
PAST
MASTERS
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Douglas Newton
Carolyn Wells
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Stephen Vincent Benet
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Bram Stoker
and more

PAST MASTERS 221

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

29 May 2025

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1: Hatteras

A. E. W Mason

1865-1948

In: *Ensign Knightley, and other stories*, 1901

THE STORY WAS TOLD TO us by James Walker in the cabin of a seven-ton cutter one night when we lay anchored in Helford river. It was towards the end of September; during this last week the air had grown chilly with the dusk, and the sea when it lost the sun took on a leaden and a dreary look. There was no other boat in the wooded creek and the swish of the tide against the planks had a very lonesome sound. All the circumstances I think provoked Walker to tell the story but most of all the lonely swish of the tide against the planks. For it is the story of a man's loneliness and the strange ways into which loneliness misled him. However, let the story speak for itself.

Hatteras and Walker had been schoolfellows, though never schoolmates. Hatteras indeed was the head of the school, and prophecy vaguely sketched out for him a brilliant career in some service of importance. The definite law, however, that the sins of the fathers shall be visited upon the children, overbore the prophecy. Hatteras, the father, disorganised his son's future by dropping unexpectedly through one of the trap ways of speculation into the bankruptcy court beneath just two months before Hatteras, the son, was to have gone up to Oxford. The lad was therefore compelled to start life in a stony world with a stock in trade which consisted of a school boy's command of the classics, a real inborn gift of tongues and the friendship of James Walker. The last item proved of the most immediate value. For Walker, whose father was the junior partner in a firm of West African merchants, obtained for Hatteras an employment as the bookkeeper at a branch factory in the Bight of Benin.

Thus the friends parted. Hatteras went out to West Africa alone and met with a strange welcome on the day when he landed. The incident did not come to Walker's ears until some time afterwards, nor when he heard of it did he at once appreciate the effect which it had upon Hatteras. But chronologically it comes into the story at this point, and so may as well be immediately told.

There was no settlement very near to the factory. It stood by itself on the swamps of the Forcados river with the mangrove forest closing in about it. Accordingly the captain of the steamer just put Hatteras ashore in a boat and left him with his traps on the beach. Half-a-dozen Kru boys had come down from the factory to receive him, but they could speak no English, and Hatteras at this time could speak no Kru. So that although there was no lack of conversation there was not much interchange of thought. At last Hatteras pointed to his traps. The Kru boys picked them up and preceded Hatteras to the factory. They mounted the steps to the verandah on the first floor and laid their loads down.

Then they proceeded to further conversation. Hatteras gathered from their excited faces and gestures that they wished to impart information, but he could make neither head nor tail of a word they said and at last he retired from the din of their chatter through the windows of a room which gave on the verandah, and sat down to wait for his superior, the agent. It was early in the morning when Hatteras landed and he waited until midday patiently. In the afternoon it occurred to him that the agent would have shown a kindly consideration if he had left a written message or an intelligible Kru boy to receive him. It is true that the blacks came in at intervals and chattered and gesticulated, but matters were not thereby appreciably improved. He did not like to go poking about the house, so he contemplated the mud-banks and the mud-river and the mangrove forest, and cursed the agent. The country was very quiet. There are few things in the world quieter than a West African forest in the daytime. It is obtrusively, emphatically quiet. It does not let you forget how singularly quiet it is. And towards sundown the quietude began to jar on Hatteras' nerves. He was besides very hungry. To while away the time he took a stroll round the verandah.

He walked along the side of the house towards the back, and as he neared the back he head a humming sound. The further he went the louder it grew. It was something like the hum of a mill, only not so metallic and not so loud; and it came from the rear of the house.

Hatteras turned the corner and what he saw was this— a shuttered window and a cloud of flies. The flies were not aimlessly swarming outside the window; they streamed in through the lattices of the shutters in a busy practical way; they came in columns from the forest and converged upon the shutters; and the hum sounded from within the room.

