had no trouble in getting aboard. He found the captain's body in the chart-house. He had been hacked about something horrible, and clenched in his right hand was a piece of silk and some coarse black hair. They must have thrown the other bodies overboard, as the only other traces of murder the second could find were bloodstains on the decks. He brought the dead captain's body back with him in the boat. I believe there was some talk of trying to get the fire out; but it was lucky we didn't try it. While we were standin' by, there was an explosion aboard the burnin' ship, and she tipped and slid down bows first. The fire must have got to some explosives, I think."

"You haven't told this to anyone else?"

"No sir, not a soul!"

"Good ! Yow, I tell you what I want to do. I want you to tell this to one of our staff, with any other particulars you can think of. Just tell it as simply and directly—"

"You mean that he is to write it, sir?" The seaman's tone was distinctly hostile.

"Yes, of course."

The man with a story to tell shook his head vigorously. "Oh, no sir! That isn't my way of doing business. This is my story, sir. I want to write it myself. Let me write it and bring it in to you to-morrow."

"But look here," cried the news enthusiast, desperately; "this is a big thing, and by to-morrow all the other papers will be on to it. It would be much easier to rattle it off to one of onr men. He'll take a shorthand note, and fix it up in good shape for you."

He reached for the plug of the speaking-tube.

"No, sir! I want to write this myself. I'll tell you what I'll do. Can you give me a quiet room and let me write it there?"

"Very well, then." The news editor made the concession grudgingly; but he wanted the story, and that seemed the only way to get it. He shot orders through the place that swept angry, copy-laden men to one side, and started them grumbling in odd corners. The result of all the confusion was that a room somewhere in the hive was cleared, and the man from the sea locked in with pen, ink and paper.

The news editor informed him, before closing the door, that he had two hours in which to put the story of the *Sultan* into a column, and that he would not be disturbed by anyone, as he intended to take the key with him. Then, with the key in his vest pocket, he walked along to the sub.'s room, and interrupted that worried man with his story. "A column on your cable page, Mr. Davis," he concluded, firmly.

"All right," said the sub. briskly, and, with his pencil between his teeth, started to search. "The Farmers' Conference and the Liberal League can go over to Page 9," he announced at last. "There's your space. Can your man fill it?"

"I think so. Anyway, I'm stopping to see that he does. I had to make the experiment to get the story," he added.

The sub. looked at his watch. "Just eleven o'clock. Let us have it as quickly as you can." He bent again over his work.

The news editor ran into young Hampden at the head of the stairs. The boy was dancing with excitement and anxiety. "Mr. Evans, *can* I have a column? This thing turned into a two-handed murder half an hour ago, and the arrests have been made. It's the biggest thing we have had for a long time."

"I'm afraid not, Mr. Hampden. Any other time, yes; but to-night a sailor turned up with the story of the missing *Sultan*, in which the whole world is interested. The *Globe* will miss this altogether. It's a big mutiny story, and we've scooped it."

"That's so!" The boy's face fell. "I suppose I'll have to carve it." He looked at his watch and hurried away to write up.

The news editor went into his room, and, putting his watch in front of him, started to look over proofs.... It was five minutes to one, and the sub. was fretting and fidgeting in his chair of thorns, when a worried-looking boy looked in and informed him that the news editor would like to see him in his room. The sub.'s chair revolved three times from the force with which he left it.

Evans, quite drunk with rage, slammed three crumpled sheets of paper on the corner of his desk as he entered. "Look what that damned drivelling fool has been doing! He's been down here for the last two hours twisting his hob-nailed feet and getting ink in his hair trying to put that 18-carat yarn into *verse*! VERSE!"

The sub. had the reputation of never having lost his temper in a crisis. As Evans, quite overcome, sank back in his chair, he gathered up the poem and read, in a sweetly composed way, the following lines:

A MARINE TRAGEDY OF THE SEA

Alas! 'twas on the roaring main we saw a burning barque ;
The Captain with his eagle eye had seen it smoking. "Hark!
Oh, listen now to me, my lads! Here something is amiss!
Come, let us steer for yonder barque! I must see into this!
But what is that in yonder boat? Twelve Chinamen I see!
I do suspect foul play, my lads—"

"We can't use this," remarked the sub. gravely.

"*Use it*?" shouted Evans, jumping to his feet. "I'd like to!"

The sub. snapped his watch. "I'll have to close down in a quarter of an hour; and there's that column."

Evans groaned and clenched his teeth. "If I'd only known the brute was doing that!"

The plaintive face of young Hampden appeared round the door. "I say, Mr. Evans. It's hard to fit this big story into half a—"

The news editor swung round. "The very thing! I'd forgotten about you, Mr. Hampden. Don't cut that murder story. Mark back all you've marked out. Stick every line in, and do it quickly, and"— turning to the sub.— "if it's what he says, run headings through it, and lead it. That'll about fill the column. I'll vamp up

something myself from this drivelling maniac's verse —about half a column; and that'll pull us out."

"Guess that's about the best way out of it," muttered the sub. thoughtfully.

"All right, Mr. Hampden. It's getting alongside closing time," he added ruefully.

The news editor didn't hear. He was already writing, smoothly and swiftly.

Down in the front office, a disconsolate, wandering seaman was entrusting a message to a reluctant and suspicious messenger.

"I want you to tell the gentleman upstairs that, after thinking it over, I'd like the name of the poem to be changed to 'The Old Captain's Story,' or, 'A Sad Tale of the Rolling Sea.' "

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19: The Immorality of Madden

C.J. Dennis

The Lone Hand, 1 Dec 1911

THERE was a shriek upon the pier, and a splash. Then a wild hubbub of voices arose, shouts and screams cutting through the drone and clatter of the holiday crowd. Then another splash, as a youth, fully clbthed, dived after the girl who had fallen into the sea. Everybody shouted directions.

"My Gawd! She's goin' down the second time! Gimme a rope, someone," yelled a red-faced man, frantically waving a fishing-rod.

"Won't no one get 'im a rope?" wailed an excited female. "Won't no one get 'im a rope?"

The crowd had rushed to one side of the pier, and, with craning necks, lined the railing. Higher up, near the sea end, two men had leapt into a boat and were tugging madly at the knot of the painter.

The youth in the water, impeded by his clothes and confused by the medley of shouted directions, was floundering about, vainly trying to locate the drowning girl.

"Under the pier! She's under the pier!" yelled the crowd. Then, catching sight of portion of a dress, the youth struck out boldly.

By the time the boat reached them, the lad, almost exhausted, was supporting the apparently lifeless form of the girl. Hastily the two were dragged aboard, and, despite the almost angry protests of the crowd, the boat was headed shoreward.

"What they takin' 'em to the beach for?" demanded the red-faced man. "I could pull 'em up here easy, if I 'ad a rope."

On the pier, the crowd kept pace with the boat, still shouting fatuous advice.

As the rescuers neared shore, men waded to meet them and carried the body of the girl on to the shingle where a bevy of middle aged females and a small clerical-looking man with side-whiskers immediately took possession.

"She was one of our party, friends," explained the man. "Her aunt is with us. Poor lady, she is stricken sorely. Go for the police, someone."

The aunt, an angular female, with a severe expression and spectacles, was bearing it bravely enough. Indeed, she seemed rather to relish her position as chief mourner and mistress of ceremonies. Under her austere directions the body of the girl was placed upon the beach, her head pillowed on a heap of seaweed, while a cordon of grim females surrounded the body and ordered the crowd back.

But the crowd, though somewhat overawed, was still full of angry importance, and continued to offer varied and gratuitous advice—

"Undo 'er dress! Roll 'er! W'y don't yer empty the water outer 'er?

Ain't nobody gone fer a doctor? W'y don't yer roll 'er? Undo 'er dress!"

Two young men in bathing dress approached and spoke earnestly to some of the female guards. They, in turn, consulted the gentleman with the side-whiskers.

"Urn, urn," he said. "I don't know, I'm sure. What do you say, Mrs. Stalker?"

"If you think it proper, Mr. Polijoy," replied the stern aunt. "Ambulance men, you say? But there must be nothing unseemly, please."

"Trust me, Mrs. Stalker, trust me," said Mr. Polijoy. "Now, young men, if you think you can do anything. But I'm sadly afraid

Quickly the two approached the drowned girl, and with a business-like air began measures for restoration. With a swift motion one of them tore open the front of the girl's dress. Mrs. Stalker screamed, and Mr. Polijoy, seizing the ambulance man by the shoulders, thrust him away.

"How dare you!" screamed Mrs. Stalker. "How you! You— you immoral monster!"

"Young man," said Mr. Polijoy, severely, standing between the body and the diffident Samaritans. "Young man, when the police arrive I shall lay an information against you for this— this outrage."

"Indecency!" cried Mrs. Stalker, her nostrils quivering with indignation.

"But I gotta do it," explained the abashed young man. "I gotta undo her stays to "

"Mr. Polijoy!" gasped Mrs. Stalker.

"Remove yourself, young man," commanded Mr. Polijoy, his whiskers bristling with pious severity. "Remember, please, that these are ladies. Gather round, ladies, gather round, and let no one approach. Where are the police?"

FURTHER DOWN the beach, Jack Madden, in bathing dress, was lying full-length on the sands gazing at a charming profile with that yearning, diffident gaze which Gladys Carson had almost persuaded herself she positively detested. She hated diffident men.

"But why not, Gladys?" Jack was saying. "What's wrong with me now? At the Granvilles' dance you nearly promised, you know, and now....."

"Oh, I don't know," said Gladys pettishly. "You're— you're— Oh, I can't be sure, Jack."

"But you do care for me a little, Gladys, dear, don't you?" pleaded the young man. "That night, you remember, you said that perhaps— Hallo! What's up?"

A bather, running along the beach, was spreading the news of the disas-

ter at the pier, and Madden sprang to his feet.

"Wait for me, Jack!" cried Gladys. But, before she could rise, the sun-tanned legs of her lover were speeding towards the crowd. Elbowing through the press,

Madden came suddenly upon the female guard, with Mr. Polijoy fussing in and out amongst the women and still enquiring loudly for police.

"What is being done?" demanded Madden, eyeing the drenched form up on the seaweed. "Here, I understand the method; let me "

"Sir," said Mr. Polijoy, barring the way, "are you a doctor?"

"Get out!" said Jack, pushing him aside; but Mrs. Stalker sternly intervened.

Without looking up, Madden swung cut a swift back-hander "Are you a medical man, sir?" demanded the austere aunt, "That young person is my niece, and I positively forbid—"

"Yes, yes," replied Jack hastily, "M.D. Edinburgh, L.R.C.P., and all the rest of it. Here," he said, beckoning the former Samaritans, "I want assistance. Catch hold there..." and together they set vigorously to work over the unconscious girl, while the female guard formed a circle around them, spreading their skirts to shut out the gaze of the vulgar crowd.

But one of the females, after peering into Madden's face, called Mr. Polijoy aside to a whispered consultation.

"Are you sure?" gasped Mr. Polijoy in a shocked voice. "Mrs. Stalker, do you hear what Miss Crump says? I'll attend to it, ladies; trust me." And, approaching Madden, he laid a detaining hand upon his shoulder.

"Young man," said Mr. Polijoy. "I desire to speak with you."

"Get out!" said Jack, shaking him off without pausing from his labor.

"Young man," persisted Mr. Polijoy, "you are not a doctor. You are an impostor. This lady here has recognised you. You are a newspaper man, a reporter. She has seen you before. "

"Indeed I have; I can swear to him," said the woman. "He reported the last meeting of our Mission Society. I was there. Doctor, indeed!"

Without heeding them Jack bent strenuously over his task, directing his assistants and breathing hard with his exertions. Again Mr. Polijoy sought to detain him.

"Young man," he said, grasping Jack's arm, "I command you to desist. I have sent for the police, and—"

Without looking up, Madden swung out a swift back-hander which, by the merest good fortune, took Mr. Polijoy full in the mouth, and that eminent Wowser went groaning to the sands. The crowd shouted approbation, and Jack went on with his task. Then the police and a doctor arrived together just as the drowned girl opened her eyes.

THAT NIGHT the moon shone on the water, and Jack Madden sat very close to Gladys on the pier.

"Then that's settled," said Jack in a tone of fatuous happiness— "And only this afternoon I was beginning to lose hope. What changed you, dear?"

"Oh Jack," murmured Gladys. "I just can't help loving men who do things. Especially when they're nice big, brown men— (Don't, Jack!). The way you saved that poor girl when the others only looked on; and the way you treated those dreadful women and that awful little man—"

"The Wowser? " said Jack.

"Yes. I do hope you hurt him— a little. The way you just went in and did it made me— Oh, don't, Jack!''

"Just one more kiss," pleaded the idiotically happy lover.

"Jack!" she gasped. "There's someone coming."

And Jack looked up just in time to catch the stern, accusing eye of Mrs. Stalker, as she walked by them with two of her female retainers. Mrs. Stalker's nostrils were wide with pious scorn, and her lips were tight with austerity.

"That's him!" she said. "Did you see it, Miss Crump? I thought as much! All immoral monster! Dear Mr. Polijoy intends to report the police for refusing to arrest him. Thank God that girl with him is no daughter of mine!"

"Jack, dear," whispered Gladys, "do it again, quickly, and let her see you."

Jack did it promptly.

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20: The Great Lock-Out

What Happened when the Spooks took charge of the Printing Trade

C. J. Dennis

The Lone Hand, 1 March 1911

IT WAS a spiritualistic séance given by his wife that led Mr. Clutterbuck first to take an interest in spooks. It was a practical interest, for Mr. Clutterbuck, the head of a large printing firm, was a practical man. He sent for the medium, one Aubrey Mercer.

In the family circle Mrs. Clutterbuck's leaning towards spiritualism had for a long time been a source of worry to her husband. As a respected member of the Church he felt himself bound to frown upon his wife's unorthodox tendencies; as a man of the world and a member of the superior class, he treated the matter with amused scorn. For, even so late as 1930, despite the efforts of Mr. Stead and others in the earlier part of the century, the occult had not yet been included among the recognised sciences. Spiritualism, Hypnotism, Telepathy, and kindred sciences were then mainly in the hands of charlatans and impostors, and a few half-baked students, such as Mercer, who elected to employ their scanty knowledge of the occult as an aid to imposture and money making rather than to use it as a stepping stone towards further discovery.

Despite his prejudices, Mr. Clutterbuck was one night persuaded to attend a private séance held in his wife's drawing-room. With the happenings at that séance this narrative has nothing to do.

Clutterbuck, who came to scoff, remained to doubt, lingered to meditate, and went to bed with the germ of a great idea fermenting in his brain.

A few days later Aubrey Mercer received a polite note requesting him to call at the office of Clutterbuck and Co., for a private interview with the head of the firm.

"Young man," began Mr. Clutterbuck, severely; "you are aware that I look upon all that mummery, with which you deceived a lot of silly women the other night, as the most barefaced, arrant humbug?"

Mr. Mercer was not in the least abashed. He was used to such talk.

"Believe me, sir," he said, earnestly, "it is my misfortune that in my profession there are many rogues whose malpractice and imposture brings it into disrepute There are many quacks in the medical profession, yet—"

"Yes, yes!" interrupted Mr. Clutterbuck; "we will take all that as said. Now, to come down to practical matters, sir. I understand that you claim to possess a certain remarkable power over certain spirits, or spooks, or whatever you care to call them. You claim that, at will, or at the request of your— er— clients, you can make these spirits perform certain acts, such as moving furniture, ringing

bells, writing upon a sheet of paper without any physical aid whatever from you. Is that so?"

Mercer nodded.

"Very well. Now I am a practical man and an unbeliever. Convince me by a test and I become a convert. Do you know anything of typewriting? Could you type quickly, to dictation, on that machine?"

"I have never used a typewriter," said Mercer.

"Very well. Here is the test. You shall come with me into a room, and while I hold your hands at one end of the room, you shall cause to be written upon a machine at the other end of the room a letter which I shall then dictate."

"Simplicity itself," said Mercer. "You accept the conditions?"

"I do."

"And I am to understand that the letter will be written by the spirit of some departed typist which you will invoke?"

"Exactly," said Mercer. "I can do that and more. If you care to have half a dozen machines I will cause six letters to be written at the same time. Is that fair?"

"Ah!" said Mr. Clutterbuck, and for a few moments he remained in deep thought.

"Now," he said, "will you oblige me by stepping to the passage and glancing into the machine room?"

"The machine room?" said Mercer in surprise.

"If you will oblige me," answered the printer. "After that I would like you to have a look at the linotypes and the lithographic department."

Mercer was about to obey; in fact he had partly risen from his chair, when he sat back again suddenly with wide-open eyes fixed on the calm face of Mr. Clutterbuck.

"Holy wars!" gasped the medium. "Why didn't I think of that?"

"Pardon me," said Mr. Clutterbuck, pleasantly. "You are not going into a trance or anything like that, I trust?"

"Trance be d——d!" replied Mr. Mercer. "Oh, you wily old fox!" he cried, dropping his professional manner entirely. "You perceptive old pea, you are! Fancy me not thinking of that!"

"Excuse me, Mr. Mercer," said the printer haughtily; "but your language—"

"Never mind my language," said Mr. Mercer. "I'm on to your game, sonny. See?"

"My game?" cried Mr. Clutterbuck. "My game? My good man, I fail to apprehend you. What do you mean by what you please to call 'my game'?"