Hatteras looked about for a Kru boy just for the sake of company, but, at that moment there was not one to be seen. He felt the cold strike at his spine, he went back to the room in which he had been sitting. He sat again, but he sat shivering. The agent had left no work for him.... The Kru boys had been anxious to explain something. The humming of the flies about that shuttered window seemed to Hatteras to have more explicit language than the Kru boys' chatterings. He penetrated into the interior of the house, and reckoned up the doors. He opened one of them ever so slightly, and the buzzing came through like the hum of a wheel in a factory, revolving in the collar of a strap. He flung the door open and stood upon the threshold. The atmosphere of the room appalled him; he felt the sweat break cold upon his forehead and a deadly sickness in all his body. Then he nerved himself to enter.

At first he saw little because of the gloom. In a moment, however, he made out a bed stretched along the wall and a thing stretched upon the bed. The thing was more or less shapeless because it was covered with a black, furry sort of rug. Hatteras, however, had little trouble in defining it. He knew now for certain

what it was that the Kru boys had been so anxious to explain to him. He approached the bed and bent over it, and as he bent over it the horrible thing occurred which left so vivid an impression on Hatteras. The black, furry rug suddenly lifted itself from the bed, beat about Hatteras' face, and dissolved into flies. The Kru boys found Hatteras in a dead swoon on the floor half-an-hour later, and next day, of course, he was down with the fever. The agent had died of it three days before.

Hatteras recovered from the fever, but not from the impression. It left him with a prevailing sense of horror and, at first, with a sense of disgust too. "It's a damned obscene country," he would say. But he stayed in it, for he had no choice. All the money which he could save went to the support of his family, and for six years the firm he served moved him from district to district, from factory to factory.

Now the second item in the stock in trade was a gift of tongues and about this time it began to bring him profit. Wherever Hatteras was posted, he managed to pick up a native dialect and with the dialect inevitably a knowledge of native customs. Dialects are numerous on the west coast, and at the end of six years, Hatteras could speak as many of them as some traders could enumerate. Languages ran in his blood; because he acquired a reputation for knowledge and was offered service under the Niger Protectorate, so that when two years later, Walker came out to Africa to open a new branch factory at a settlement on the Bonny river, he found Hatteras stationed in command there.

Hatteras, in fact, went down to Bonny river town to meet the steamer which brought his friend.

"I say, Dick, you look bad," said Walker.

"People aren't, as a rule, offensively robust about these parts."

"I know that; but your the weariest bag of bones I've ever seen."

"Well, look at yourself in a glass a year from now for my double," said Hatteras, and the pair went up river together.

"Your factory's next to the Residency," said Hatteras. "There's a compound to each running down to the river, and there's a palisade between the compounds. I've cut a little gate in the palisade as it will shorten the way from one house to the other."

The wicket gate was frequently used during the next few months—indeed, more frequently than Walker imagined. He was only aware that, when they were both at home, Hatteras would come through it of an evening and smoke on his verandah. Then he would sit for hours cursing the country, raving about the lights in Piccadilly-circus, and offering his immortal soul in exchange for a comic-opera tune played upon a barrel-organ. Walker possessed a big atlas, and one of Hatteras' chief diversions was to trace with his finger a bee-line across the African continent and the Bay of Biscay until he reached London.

More rarely Walker would stroll over to the Residency, but he soon came to notice that Hatteras had a distinct preference for the factory and for the factory verandah. The reason for the preference puzzled Walker considerably. He drew a quite erroneous conclusion that Hatteras was hiding at the Residency— well, some one whom it was prudent, especially in an official, to conceal. He abandoned the conclusion, however, when he discovered that his friend was in the habit of making solitary expeditions. At times Hatteras would be absent for a couple of days, at times for a week, and, so far as Walker could ascertain, he never so much as took a servant with him to keep him company. He would simply announce at night his intended departure, and in the morning he would be gone. Nor on his return did he ever offer to Walker any explanation of his journeys. On one occasion, however, Walker broached the subject. Hatteras had come back the night before, and he sat crouched up in a deck chair, looking intently into the darkness of the forest.

"I say," asked Walker, "isn't it rather dangerous to go slumming about West Africa alone?"

Hatteras did not reply for a moment. He seemed not to have heard the suggestion, and when he did speak it was to ask a quite irrelevant question.

"Have you ever seen the Horse Guards' Parade on a dark, rainy night?" he asked; but he never moved his head, he never took his eyes from the forest. "The wet level of ground looks just like a lagoon and the arches a Venice palace above it."

"But look here, Dick!" said Walker, keeping to his subject. "You never leave word when you are coming back. One never knows that you have come back until you show yourself the morning after."

"I think," said Hatteras slowly, "that the finest sight in the world is to be seen from the bridge in St. James's Park when there's a State ball on at Buckingham Palace and the light from the windows reddens the lake and the carriages glance about the Mall like fireflies."

"Even your servants don't know when you come back," said Walker.

"Oh," said Hatteras quietly, "so you have been asking questions of my servants?"

"I had a good reason," replied Walker, "your safety," and with that the conversation dropped.

Walker watched Hatteras. Hatteras watched the forest. A West African mangrove forest at night is full of the eeriest, queerest sounds that ever a man's ears harkened to. And the sounds come not so much from the birds, or the soughing of the branches; they seem to come from the swamp life underneath the branches, at the roots of trees. There's a ceaseless stir as of a myriad of reptiles creeping in the slime. Listen long enough and you will fancy that you hear the whirr and rush of innumerable crabs, the flapping of innumerable fish.

Now and again a more distinctive sound emerges from the rest—the croaking of a bull-frog, the whining cough of a crocodile. At such sounds Hatteras would start up in his chair and cock his head like a dog in a room that hears another dog barking in the street.

"Doesn't it sound damned wicked?" he said, with a queer smile of enjoyment.

Walker did not answer. The light from a lamp in the room behind them struck obliquely upon Hatteras' face and slanted off from it in a narrowing column until it vanished in a yellow thread among the leaves of the trees. It showed that the same enjoyment which ran in Hatteras' voice was alive upon his face. His eyes, his ears, were alert, and he gently opened and shut his mouth with a little clicking of the teeth. In some horrible way he seemed to have something in common with, he appeared almost to participate in, the activity of the swamp. Thus, had Walker often seen him sit, but never with the light so clear upon his face, and the sight gave to him a quite new impression of his friend. He wondered whether all these months his judgment had been wrong. And out of that wonder a new thought sprang into his mind.

"Dick," he said, "this house of mine stands between your house and the forest. It stands on the borders of the trees, on the edge of the swamp. Is that why you always prefer it to your own?"

Hatteras turned his head quickly towards his companion, almost suspiciously. Then he looked back into the darkness, and after a little he said:—

"It's not only the things you care about, old man, which tug at you, it's the things you hate as well. I hate this country. I hate these miles and miles of mangroves, and yet I am fascinated. I can't get the forest and the undergrowth out of my mind. I dream of them at nights. I dream that I am sinking into that black oily batter of mud. Listen," and he suddenly broke off with his head stretched forwards. "Doesn't it sound wicked?"

"But all this talk about London?" cried Walker.

"Oh, don't you understand?" interrupted Hatteras roughly. Then he changed his tone and gave his reason. "One has to struggle against a fascination of that sort. It's devil's work. So for all I am worth I talk about London."

"Look here, Dick," said Walker. "You had better get leave and go back to the old country for a spell."

"A very solid piece of advice," said Hatteras, and he went home to the Residency.

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2: The Human Element

Arthur Train

1875-1945

Collected in: *Tutt and Mr. Tutt*, 1920

Tutt and Mr Tutt, shrewd New York lawyers, featured in three volumes of short stories by Arthur Train, himself a New York lawyer and former District Attorney. This is the first story.

ALTHOUGH men flatter themselves with their great actions, they are not so often the result of great design as of chance.— LA ROCHEFOUCAULD.