"What an innocent old cherub it is," smiled the transformed Mr. Mercer. "You know what game I mean; running all this bloomin' caboose of yours by spirit labor. It's an inspiration, and I congratulate you."

"Spirit labor? Preposterous!" said Mr. Clutterbuck. "What advantage would that be to me to—"

In a most unprofessional manner the medium laid a finger beside his nose and winked.

"No wages," he said; "no tucker, no clothes, no unions, no strikes, no expense. Savee? I'm on to you."

"And suppose," remarked Mr. Clutterbuck, loftily; "suppose I told you you were an impertinent scoundrel, and ordered you out of my office?"

"And suppose," replied Mr. Mercer, "suppose I told you there were a pair of us? And suppose I went along to the nearest opposition establishment and blew the gaff on you? Have you got my measure now? What?"

"Ah!" said Mr. Clutterbuck.

"Exactly," said Mr. Mercer. "That's where it pinches."

"Can it be done?" Mr. Clutterbuck asked, confidentially.

"It can," declared the medium. "And there's a fortune in it— for both of us."

"Ah, of course, of course," said Mr. Clutterbuck, gently. "I shall see that you are properly, not to say handsomely, remunerated. Your salary—"

"Salary be blowed!" said Mercer. See here—"

And then ensued a pretty wrangle with which, though entertaining, we have no time to concern ourselves.

Some three weeks later the whole of the employees of Messrs. Clutterbuck and Co. received a week's notice of dismissal. In vain foremen and managers sought interviews with their employer; in vain the union wrote for an explanation. The head of the firm closeted himself continually with his new private secretary, Mr. Aubrey Mercer; and a week later the works closed down.

So far as the public knew they remained closed down. But two or three of the discharged employees, happening to pass the factory late one night, were surprised to hear the noise of machinery within.

"Scabs, by G—!" said one of the men. "We'll stop and watch."

All night they watched, till late the next morning, but though the machinery stopped no workmen emerged.

"He's boarding them on the premises," said the men; "it's a case for the union."

To the officials of the union Mr. Clutterbuck was polite, but uncommunicative. He employed no workmen.

To the factories inspector he was equally polite and equally reticent. He employed no workmen.

"But I heard machinery!" said that mystified official.

"My good man," said Mr. Clutterbuck, urbanely, "I have yet to learn that you have any control over my machinery. Good evening."

Determined to explore the mystery, a number of unionists decided upon an unlawful act. One of their number, to be chosen by lot, was burglariously to enter the premises by day, and remain concealed until the works started at night.

The lot fell on Tom Collins, an enthusiastic young laborite and leading unionist; and, assisted by his fellows, he contrived to get in at a window on the day appointed, and concealed himself in the office formerly occupied by the clerical staff.

Shortly after dark Mr. Clutterbuck and his secretary came in.

Mercer entered the clerk's room, in which Collins lay concealed and turned on the electric light. Then he followed Clutterbuck into the proprietor's private office.

Ten minutes later Collins heard the machinery start. Cautiously he crept out of his hiding place, and his glance fell casually on the safe in which were kept the books of the firm. As he gazed, the safe opened suddenly, a large ledger appeared to tip itself out, float across the room, and deposit itself on a desk. Another and another followed; but Collins kept his gaze upon the first. As it reached the desk it opened mysteriously, and the leaves fluttering over to the page containing the latest entry. Then, to the horror of the watching man, a pen reared from the desk, dipped gracefully into the inkwell, and hastily running up a column of figures, dotted down the total at the bottom in a neat and clerkly hand. It was Collins' gasp of dismay that brought Mercer into the room.

Without a word, the secretary seized the helpless and horrified man by the collar, flung him into the street, and, relocking the front door, went back to Clutterbuck's office.

"What is it?" asked the printer.

"A spy, I reckon," replied Mercer.

Found him in the clerk's room gaping at the performance of Andrew, the ledger-keeper. He was pretty limp, and I emptied him out easily."

"Ah! said Clutterbuck. "To-morrow we will have to see to the barring of all the windows. Do you think Huxley is to be trusted?"

Huxley was the only living clerk in the firm's employ, and was left in sole charge of the office by day to attend to customers and receive orders.

"Sure," replied Mercer. "He knows nothing about the spooks, and the screw you give him keeps his mouth shut."

"Um," said Clutterbuck. "Um. We must be careful. If our scheme is discovered we shall have opposition in less than a week. Already the trade is beginning to grumble about my cutting the prices. Now," he continued, with a brisk air of business, "about those new hands for the linos."

Mercer shrugged impatiently.

"You must give me time, man," he said. "I've put on over a hundred hands already."

"But I can't have those linos idle," protested the printer. "I am losing money on them. The whole battery must be started. Orders are getting ahead of the work."

Mercer picked up a ruler and beat his left palm with it impatiently.

"Look here," he said aggressively. "Don't you use quite so much of that sort of talk with me. We're partners in this— understand?— and I'm doing my best. I called up the spirits of seventeen departed linotypers last night, and every bloomin' spook of 'em resisted my influence. Said they were staunch unionists, dead or alive, and weren't going to scab for anyone."

"But there must be thousands of dead lino men," said Clutterbuck.

"Well, you'd better go and find 'em," said the medium.

Just as Mercer was leaving the factory a familiar voice addressed him"

"Wot-O, Mercer. How's the game?"

By the light of an adjacent street lamp Mercer recognised the face of an old professional acquaintance, a medium, like himself, but one that worked on a lower strata of society. It was a critical moment; and Mercer made a fatal mistake.

"I don't know you," he said.

"Wot?" said the other, drawing nearer. "Don't know yer ole pal Jones. Made a rise, have yen, Aubrey, an' turned down yer ole cobbers? All right, sonny, but I'm on to yer little game, don't fergit. I've been watchin'—"

"Go to the devil!" said Mercer, and passed on.

When Clutterbuck heard of this incident later he exhibited much uneasiness.

"If he's a medium," he said, "he might suspect. Hadn't we better— er— see if he needs squaring?"

"Not on your life." said Mercer, airily. "I know Jonesey. He's not a bad medium but hasn't the brains of a meat axe; and he drinks. He's just a bluffer, that's all."

But that Mr. Jones was something more than a mere bluffer became alarmingly evident to Mr. Clutterbuck some days later when he opened his morning paper. The headlines ran:

EXTRAORDINARY HAPPENINGS IN THE PRINTING TRADE.
ANOTHER LARGE ESTABLISHMENT DISCHARGES ITS EMPLOYEES.

Hastily glancing down the column, Mr. Clutterbuck was horrified to find that the establishment referred to was that of his largest trade rivals, Barking Bros.

For the first time in his married life the worthy churchwarden shocked the family circle with profanity. Then he went nastily forth in search of Mercer.

"It's that confounded friend of yours!" he exploded as he came on Mercer at that gentleman's new and elaborate private apartments. "He's been spying on us! We must try to combine. We must see the Barkings at once and form a— a trust before this gets any further."

Mr. Mercer sat back and regarded his companion joyously.

"Oh, you perceptive old pea!" he cried admiringly. "You bash the correct nail on the napper every pop."

"Come," said Mr. Clutterbuck, impatiently. "We have no time to lose. My motor is at the door."

They found both Mr. Barkings in, but both Mr. Barkings, though polite, were extremely reticent on the subject of spooks. The Barking Brothers, who knew their man, and were, if possible, keener business men and more unprincipled sweaters than he, were naturally shy.

Eventually the brothers informed their visitors that they must first consult their manager.

"Mr. Jones," suggested Mercer.

The elder Mr. Barking hesitated.

"Er— yes," he admitted; "that is the name of our present manager."

But the whole company had failed altogether to consider the temperament of Mr. Jones, the new manager. At the precise time of the interview in the Barkings' office, the new manager, his pockets filled with a fat retainer he had extorted from his new employers, was entertaining a select company, in the back parlor of a suburban hotel, with the story of his great scheme and prospective fortune.

"It'sh a gol' mine," hiccoughed Mr. Jones ecstatically; "an' only me an' Aubrey Mercer was clever enough to cop on to it."

Next morning the papers had it; and the great spook labor monopoly was burst.

At first the public was incredulous. But as factory after factory discharged its hands, yet continued operations with no visible workmen, people began to realise that there must be something in the newspaper reports.

Crowds of half-starved and workmen filled the streets. Insipid rioting broke out here and there, and was quelled. The Government of the day was appealed to in vain. In vain the democratic press stormed, and the combined unions issued unveiled threats. The offending employers— men of the Clutterbuck stamp— who went to and fro from their works under escort, remained fatuously confident in the protection of the law, and failed to see the terrible crisis they invited.

The trouble seemed imminent. At a mass meeting of combined unions it was decided to leave the question of a resort to force in the hands of the central executive; and in the minds of all there was little doubt what the decision would

be. The men were starving, desperate; the Government had refused redress; there was but one course remaining.