"HE SAYS he killed him, and that's all there is about it!" said Tutt to Mr. Tutt. "What are you going to do with a fellow like that?" The junior partner of the celebrated firm of Tutt & Tutt, attorneys and counselors at law, thrust his hands deep into the pockets of his yellow checked breeches and, balancing himself upon the heels of his patent-leather boots, gazed in a distressed, respectfully inquiring manner at his distinguished associate.

"Yes," he repeated plaintively. "He don't make any bones about it at all. 'Sure, I killed him!' says he. 'And I'd kill him again, the ——!' I prefer not to quote his exact language. I've just come from the Tombs and had quite a talk with Serafino in the counsel room, with a gum-chewing keeper sitting in the corner watching me for fear I'd slip his prisoner a saw file or a shotgun or a barrel of poison. I'm all in! These murder cases drive me to drink, Mr. Tutt. I don't mind grand larceny, forgery, assault or even manslaughter— but murder gets my goat! And when you have a crazy Italian for a client who says he's glad he did it and would like to do it again— please excuse me! It isn't law; it's suicide!"

He drew out a silk handkerchief ornamented with the colors of the Allies, and wiped his forehead despairingly.

"Oh," remarked Mr. Tutt with entire good nature. "He's glad he did it and he's quite willing to be hanged!"

"That's it in a nutshell!" replied Tutt.

The senior partner of Tutt & Tutt ran his bony fingers through the lank gray locks over his left eye and tilted ceilingward the stogy between his thin lips. Then he leaned back in his antique swivel chair, locked his hands behind his head, elevated his long legs luxuriously, and crossed his feet upon the fourth volume of the *American and English Encyclopedia of Law*, which lay open upon the desk at Champerty and Maintenance. Even in this inelegant and relaxed posture he somehow managed to maintain the air of picturesque dignity which always made his tall, ungainly figure noticeable in any courtroom. Indubitably Mr. Ephraim Tutt suggested a past generation, the suggestion being accentuated by a slight pedantry of diction a trifle out of character with the rushing age in which he saw fit to practise his time-honored profession. "Cheer

up, Tutt," said he, pushing a box of stogies toward his partner with the toe of his congress boot. "Have a weed?"

Since in the office of Tutt & Tutt such an invitation like those of royalty, was equivalent to a command, Tutt acquiesced.

"Thank you, Mr. Tutt," said Tutt, looking about vaguely for a match.

"That conscienceless brat of a Willie steals 'em all," growled Mr. Tutt. "Ring the bell."

Tutt obeyed. He was a short, brisk little man with a pronounced abdominal convexity, and he maintained toward his superior, though but a few years his junior, a mingled attitude of awe, admiration and affection such as a dickey bird might adopt toward a distinguished owl.

This attitude was shared by the entire office force. Inside the ground glass of the outer door Ephraim Tutt was king. To Tutt the opinion of Mr. Tutt upon any subject whatsoever was law, even if the courts might have held to the contrary. To Tutt he was the eternal fount of wisdom, culture and morality. Yet until Mr. Tutt finally elucidated his views Tutt did not hesitate to hold conditional if temporary opinions of his own. Briefly their relations were symbolized by the circumstance that while Tutt always addressed his senior partner as "Mr. Tutt," the latter accosted him simply as "Tutt." In a word there was only one Mr. Tutt in the firm of Tutt & Tutt.

But so far as that went there was only one Tutt. On the theory that a lily cannot be painted, the estate of one seemingly was as dignified as that of the other. At any rate there never was and never had been any confusion or ambiguity arising out of the matter since the day, twenty years before, when Tutt had visited Mr. Tutt's law office in search of employment. Mr. Tutt was just rising into fame as a police-court lawyer. Tutt had only recently been admitted to the bar, having abandoned his native city of Bangor, Maine, for the metropolis.

"And may I ask why you should come to me?" Mr. Tutt had demanded severely from behind the stogy, which even at that early date had been as much a part of his facial anatomy as his long ruminative nose. "Why the devil should you come to me? I am nobody, sir— nobody! In this great city certainly there are thousands far more qualified than I to further your professional and financial advancement."

"Because," answered the inspired Tutt with modesty, "I feel that with you I should be associated with a good name."

That had settled the matter. They bore no relationship to one another, but they were the only Tutts in the city and there seemed to be a certain propriety in their hanging together. Neither had regretted it for a moment, and as the years passed they became indispensable to each other. They were the necessary component parts of a harmonious legal whole. Mr. Tutt was the brains and the

voice, while Tutt was the eyes and legs of a combination that at intervals— rare ones, it must be confessed— made the law tremble, sometimes in fear and more often with joy.

At first, speaking figuratively, Tutt merely carried Mr. Tutt's bag— rode on his coat tails, as it were; but as time went on his activity, ingenuity and industry made him indispensable and led to a junior partnership. Tutt prepared the cases for Mr. Tutt to try. Both were well versed in the law if they were not profound lawyers, but as the origin of the firm was humble, their practise was of a miscellaneous character.

"Never turn down a case," was Tutt's motto.

"Our duty as sworn officers of the judicial branch of the Government renders it incumbent upon us to perform whatever services our clients' exigencies demand," was Mr. Tutt's way of putting it.

In the end it amounted to exactly the same thing. As a result, in addition to their own clientele, other members of the bar who found themselves encumbered with matters which for one reason or another they preferred not to handle formed the habit of turning them over to Tutt & Tutt. A never-ending stream of peculiar cases flowed through the office, each leaving behind it some residuum of golden dust, however small. The stately or, as an unkind observer might have put it, the ramshackly form of the senior partner was a constant figure in all the courts, from that of the coroner on the one hand to the appellate tribunals upon the other. It was immaterial to him what the case was about— whether it dealt with the "next eventual estate" or the damages for a dog bite— so long as he was paid and Tutt prepared it. Hence Tutt & Tutt prospered. And as the law, like any other profession requires jacks- of- all-trades, the firm acquired a certain peculiar professional standing of its own, and enjoyed the good will of the bar as a whole.

They had the reputation of being sound lawyers if not overafflicted with a sense of professional dignity, whose word was better than their bond, yet who, faithful to their clients' interests knew no mercy and gave no quarter. They took and pressed cases which other lawyers dared not touch lest they should be defiled— and nobody seemed to think any the less of them for so doing. They raised points that made the refinements of the ancient schoolmen seem blunt in comparison. No respecters of persons, they harried the rich and taunted the powerful, and would have as soon jailed a bishop or a judge as a pickpocket if he deserved it. Between them they knew more kinds of law than most of their professional brethren, and as Mr. Tutt was a bookworm and a seeker after legal and other lore their dusty old library was full of hidden treasures, which on frequent occasions were unearthed to entertain the jury or delight the bench. They were loyal friends, fearsome enemies, high chargers, and maintained their unique position in spite of the fact that at one time or another they had run

close to the shadowy line which divides the ethical from that which is not. Yet Mr. Tutt had brought disbarment proceedings against many lawyers in his time and— what is more— had them disbarred.

"Leave old Tutt alone," was held sage advice, and when other lawyers desired to entertain the judiciary they were apt to invite Mr. Tutt to be of the party. And Tutt gloried in the glories of Mr. Tutt.

"That's it!" repeated Tutt as he lit his stogy, which flared up like a burning bush, the cub of a Willie having foraged successfully in the outer office for a match. "He's willing to be hanged or damned or anything else just for the sake of putting a bullet through the other fellow!"

"What was the name of the unfortunate deceased?"

"Tomasso Crocedoro— a barber."

"That is almost a defense in itself," mused Mr. Tutt. "Anyhow, if I've got to defend Angelo for shooting Tomasso you might as well give me a short scenario of the melodrama. By the way, are we retained or assigned by the court?"

"Assigned," chirped Tutt.

"So that all we'll get out of it is about enough to keep me in stogies for a couple of months!"

"And— if he's convicted, as of course he will be— a good chance of losing our reputation as successful trial counsel. Why not beg off?"