In all the discussions and speeches that day one name constantly recurred— that of Harry Devine, a labor leader and born organiser, who had died in the previous year. "If only Harry Devine were alive," said the speakers, he would get us out of it." But Harry Devine was dead, and none seemed able to fill his place.

The mind of one man in particular seemed obsessed with a desire for the assistance of Devine. This was Tom Collins, whom the weird experience in Clutterbuck's office had set thinking.

Amongst other things, Collins had dabbled a little in spiritualism, and for many days the nucleus of a scheme— a last, desperate resort— had been in his mind. After the resolution at the mass meeting he set out to scour the city in search of a medium. But all, it seemed, were engaged at fabulous salaries by the factory owners. The demand had exhausted the supply.

At last, with sinking heart, Collins called at a tumble-down cottage to which he had been directed in an obscure part of the town.

A small and shrivelled old woman opened the door to him.

"Is Madame Bianco in?" asked Collins anxiously.

"Are you from a factory?" she asked, half closing the door.

"No, no," Collins assured her.

"You are sure?" she persisted, cautiously. "They came last week and tried to force me to go, when I wouldn't take their bribes. I am frightened. There will be bloodshed before it all ends."

"There will be no bloodshed," said Collins, "if you are able to assist me— and willing. I want to end the whole ghastly business, and perhaps you can help me. Listen, I want Harry Devine."

"But Harry Devine is dead!"

"Yes, yes, I know. But you are a medium. If I can speak to him for one minute— for half a minute. Please let me in, and I will convince you I am in earnest."

Timidly she admitted him.

Under strong escort, through crowds of jeering, savage men, Mr. Clutterbuck and his private secretary reached the office just as the street lamps were being lighted.

Entering hastily, they closed and bolted the heavy front door behind them as a shower of stones clattered upon the panels.

"Whew!" said Mercer, wiping his forehead. "This is getting too hot for me! I've half a mind to chuck the business and get out."

The good printer seemed worried and irritable. His fat, heavy face was pale; his hand shook.

"Don't be a fool," he said, "You are making more money than ever before in your life. They won't harm us; they've too much respect for the police— the scum! Don't waste time, man. Get the hands started. Every minute means money. What about the lino men?"

"I've got three more— of a sort," Mercer replied. "One died during his apprenticeship; the other two are a bit—"

"Confound it!" exploded the printer dashing down his pen. "With all those thousands and thousands of dead men to draw upon, can't you do better than that? If I thought you were playing with me I'd—"

"Pull off!" said Mr. Mercer, placing his foot upon a chair and wagging an admonitory forefinger at the printer. "Now, understand this: I'm doing the best I can, and I can't do more. My business is partly spiritualism and partly hypnotism. If I can influence a spirit by my will he's mine, and I can make him do what I like; but it's only the weak-willed ones that I can influence, and weak wills don't often go with competent workmen. Do you get that? Then I've had a lot of trouble with unionists. It would surprise you what a lot of defunct unionists there are over yonder, and they're all stubborn as mules. If you don't like it, you can find your spooks yourself."

"Very well," said Mr. Clutterbuck resignedly. "But, for goodness sake, get them started."

For twenty minutes Mr. Clutterbuck waited impatiently, but heard no sound of machinery. Then Mercer came back looking pale and scared.

"I can't understand it," he said, wiping beads of perspiration from his forehead. "There's something wrong... They won't answer me! They seem to be there, some of them, but something seems to be keeping them back."

"Have you tried the clerks?" asked Clutterbuck. No? Well, come."

Together they went into the clerks' room, and Mercer, sitting in a chair, remained silent and motionless for some minutes.

"Well?" queried Clutterbuck, impatiently.

"Hush!" said Mercer. "There's one here. It's Andrew."

"Andrew!" thundered Mr. Clutterbuck, glaring around the office in a vain attempt to transfix the invisible clerk. "What do you mean by it, sir? You should have been at work half an hour ago."

"Hush, I tell you," said Mercer.

Clutterbuck ignored him.

"Get to work at once, sir!" he roared.

Suddenly the door of the safe opened and a book came hastily out; but half way to the desk it fell heavily and lay open upon the floor. Mercer shrieked.

"Andrew!" thundered Mr. Clutterbuck. Then he, too, turned pale and gripped a desk for support.

"What is it?" he gasped, and both stood listening.

Deep silence reigned in the room, yet to Clutterbuck there seemed to be a vague, uncanny something going on. He could hear nothing, see nothing unfamiliar, yet it seemed to him that there was a commotion in the room. A silent conflict seemed to be raging here, there, and all about him. He seemed to be aware of the deep, gasping breaths of struggling men, yet he knew that his ears heard nothing of the kind.

"He called for help," said Mercer in a scared whisper, "an' then— then— I don't understand it. There's something devilish going on. Can't you feel it? I'm off!" .

No!" said Clutterbuck, recovering himself by an effort, and barring the way. "No! I pay you to do this work, and by G— you'll do it. Call them again."

"Not for a fortune!" cried Mercer. "Stand out of my way!"

Then a large ink-well came hurtling through the air, propelled by some invisible hand, and struck Mr. Clutterbuck full in the face. He went down like a felled ox. Mercer leaped across the prostrate body, and rushing to the front door, unlocked it, and fled into the street.

NEXT MORNING newspapers and public were agape with curiosity. Strange, mysterious things, it appeared, had happened in the night at every one of the factories working under the new system. Employers had been carried fainting from their offices. Others had rushed shrieking into the street. The elder Mr. Barking was in hospital, raving deliriously. Mr. Clutterbuck had been found bleeding and unconscious on the floor of his office. Not one of the factories, it was alleged, had worked during the night. What had happened? Asked everyone. Those of the employers who were calm enough to be coherent remained reticent. In most cases their managers and private secretaries were not to be found. But two living souls could account for the mysterious happenings of the night. One was Tom Collins of the combined unions' executive, the other a thin, shrivelled, and exceedingly nervous old lady who occupied a tumble-down cottage in a back street.

But before the issue of the evening press, Tom Collins, after a meeting of the executive, told what he knew; and an hour later the flaring headlines shrieked the news in the public street—

THE GREAT LOGIC OUT COLLAPSES.
DEAD UNIONISTS ORGANISED BY THE SPIRIT OF HARRY DEVINE.
THE WORKS PICKETED.
BLACKLEG SPIRITS ROUTED.

THUS ended the great lockout of 1930. That the experiment is never likely to be successful again is evident from the subsequent history of Mr. Mercer. After

the collapse that gentleman journeyed to Broken Hill with the idea of starting spirit labor in the mines; but he was frustrated at the outset by Harry Devine. From here he went to New York; but again found Devine before him. He then started for Germany, in the hope that Devine's ignorance of the language in this life had been carried with him across the Styx. The ship in which he sailed was wrecked, and Mercer, amongst others, was drowned.

The story of his meeting with Harry Devine on the other side would, no doubt, prove vastly entertaining reading; but, unfortunately, the particulars are not to hand.

21: Perfect (!) Alibi

Mark Hellinger

1903-1947

Sunday Mail (Brisbane) 5 Mar 1944

MARK Hellinger lived a short but exciting life. In 1925, aged just 22, he was hired by The New York Daily News *to do the "About Town" weekly column, intended to be filled with news and gossip about Broadway. Instead, Hellinger wrote Broadway short-short stories with a twist in the tail, in the O. Henry mode. Later they became a* daily *feature! The stories were very popular and by the late 1930s were syndicated and sold to many other newspapers. He is believed to have written some 6,000 of them. He went on to become a movie producer of* noir *movies like* The Killers*,* High Sierra, They Drive by Night, The Two Mrs Carrolls*, and* The Naked City*.*

Over 200 of his Broadway stories were syndicated and published in Australian newspapers. I collected 200 into two 100-story volumes, Mark Hellinger's Broadway, 1930s*; and* Mark Hellinger's Broadway, 1940s*, both free online in the MobileRead library.*

JOHNNY Parvo always did a little hurry-up drinking after he left the office. At the dot of five he skidded into an elevator, and at the dot of 5.2 he was standing against the bar of Geller's saloon.

This night Clem Daggart drank beside Johnny. Clem never displayed haste.

Johnny regarded his companion curiously. 'How do you do it?' he asked.

'How do I do. what?' Clem was short and thin and dark and wrinkled like a bobby pin.

'How,' Johnny persisted, 'do you get away with getting home so late for dinner?'

Clem downed his dose and ordered another.

'It's all due to an accident, ' he replied. 'My Mabel used to raise the roof— just like your wife does— every time I barged in late. Of course. I always had an excuse, but none of them was particularly hot.

'Right after Pearl Harbour, though, I got a lucky break. I went home late and told Mabel I had met Harry Walker, an old school pal of mine. I said that poor Harry had just joined the Navy, and was about to go off to win the war. So naturally, I pointed out I had to have a few drinks with Harry.'

'And that worked, huh?' Johnny asked, taking a nervous squint at the clock on the wall.

'Like a charm.' Clem nodded. 'She wanted lo know all about Harry Walker. I told her, and I used a lot of sob stuff about how the kids from the old neighbourhood were marching, off for Old Glory. She agreed, and she almost busted out crying over poor Harry.' Clem grinned. 'So I've been using that same dodge ever since.'

Johnny laughed. 'I suppose,' he ventured, 'that you've used the old gag about Harry being on furlough? '

'I've used 'em all,' returned Clem happily. 'And all in correct order, too. I've even used the one about stopping in to see his old mother.

'The trick is in the way you pull it. Don't do it too often and it's gotta work.'

'Not for me, it wouldn't.' Johnny sighed. 'Holy smokes! See you later, Clem!'

Clem had a few more leisurely drinks— and then, half high, went home.

Mabel was waiting. She was round, warm, and as appetising as an apple dumpling. 'What kept you, dear?' she asked.

Clem shook his head sadly. 'It's Harry Walker,' he said softly. 'He's been reported missing in action.'

Mabel stifled a gasp with her hand.

'In the Pacific,' Clem went on, 'submarine action.'

'Oh, my,' Mabel whispered. 'Oh, my.'

'I feel sorry for his mother,' Clem said.

'You ought to go to see her,' his wife exclaimed. 'Maybe I will.' Clem murmured. 'After work, to-morrow night.'

But thereafter Clem became lost for additional excuses. He racked his brain and came up with the notion that good old Harry had just been heard from— 'turned up in a Jap prison camp in Formosa.'

And then a few nights later he told Mabel he had been delayed because he was taking up a collection to send warm clothing and food to good old Harry.

Johnny Parvo met Clem a couple of evenings in Geller's saloon, and marvelled that the guy was still getting away with his thin lies.

'You ought to quit, while you're still ahead of the game. ' he counselled.

'Nothing doing.' Clem retorted. 'I stumbled on this gadget by accident, and I'm working it until it's worn out.'

And he did. He worked every angle of the thing until Mabel felt she knew the entire tragic history of poor old Harry Walker— from the day he skinned his knee on a desk in the third grade until the night he was hung by the thumbs by his Jap captors, who wanted to know the name of his submarine.

Secretly. Johnny envied Clem. He just didn't have the nerve to try a gag like that on his wife. He knew she wouldn't go for it more than once. And, accordingly, it was not worth using.

ONE NIGHT Johnny scurried into Geller's saloon and found Clem, as usual, dreaming over a drink. 'Well,' he said, 'how's our dear friend, Harry Walker, making out?'

Clem scowled. 'Don't mention that name,' he said.

'Oh oh!' Johnny cried, 'Oh oh!'

Clem said nothing.

Johnny had his drink. He poured himself another and looked quickly up at the clock.

'How is Mabel these days?' Johnny asked.

Once again Clem said nothing. Johnny's eyes grew large. 'I asked you a question, Clem,' Johnny insisted. 'I said to you, how is Mabel these days?'

'Mabel,' replied Clem slowly, 'left me this morning at exactly 2 a.m. Permanently.'

Johnny whistled. 'Fight?' he inquired,

'Yeah,' Clem admitted. 'Big scene, too. She found out about Harry Walker.'

'Wow!' Johnny leaned closer, 'Somebody snitch? '

Clem turned on a tired smile.

'Nope,' he explained softly. 'Nobody knew about it except you. It's just that I got home late last night— and there on the table was an invitation on a postcard from Harry Walker. He was inviting me and my wife to a party, because he had been called up.'

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22: An Unfinished Story

O. Henry

1862-1910

McClure's Magazine August 1905

In: *The Four Million*, 1906

WE NO LONGER groan and heap ashes upon our heads when the flames of Tophet are mentioned. For, even the preachers have begun to tell us that God is radium, or ether or some scientific compound, and that the worst we wicked ones may expect is a chemical reaction. This is a pleasing hypothesis; but there lingers yet some of the old, goodly terror of orthodoxy.

There are but two subjects upon which one may discourse with a free imagination, and without the possibility of being controverted. You may talk of your dreams; and you may tell what you heard a parrot say. Both Morpheus and the bird are incompetent witnesses; and your listener dare not attack your recital. The baseless fabric of a vision, then, shall furnish my theme— chosen with apologies and regrets instead of the more limited field of pretty Polly's small talk.

I had a dream that was so far removed from the higher criticism that it had to do with the ancient, respectable, and lamented bar-of-judgment theory.

Gabriel had played his trump; and those of us who could not follow suit were arraigned for examination. I noticed at one side a gathering of professional bondsmen in solemn black and collars that buttoned behind; but it seemed there was some trouble about their real estate titles; and they did not appear to be getting any of us out.

A fly cop— an angel policeman— flew over to me and took me by the left wing. Near at hand was a group of very prosperous-looking spirits arraigned for judgment.

"Do you belong with that bunch?" the policeman asked.

"Who are they?" was my answer.

"Why," said he, "they are— "

But this irrelevant stuff is taking up space that the story should occupy.

Dulcie worked in a department store. She sold Hamburg edging, or stuffed peppers, or automobiles, or other little trinkets such as they keep in department stores. Of what she earned, Dulcie received six dollars per week. The remainder was credited to her and debited to somebody else's account in the ledger kept by G— — Oh, primal energy, you say, Reverend Doctor— Well then, in the Ledger of Primal Energy.

During her first year in the store, Dulcie was paid five dollars per week. It would be instructive to know how she lived on that amount. Don't care? Very

well; probably you are interested in larger amounts. Six dollars is a larger amount. I will tell you how she lived on six dollars per week.

One afternoon at six, when Dulcie was sticking her hat-pin within an eighth of an inch of her *medulla oblongata*, she said to her chum, Sadie— the girl that waits on you with her left side:

"Say, Sade, I made a date for dinner this evening with Piggy."

"You never did!" exclaimed Sadie admiringly. "Well, ain't you the lucky one? Piggy's an awful swell; and he always takes a girl to swell places. He took Blanche up to the Hoffman House one evening, where they have swell music, and you see a lot of swells. You'll have a swell time, Dulce."

Dulcie hurried homeward. Her eyes were shining, and her cheeks showed the delicate pink of life's— real life's— approaching dawn. It was Friday; and she had fifty cents left of her last week's wages.

The streets were filled with the rush-hour floods of people. The electric lights of Broadway were glowing— calling moths from miles, from leagues, from hundreds of leagues out of darkness around to come in and attend the singeing school. Men in accurate clothes, with faces like those carved on cherry stones by the old salts in sailors' homes, turned and stared at Dulcie as she sped, unheeding, past them. Manhattan, the night-blooming cereus, was beginning to unfold its dead-white, heavy-odoured petals.

Dulcie stopped in a store where goods were cheap and bought an imitation lace collar with her fifty cents. That money was to have been spent otherwise— fifteen cents for supper, ten cents for breakfast, ten cents for lunch. Another dime was to be added to her small store of savings; and five cents was to be squandered for licorice drops— the kind that made your cheek look like the toothache, and last as long. The licorice was an extravagance— almost a carouse— but what is life without pleasures?

Dulcie lived in a furnished room. There is this difference between a furnished room and a boardinghouse. In a furnished room, other people do not know it when you go hungry.

Dulcie went up to her room— the third floor back in a West Side brownstone-front. She lit the gas. Scientists tell us that the diamond is the hardest substance known. Their mistake. Landladies know of a compound beside which the diamond is as putty. They pack it in the tips of gas-burners; and one may stand on a chair and dig at it in vain until one's fingers are pink and bruised. A hairpin will not remove it; therefore let us call it immovable.

So Dulcie lit the gas. In its one-fourth-candlepower glow we will observe the room.

Couch-bed, dresser, table, washstand, chair— of this much the landlady was guilty. The rest was Dulcie's. On the dresser were her treasures— a gilt china vase presented to her by Sadie, a calendar issued by a pickle works, a book on

the divination of dreams, some rice powder in a glass dish, and a cluster of artificial cherries tied with a pink ribbon.

Against the wrinkly mirror stood pictures of General Kitchener, William Muldoon, the Duchess of Marlborough, and Benvenuto Cellini. Against one wall was a plaster of Paris plaque of an O'Callahan in a Roman helmet. Near it was a violent oleograph of a lemon-coloured child assaulting an inflammatory butterfly. This was Dulcie's final judgment in art; but it had never been upset. Her rest had never been disturbed by whispers of stolen copes; no critic had elevated his eyebrows at her infantile entomologist.

Piggy was to call for her at seven. While she swiftly makes ready, let us discreetly face the other way and gossip.