"Let me hear the story first," answered Mr. Tutt. "Angelo sounds like a good sport. I have a mild affection for him already."

He reached into the lower compartment of his desk and lifted out a tumbler and a bottle of malt extract, which he placed carefully at his elbow. Then he leaned back again expectantly.

"It is a simple and naive story," began Tutt, seating himself in the chair reserved for paying clients— that is to say, one which did not have the two front legs sawed off an inch or so in order to make lingering uncomfortable. "A plain, unvarnished tale. Our client is one who makes an honest living by blacking shoes near the entrance to the Brooklyn Bridge. He is one of several hundred original Tonys who conduct shoe-shining emporiums."

"Emporia," corrected his partner, pouring out a tumbler of malt extract.

"He formed an attachment for a certain young lady," went on Tutt, undisturbed, "who had previously had some sort of love affair with Crocedoro, as a result of which her social standing had become slightly impaired. In a word Tomasso jilted her. Angelo saw, pitied and loved her, took her for better or for worse, and married her."

"For which," interjected Mr. Tutt, "he is entitled to everyone's respect."

"Quite so!" agreed Tutt. "Now Tomasso, though not willing to marry the girl himself, seems to have resented the idea of having anyone else do so, and

accordingly seized every opportunity which presented itself to twit Angelo about the matter."

"Dog in the manger, so to speak," nodded Mr. Tutt.

"He not only jeered at Angelo for marrying Rosalina but he began to hang about his discarded mistress again and scoff at her choice of a husband. But Rosalina gave him the cold shoulder, with the result that he became more and more insulting to Angelo. Finally one day our client made up his mind not to stand it any longer, secured a revolver, sought out Tomasso in his barber shop and put a bullet through his head. Now however much you may sympathize with Angelo as a man and a husband there isn't the slightest doubt that he killed Tomasso with every kind of deliberation and premeditation."

"If the case is as you say," replied Mr. Tutt, replacing the bottle and tumbler within the lower drawer and flicking a stogy ash from his waistcoat, "the honorable justice who handed it to us is no friend of ours."

"He isn't," assented his partner. "It was Babson and he hates Italians. Moreover, he stated in open court that he proposed to try the case himself next Monday and that we must be ready without fail."

"So Babson did that to us!" growled Mr. Tutt. "Just like him. He'll pack the jury and charge our innocent Angelo into the middle of hades."

"And O'Brien is the assistant district attorney in charge of the prosecution," mildly added Tutt. "But what can we do? We're assigned, we've got a guilty client, and we've got to defend him."

"Have you set Bonnie Doon looking up witnesses?" asked Mr. Tutt. "I thought I saw him outside during the forenoon."

"Yes," replied Tutt. "But Bonnie says it's the toughest case he ever had to handle in which to find any witnesses for the defense. There aren't any. Besides, the girl bought the gun and gave it to Angelo the same day."

"How do you know that?" demanded Mr. Tutt, frowning.

"Because she told me so herself," said Tutt. "She's outside if you want to see her."

"I might as well give her what you call 'the once over,'" replied the senior partner.

Tutt retired and presently returned half leading, half pushing a shrinking young Italian woman, shabbily dressed but with the features of one of Raphael's madonnas. She wore no hat and her hands and finger nails were far from clean, but from the folds of her black shawl her neck rose like a column of slightly discolored Carrara marble, upon which her head with its coils of heavy hair was poised with the grace of a sulky empress.

"Come in, my child, and sit down," said Mr. Tutt kindly. "No, not in that one; in that one." He indicated the chair previously occupied by his junior. "You can leave us, Tutt. I want to talk to this young lady alone."

The girl sat sullenly with averted face, showing in her attitude her instinctive feeling that all officers of the law, no matter upon which side they were supposed to be, were one and all engaged in a mysterious conspiracy of which she and her unfortunate Angelo were the victims. A few words from the old lawyer and she began to feel more confidence, however. No one, in fact, could help but realize at first glance Mr. Tutt's warmth of heart. The lines of his sunken cheeks if left to themselves automatically tended to draw together into a whimsical smile, and it required a positive act of will upon his part to adopt the stern and relentless look with which he was wont to glower down upon some unfortunate witness in cross-examination.