For the room, Dulcie paid two dollars per week. On week-days her breakfast cost ten cents; she made coffee and cooked an egg over the gaslight while she was dressing. On Sunday mornings she feasted royally on veal chops and pineapple fritters at "Billy's" restaurant, at a cost of twenty-five cents— and tipped the waitress ten cents. New York presents so many temptations for one to run into extravagance. She had her lunches in the department-store restaurant at a cost of sixty cents for the week; dinners were $1.05. The evening papers— show me a New Yorker going without his daily paper!— came to six cents; and two Sunday papers— one for the personal column and the other to read— were ten cents. The total amounts to $4.76. Now, one has to buy clothes, and—

I give it up. I hear of wonderful bargains in fabrics, and of miracles performed with needle and thread; but I am in doubt. I hold my pen poised in vain when I would add to Dulcie's life some of those joys that belong to woman by virtue of all the unwritten, sacred, natural, inactive ordinances of the equity of heaven. Twice she had been to Coney Island and had ridden the hobby-horses. 'Tis a weary thing to count your pleasures by summers instead of by hours.

Piggy needs but a word. When the girls named him, an undeserving stigma was cast upon the noble family of swine. The words-of-three-letters lesson in the old blue spelling book begins with Piggy's biography. He was fat; he had the soul of a rat, the habits of a bat, and the magnanimity of a cat… He wore expensive clothes; and was a connoisseur in starvation. He could look at a shop-girl and tell you to an hour how long it had been since she had eaten anything more nourishing than marshmallows and tea. He hung about the shopping districts, and prowled around in department stores with his invitations to dinner. Men who escort dogs upon the streets at the end of a string look down upon him. He is a type; I can dwell upon him no longer; my pen is not the kind intended for him; I am no carpenter.

At ten minutes to seven Dulcie was ready. She looked at herself in the wrinkly mirror. The reflection was satisfactory. The dark blue dress, fitting without a wrinkle, the hat with its jaunty black feather, the but-slightly-soiled gloves— all representing self-denial, even of food itself— were vastly becoming.

Dulcie forgot everything else for a moment except that she was beautiful, and that life was about to lift a corner of its mysterious veil for her to observe its wonders. No gentleman had ever asked her out before. Now she was going for a brief moment into the glitter and exalted show.

The girls said that Piggy was a "spender." There would be a grand dinner, and music, and splendidly dressed ladies to look at, and things to eat that strangely twisted the girls' jaws when they tried to tell about them. No doubt she would be asked out again. There was a blue pongee suit in a window that she knew— by saving twenty cents a week instead of ten, in— let's see— Oh, it would run into years! But there was a second-hand store in Seventh Avenue where—

Somebody knocked at the door. Dulcie opened it. The landlady stood there with a spurious smile, sniffing for cooking by stolen gas.

"A gentleman's downstairs to see you," she said. "Name is Mr. Wiggins."

By such epithet was Piggy known to unfortunate ones who had to take him seriously.

Dulcie turned to the dresser to get her handkerchief; and then she stopped still, and bit her underlip hard. While looking in her mirror she had seen fairyland and herself, a princess, just awakening from a long slumber. She had forgotten one that was watching her with sad, beautiful, stern eyes— the only one there was to approve or condemn what she did. Straight and slender and tall, with a look of sorrowful reproach on his handsome, melancholy face, General Kitchener fixed his wonderful eyes on her out of his gilt photograph frame on the dresser.

Dulcie turned like an automatic doll to the landlady.

"Tell him I can't go," she said dully. "Tell him I'm sick, or something. Tell him I'm not going out."

After the door was closed and locked, Dulcie fell upon her bed, crushing her black tip, and cried for ten minutes. General Kitchener was her only friend. He was Dulcie's ideal of a gallant knight. He looked as if he might have a secret sorrow, and his wonderful moustache was a dream, and she was a little afraid of that stern yet tender look in his eyes. She used to have little fancies that he would call at the house sometime, and ask for her, with his sword clanking against his high boots. Once, when a boy was rattling a piece of chain against a lamp-post she had opened the window and looked out. But there was no use. She knew that General Kitchener was away over in Japan, leading his army

against the savage Turks; and he would never step out of his gilt frame for her. Yet one look from him had vanquished Piggy that night. Yes, for that night.

When her cry was over Dulcie got up and took off her best dress, and put on her old blue kimono. She wanted no dinner. She sang two verses of "Sammy." Then she became intensely interested in a little red speck on the side of her nose. And after that was attended to, she drew up a chair to the rickety table, and told her fortune with an old deck of cards.

"The horrid, impudent thing!" she said aloud. "And I never gave him a word or a look to make him think it!"

At nine o'clock Dulcie took a tin box of crackers and a little pot of raspberry jam out of her trunk, and had a feast. She offered General Kitchener some jam on a cracker; but he only looked at her as the sphinx would have looked at a butterfly— if there are butterflies in the desert.

"Don't eat it if you don't want to," said Dulcie. "And don't put on so many airs and scold so with your eyes. I wonder if you'd be so superior and snippy if you had to live on six dollars a week."

It was not a good sign for Dulcie to be rude to General Kitchener. And then she turned Benvenuto Cellini face downward with a severe gesture. But that was not inexcusable; for she had always thought he was Henry VIII, and she did not approve of him.

At half-past nine Dulcie took a last look at the pictures on the dresser, turned out the light, and skipped into bed. It's an awful thing to go to bed with a good-night look at General Kitchener, William Muldoon, the Duchess of Marlborough, and Benvenuto Cellini. This story really doesn't get anywhere at all. The rest of it comes later— sometime when Piggy asks Dulcie again to dine with him, and she is feeling lonelier than usual, and General Kitchener happens to be looking the other way; and then—

As I said before, I dreamed that I was standing near a crowd of prosperous-looking angels, and a policeman took me by the wing and asked if I belonged with them.

"Who are they?" I asked.

"Why," said he, "they are the men who hired working-girls, and paid 'em five or six dollars a week to live on. Are you one of the bunch?"

"Not on your immortality," said I. "I'm only the fellow that set fire to an orphan asylum, and murdered a blind man for his pennies."

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23: The Enigmatic Emeralds

Edward Dyson

1865-1931

(As by Ward Edson)

Punch (Melbourne) 16 March 1916

WHAT EVERYBODY predicted had happened at last— Mrs. Agnes Inglefield's emeralds had been stolen.

Mrs. Agnes Inglefield's emeralds were almost an institution. First night audiences would miss them as much as big Mrs. Agnes Inglefield herself, and a great deal more than little Mr. Agnes Inglefield. Mr. Agnes Inglefield had probably never noticed the emeralds. He was a little, purblind, comatose sort of man, so absent-minded that he was continually forgetting himself.

Mrs. Inglefield, on the other hand, was a large, exceedingly stout, very wideawake lady, who never in any circumstances forgot herself, or allowed other people to forget her. She was at least fifty-eight by this. Her profuse dark hair, by reason of its singular uniformity, and the fact that it fitted her with the precision of a man's hard hat, had long sustained the reputation of being a confirmed wig. Mrs. Inglefield raddled her cheeks most unsuccessfully, and was a great, kindly-hearted fool of a woman, who loved to dress herself in spangled materials and expensive emeralds. She looked like a starlit night.

The most conspicuous of Mrs. Inglefield's many ornaments was the emerald necklace. Melbourne was quite familiar with these emeralds. It had seen them shedding a green lustre over Mrs. Inglefield's spacious and benevolent bosom as her brougham crept through the city streets, conveying her to the theatre, a ball, or some social function: it had picked them out scores and scores of times, gleaming in the dim-light down in a seat in the front circle row during the performance of many plays.

Mrs. Inglefield was an inveterate first-nighter, but though extremely rich, she clung to her old-fashioned, comfortable brougham, disdaining the smart motor cars of her acquaintances as dangerous to life and limb. Her acquaintances said she hated the motor head-lights, since they might almost outshine her beloved emeralds.

People had told Mrs. Inglefield her emeralds would be stolen, but Mrs. Inglefield had replied, "I have emeralds to ornament me, not to illuminate the interior of a vault."

Now the emerald's were gone.

It happened so very simply. A block of traffic caused by the escapades of a very drunken and hilarious citizen lying on his back before the wheels of a vice-regal motor car had served to hold up Mrs. Agnes Inglefield's brougham for a

few moments. During one of these moments a hand thrust through the open window of the carriage had torn the emeralds from Mrs. Inglefield's neck.

Detective Kewt was given the Inglefield emerald case to handle.

"MIGHT as well set a man to hunt for a white cat in the snows of Siberia," he told his friend, Austin Porteous, sitting on the counter in the latter's little curiosity shop.

The cherubic-looking antiquarian smiled gently. He was turning over a large cameo, examining the substantial gold setting in elaborate basket work.