Inside Mr. Tutt was a benign and rather mellow old fellow, with a dry sense of humor and a very keen knowledge of his fellow men. He made a good deal of money, but not having any wife or child upon which to lavish it he spent it all either on books or surreptitiously in quixotic gifts to friends or strangers whom he either secretly admired or whom he believed to be in need of money. There were vague traditions in the office of presents of bizarre and quite impossible clothes made to office boys and stenographers; of ex-convicts reoutfitted and sent rejoicing to foreign parts; of tramps gorged to repletion and then pumped dry of their adventures in Mr. Tutt's comfortable, dingy old library; of a fur coat suddenly clapped upon the rounded shoulders of old Scraggs, the antiquated scrivener in the accountant's cage in the outer office, whose alcoholic career, his employer alleged, was marked by a trail of empty rum kegs, each one flying the white flag of surrender.

And yet old Ephraim Tutt could on occasion be cold as chiseled steel, and as hard. Any appeal from a child, a woman or an outcast always met with his ready response; but for the rich, successful and those in power he seemed to entertain a deep and enduring grudge. He would burn the midnight oil with equal zest to block a crooked deal on the part of a wealthy corporation or to devise a means to extricate some no less crooked rascal from the clutches of the law, provided that the rascal seemed the victim of hard luck, inheritance or environment. His weather-beaten conscience was as elastic as his heart. Indeed when under the expansive influence of a sufficient quantity of malt extract or ancient brandy from the cellaret on his library desk he had sometimes been heard to enunciate the theory that there was very little difference between the people in jail and those who were not.

He would work weeks without compensation to argue the case of some guilty rogue before the Court of Appeals, in order, as he said, to "settle the law," when his only real object was to get the miserable fellow out of jail and send him back to his wife and children. He went through life with a twinkling eye and a quizzical smile, and when he did wrong he did it— if such a thing is possible— in a way to make people better. He was a dangerous adversary and judges were

afraid of him, not because he ever tricked or deceived them but because of the audacity and novelty of his arguments which left them speechless. He had the assurance that usually comes with age and with a lifelong knowledge of human nature, yet apparently he had always been possessed of it.

Once a judge having assigned him to look out for the interests of a lawyerless prisoner suggested that he take his new client into the adjoining jury room and give him the best advice he could. Mr. Tutt was gone so long that the judge became weary, and to find out what had become of him sent an officer, who found the lawyer reading a newspaper beside an open window, but no sign of the prisoner. In great excitement the officer reported the situation to the judge, who ordered Mr. Tutt to the bar.

"What has become of the prisoner?" demanded His Honor.

"I do not know," replied the lawyer calmly. "The window was open and I suspect that he used it as a means of exit."

"Are you not aware that you are a party to an escape— a crime?" hotly challenged the judge.

"I most respectfully deny the charge," returned Mr. Tutt.

"I told you to take the prisoner into that room and give him the best advice you could."

"I did!" interjected the lawyer.

"Ah!" exclaimed the judge. "You admit it! What advice did you give him?"

"The law does not permit me to state that," answered Mr. Tutt in his most dignified tones. "That is a privileged communication from the inviolate obligation to preserve which only my client can release me— I cannot betray a sacred trust. Yet I might quote Cervantes and remind Your Honor that 'Fortune leaves always some door open to come at a remedy!'"

Now as he gazed at the tear-stained cheeks of the girl-wife whose husband had committed murder in defense of her self-respect, he vowed that so far as he was able he would fight to save him. The more desperate the case the more desperate her need of him— the greater the duty and the greater his honor if successful.

"Believe that I am your friend, my dear!" he assured her. "You and I must work together to set Angelo free."

"It's no use," she returned less defiantly. "He done it. He won't deny it."

"But he is entitled to his defense," urged Mr. Tutt quietly.