Detective Kewt sighed. "The thief may have been watching his chance. Mrs. Inglefield has worn this eighteen hundred pounds' worth of emeralds persistently for years."

Porteous nodded. "I know them," he said. "They are worth more. There are in the necklace four particularly fine stones."

"So some smart criminal may have been dogging his chance. Nimble Hegan is in town."

"Hegan? Yes; it would be worth your while to find out what Hegan was doing with himself at eight minutes past eleven, on Saturday night."

"I have," replied Kewt with a sigh that was almost a groan. "He was leaning on a hotel corner in Bourke-street, talking to a police constable."

Porteous looked up, a bird-like sharpness in the black eves that contrasted so quaintly with his old doll's face. "A deliberate alibi, perhaps. It suggests a confederate."

"I've thought of that, too. Perhaps if you went and saw Mrs. Inglefield, you could get something out of her that would be of value. I couldn't."

"Very well, I'll do what I can."

Tracking criminals was one of the hobbies of Mr. Austin Porteous. His other hobby was collecting ancient articles of art and virtue, and selling them at a suitable profit to cranky amateurs.

Mr. Porteous, saw Mrs. Inglefield; he peered into her mind through his large, horn-rimmed spectacles; he peered into the case from the only discoverable point of view, and then admitted that there was nothing in it for the scientific investigator.

"That's about the total make-up," Kewt acknowledged. "I'll get me to the pawnbrokers."

BUT three days later Kewt reappeared at the little, out-of-the-way shop of Mr. Austin Porteous. Mr. Kewt was accompanied by a slim, brown, cadaverous man in a suit of clothes that might have been the second-best of a not- too-prosperous tramp.

Kewt, holding a position between his companion and the door, took a small tissue-paper pared from his pocket, opened it, and handed Austin Porteous a big emerald necklace.

"Mrs. Inglefield's emeralds," said the antiquarian. "I congratulate you,. Kewt. Where did you nab the man?"

"I didn't," Kewt replied. "He nabbed me. Let me introduce Mr. Horace Skews. Mr. Skews, Mr. Porteous."

"Most happy," said Skews, with a marked English accent, at the same time extending a hand which Mr. Porteous was pleased to note was clean, as well as slim and unstained by labour.

"Mr. Skews brought me the emeralds two hours ago," said Kewt. "He says he found them."

"Indeed," said Porteous dryly.

"Yes," continued the detective; "found them two weeks ago."

Austin Porteous was alert in a moment. "Two weeks ago? They were only stolen last Saturday!"

"I found those emeralds two weeks ago yesterday," said Skews, "and they-must have been in the place in which I found them since the previous night at eleven."

"Why?" asked Porteous.

"Because they were in my bed; and I retire at eleven."

"Tell him," said Detective Kewt, "tell him all."

"Certainly," said Skews. "You must know, Mr. Porteous, I am something of a pariah. My appearance, my costume, my hat have probably told you that I am not at this moment one of the monied class. I have been of the useless rich, but at present I haven't the proverbial bean. I have been sleeping, sir, in a cement barrel— You look incredulous. You think it improbable a man of my dimensions could sleep in a cement barrel. I admit the whole of me does not sleep in the cement barrel, but as much of me as I can get into the barrel does. The cement barrel is in a block at the back of Osgood's big ironmongery. The block contains much of Osgood's property that is of no particular or immediate value, chiefly barrels.

"On the night of 5th January— that is, Wednesdays fortnight— I stole to the corner of the lot where my cement barrel is. Inside the cement barrel were a quantity of old straw and, several back numbers of the *Age*. My bedclothes, Mr. Porteous. I pulled these things out, made myself comfortable with my legs in the barrel and my head on a small zinc-lined case, and went to sleep. I awoke about seven o'clock on Thursday fortnight, and the first thing my eyes fell upon, lying in the straw of my bed, was the emerald necklace. That is all."

"Not all," said Porteous ; "not all, my dear sir, since it was a fortnight ago, and you turn up with the necklace-to-day."

"I left the rest to the imagination of a man of obvious intelligence," said Skews' suavely. "An emerald necklace, certainly genuine, was an article of immense value to a man in my unfortunate position. So I thought at first. I found later it was useless, because a man in my position could not venture to dispose of jewels worth perhaps £2,000. I kept my find, searching the papers meanwhile for some word of the necklace. None came till last Monday morning, when I read of the theft of Mrs. Inglefield's emeralds.

"And there's the story, and there are the stones," said the detective.

"Dear, dear me! A most curious situation. She was robbed of the stones on Saturday, our friend here finds them on a waste lot several days earlier, and restores them to-day. It looks, Mr. Skews, as if your story wouldn't wash."

"It does, indeed, Mr. Porteous, but happily I can prove I was in a city doss-house from ten o'clock on Saturday night till nine o'clock on Sunday morning."

"That seems to be the truth," said Kewt.

"Bless my soul!" mused Porteous. He was peering into the emeralds with a small magnifying glass. "Most extraordinary story. But miracles don't happen, you know, Mr. Kewt."'

"Not in the Criminal Investigation Department," said Kewt.

"Perhaps we can reconcile Mr. Skews's story with fact, without the need of a miracle." Suddenly Mr. Porteous's droll tone was dropped. He became very alert. "I'm interested," he said. "I'm most interested." He peered into every turn and twist of the necklace. "A devilishly delightful case, Kewt. I should certainly like to follow it up."

MR. AUSTIN PORTEOUS did follow the case up. He went to Mrs. Agnes Inglefield again, and learned of a purely irrelevant young man, one John Weston, a nephew of Mrs. Inglefield's, who had a place in Inglefield's firm, and had practically lived with the Inglefields. This young man had disappeared, ten days before the theft of the emeralds.

"Dear me!" said Porteous, "and you don't know where he has gone?"

"We have no idea ; but he is a wild boy— he left his parents' home several times. We have no fears on his account. Oh, his accounts were all correct. There was no reason of that sort. We have every confidence in him."

Austin Porteous left, carrying John Weston's portrait with him. He next went to the police court. There he heard of a case of assault on the police that happened in the vicinity of the waste block at the back of Osgood's big ironmongery store at about ten o'clock, on the night of Wednesday, 5th January. The policeman assaulted had come upon the two men fighting furiously in the locality mentioned. He attempted to arrest them, and they turned on him, and in the hot struggle that ensued the constable was rather severely injured.

However, help arrived, and the men were secured. They gave the names of James Queen and Henry Brown, and were now serving a six - months sentence.

Mr. Porteous obtained permission to call upon Messrs, Queen and Brown in their respective cells. He was not surprised to find that Henry Brown bore a startling resemblance to the missing nephew, John Weston.

THAT EVENING Austin Porteous was in a position to clear up the mystery of the Inglefield emeralds that were stolen before they were lost. He did so in presence of Mrs. Agnes Inglefield, Mr. Agnes Inglefield (still sleepy and self-absorbed), Detective William Kewt and Mr. Skews.

"It is like all seemingly extraordinary cases," said Porteous, "a very simple matter. The emeralds were found by Mr. Skews several days before Mrs. Inglefield was robbed, and Skews did actually have them in his pocket on Saturday night. No, I am not denying that the lady was robbed. Mrs. Inglefield, the man who stole your emeralds was your nephew, John Weston. He worked in collaboration with a young working jeweller named Carter, now under sentence for assaulting Constable Ryan. Weston and Carter met on that block behind Osgoods on the Wednesday night after securing the emeralds, probably to come to some settlement. They quarrelled and fought. A constable came upon the scene, and Weston dropped the emeralds into the cement barrel, our friend Skews's bedchamber. The two young men were arrested, and were tried and sent to prison under false lames. They are in prison now."

"But I had the emeralds after that," said Mrs. Inglefield.

"Certainly, madam, the necklace was snatched from your neck some time after— but you need not bother about that. Here are your genuine emeralds. Examine them closely, and you will find traces of plaster of Paris still adhering to the setting. Your nephew and his confederate, the working jeweller, made an imitation emerald necklace sufficiently like your own to deceive you. That you had been wearing for some time while the genuine emeralds were in Weston's hands."

"And the thief on Saturday?" gasped Kewt.

"The Lord knows who he was," replied Porteous; "we need not bother our heads about him. He got what he deserved— a handful of paste!"

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24: Force Majeure

J. D. Beresford

1873-1947

In: *Nineteen Impressions*, 1918

AS A MIDGE before an elephant, so is man when opposed to Fate. The elephant breathes or lies down, and the high shrill of the midge is done. The midge believes passionately that the looming monster which shuts out his whole world has come across the earth with this one awful purpose of destroying his little life. But the elephant knows less of the midge than the midge knows of the elephant....

George Coleman was not a figure that one would associate with the blunderings of outrageous destiny. He was of the type that seems born to move easily and contentedly through life; neither success nor failure; a tall, thin, fair man, reasonably intelligent, placidly thirty-five, and neither too diligent nor noticeably lazy. He was one of the many who had failed to find briefs; and one of the few who had, nevertheless, succeeded in earning a decent income. He had obtained, through special influence, a post as legal secretary and adviser to a great firm of financiers in the City. The post was almost a sinecure and the salary £800 a year. Added to that, he had another £300 of his own. He spent his holidays in Switzerland or Italy or Norway.

Any suburb would have made him a church-warden, but he preferred to go on living in his chambers, in Old Buildings, Lincoln's Inn. He was used to the inconveniences, and the place satisfied his feeble feeling for romance.

His friend Morley Price, the architect, told him that there was a sinister influence about those chambers. They were on the fifth floor, and boasted a dormer window that might have been done by Sime, in a mood of final recklessness. The dormer was in the sitting-room, and looked out on to the court. Price loved to lie back in his chair and stare at it, attempting vainly to account by archaeology and building construction for the twists and contortions of the jambs and soffit.

"It's a filthy freak, Coleman," was his usual conclusion; "not the work of a decent human mind, but a horrid, sinister growth that comes from within. One day it will put out another tentacle and crush you." After that he would fit his pipe into the gap in his front teeth and return to another attempt at formulating a theory of causation. He had always refused to consider any artificial substitute for those lost teeth. He said that the hole was the natural place for his pipe. Also, that the disfigurement was distinguished and brought him business.

If it had been Morley Price, now.... However, it was the absurdly commonplace George Coleman.

The beginning of it all was ordinary enough. He fell in love with a young woman who lived in Surbiton. She was pretty, dark, svelt, and looked perfectly fascinating with a pole at the stern of a punt, while her fox-terrier, Mickie, barked at swallows from the bow.

Coleman was quite acceptable. He punted even better than she did, and he was devoted to dogs, and more especially to Mickie. Nothing could have been more satisfactory and altogether delightful before the elephant came a vast, ubiquitous, imperturbable beast that the doctors called typhoid.

After Muriel died, Coleman took Mickie home to his chambers in Old Buildings, Lincoln's Inn. Mickie was more than a legacy; he was a sacred trust. Coleman had sworn to cherish him when his lovely mistress had been called away to join the headquarters of that angelic host to which she had hitherto belonged as a planetary member. She had appeared to be more concerned about Mickie than about George, at the last. She had not known George so long.

But it was George who cherished her memory. Mickie settled down at once. Within a week Muriel might never have existed, so far as he was concerned. If there was no longer a punt for him, there was a dormer window with a broad, flat seat that served equally well; and in place of migrant swallows there were perennial sparrows.

Coleman was not more sentimental than the average Englishman. At first he was "terribly cut up," as he might have phrased it; but six weeks after Muriel's death the cuts, in normal conditions, would doubtless have cicatrized.

Unhappily, the conditions were anything but normal. The vast bulk of the elephant was between him and any possible road of escape. In this second instance Fate assumed the form of certain mannerisms in Mickie.

He was quite an ordinary fox-terrier, with prickears that had spoiled him for show purposes, but he had lived with Muriel from puppyhood, and all his reactions showed her influence. He had, in fact, all the mannerisms of a spoilt lap-dog. He craved attention he could not bark at the sparrows without turning every few seconds to Coleman for praise and encouragement; he was fussy and restless, on Coleman's lap one minute and up at the window the next; he was noisy and mischievous, and had no sense of shame; when he was reprimanded he jumped up joyfully and tried to lick Coleman's face.

And every one of his foolish tricks was inextricably associated in Coleman's mind with Muriel....

At the end of six weeks Coleman was conscious that he had mourned long enough. He began to feel that it was not healthy for a man of thirty-five to continue in grief for one girl when there were so many others. He decided that the time had come when his awful gloom might melt into resigned sadness. Moreover, a sympathetic young woman he knew, who had a fine figure and tender eyes, had quite noticeably ceased to insist upon the fact that she was

sorry for him. In other circumstances Coleman would have changed his unrelieved tie for one with a faint, white stripe.

But Mickie, cheerful beast as he was, stood between Coleman and half-mourning. Mickie was an awful reminder. Muriel had died, but her personality lived on. Every time Mickie barked Coleman could hear Muriel's clear, happy voice say: "Oh, Mickie, darling, shut up; you'll simply deafen mummy if you bark like that!"

Mickie began to get on Coleman's nerves. Sometimes when he was alone with him in the evening he regarded him with a heart full of evil desires; thoughts of losing him in the country, of selling him to a dog-fancier in Soho, of sending him to live with a married sister in Yorkshire. But that was just the breaking-point with Coleman. He was a shade too sentimental to shirk a sacred trust. Muriel, almost with her "dying breath," had confided Mickie to his keeping; bright, beautiful, happy Muriel who had loved and trusted him. Coleman would have regarded himself as a damned soul if he had been false to that trust.

Then he tried to train Mickie. He might as well have tried to train the dormer window. Mickie was four years old, and long past any possibility of alteration by the methods of Coleman. For he simply could not beat the dog; it would have been too sickeningly like beating Muriel.

His gloom deepened, and the young woman with the tender eyes lost sight of him for days at a time. She had no idea of the true state of the case; she merely thought that he was rather silly to go on making himself miserable about a little feather-brained thing like Muriel Hepworth.

The awful thing happened nearly ten weeks after Muriel's death. For many days Coleman had met no one outside his office routine. Most afternoons and every evening he had been shut up with the wraith of a happy voice which laughingly reproved the unchangeable Mickie. He had begun to imagine foolish things; to try experiments; he had kept away from any sight of those tender eyes for nearly a fortnight, hoping to lay the ghost of that insistent, inaudible voice.

It was a hot July evening, and Mickie was on and off the window-sill every moment, divided between furious contempt for the sparrows and the urgent desire for his master's co-operation and approval.

The voice of Muriel filled the room.

Coleman heaved himself out of his chair with a deep groan and went to the window. Below the sill a few feet of sloping tiles pitched steeply down to a narrow eaves-gutter; below the eaves-gutter was a sheer fall of fifty feet on to a paved court.

Mickie had his fore-feet on the sill; he was barking delightedly now that he had an audience.

The fantastic contortions of the dormer seemed to bend over man and dog; and the evil thing that had come to stay with Coleman crept into his brain and paralysed his will.

He stretched out his hand and gave Mickie a strong push.

Mickie slithered down the tiles, yelped, turned clean round, missed the gutter with his hind feet, but caught it at the last moment with both front paws, and so hung, shrieking desperately, struggling to lift himself back to safety while his whole body hung over the abyss.

For a moment man and dog stared into each other's eyes.

Then the virtue returned to Coleman. He was temporarily heroic. "Hold on, old man, hold on," he said tenderly, and began to work his shoulders down the short length of tiles, while he felt about inside the room with his feet trying to maintain some sort of hook on jamb or window board.

He was a long, thin man, and the feat was not a difficult one; the trouble was that he was too slow over it. For as he gingerly lifted one hand from the tiles to grasp Mickie's neck, the dog gave one last terrified yelp and let go.

Coleman heard the thud of his fall into the court.

He could not summon up courage to go down and gather up the mangled heap he so vividly pictured in his imagination.

That night he believed he was going mad, but he slept well and awoke with a strange sense of relief. He awoke much later than usual; a new and beautiful peace reigned that morning.

Strangely enough, neither his bedmaker nor the porter made any reference to Mickie; and while Coleman wondered at their failure to comment on so remarkable a tragedy, he could not bring himself to ask a question.

All through the day, as he worked at his office, a delicious sense of lightness and freedom exhilarated him. He dined at the Cock in Fleet Street, and when he returned to the exquisite stillness of his chambers he sat down to write to the girl with tender eyes....

He thought he had closed the outer door.

He was enormously startled when he heard a strangely familiar patter of feet behind him.

He did not turn his head; he sat cold and rigid, and his ringers began to pick at the blotting-paper. He sat incredibly still and waited for the next sign.

It came with excruciating suddenness: a shrill, joyful, agonising bark, followed with a new distinctness by the echo of a voice that said: "Oh! Mickie, darling, you'll simply deafen mummy if you bark like that."

He did not move his body, but slowly and reluctantly first his eyes and then his head turned awfully to the window....

The porter told Morley Price that he had not seen Mr. Coleman fall. He thought he heard a dog bark, he said, just like the little terrier as Mr. Coleman'd

been so fond of; and he was surprised because the pore little feller 'ad fallen out o' the self-same winder the night afore, and he 'adn't cared to speak of it to Mr. Coleman knowin' 'ow terrible cut-up 'e'd be about it. ...

THE CHAMBERS have remained unlet ever since.

Morley Price went up there once on a still July evening, and rushed out again with his hands to his ears.

End