"He won't make no defense."

"We must make one for him."

"There ain't none. He just went and killed him."

Mr. Tutt shrugged his shoulders.

"There is always a defense," he answered with conviction. "Anyhow we can't let him be convicted without making an effort. Will they be able to prove where he got the pistol?"

"He didn't get the pistol," retorted the girl with a glint in her black eyes. "I got it. I'd ha' shot him myself if he hadn't. I said I was goin' to, but he wouldn't let me."

"Dear, dear!" sighed Mr. Tutt. "What a case! Both of you trying to see which could get hanged first!"

THE INEVITABLE day of Angelo's trial came. Upon the bench the Honorable Mr. Justice Babson glowered down upon the cowering defendant flanked by his distinguished counsel, Tutt & Tutt, and upon the two hundred good and true talesmen who, "all other business laid aside," had been dragged from the comfort of their homes and the important affairs of their various livelihoods to pass upon the merits of the issue duly joined between The People of the State of New York and Angelo Serafino, charged with murder.

One by one as his name was called each took his seat in the witness chair upon the *voir dire* and perjured himself like a gentleman in order to escape from service, shyly confessing to an ineradicable prejudice against the entire Italian race and this defendant in particular, and to an antipathy against capital punishment which, so each unhesitatingly averred, would render him utterly incapable of satisfactorily performing his functions if selected as a juryman. Hardly one, however, but was routed by the Machiavellian Babson. Hardly one, however ingenious his excuse— whether about to be married or immediately become a father, whether engaged in a business deal involving millions which required his instant and personal attention whether in the last stages of illness or obligated to be present at the bedside of a dying wife— but was browbeaten into helplessness and ordered back to take his place amidst the waiting throng of recalcitrant citizens so disinclined to do their part in elevating that system of trial by jury the failure of which at other times they so loudly condemned.

This trifling preliminary having been concluded, the few jurymen who had managed to wriggle through the judicial sieve were allowed to withdraw, the balance of the calendar was adjourned, those spectators who were standing up were ordered to sit down and those already sitting down were ordered to sit somewhere else, the prisoners in the rear of the room were sent back to the Tombs to await their fate upon some later day, the reporters gathered rapaciously about the table just behind the defendant, a corpulent Ganymede in the person of an aged court officer bore tremblingly an opaque glass of yellow drinking water to the bench, O'Brien the prosecutor blew his nose with a fanfare of trumpets, Mr. Tutt smiled an ingratiating smile which seemed to clasp the whole world to his bosom— and the real battle commenced; a game in which

every card in the pack had been stacked against the prisoner by an unscrupulous pair of officials whose only aim was to maintain their record of convictions of "murder in the first" and who laid their plans with ingenuity and carried them out with skill and enthusiasm to habitual success.

They were a grand little pair of convictors, were Babson and O'Brien, and woe unto that man who was brought before them. It was even alleged by the impious that when Babson was in doubt what to do or what O'Brien wanted him to do the latter communicated the information to his conspirator upon the bench by a system of preconcerted signals. But indeed no such system was necessary, for the judge's part in the drama was merely to sustain his colleague's objections and overrule those of his opponent, after which he himself delivered the *coup de grace* with unerring insight and accuracy. When Babson got through charging a jury the latter had always in fact been instructed in brutal and sneering tones to convict the defendant or forever after to regard themselves as disloyal citizens, oath violators and outcasts though the stenographic record of his remarks would have led the reader thereof to suppose that this same judge was a conscientious, tender-hearted merciful lover of humanity, whose sensitive soul quivered at the mere thought of a prison cell, and who meticulously sought to surround the defendant with every protection the law could interpose against the imputation of guilt.

He was, as Tutt put it, "a dangerous old cuss." O'Brien was even worse. He was a bull-necked, bullet-headed, pugnosed young ruffian with beery eyes, who had an insatiable ambition and a still greater conceit, but who had devised a blundering, innocent, helpless way of conducting himself before a jury that deceived them into believing that his inexperience required their help and his disinterestedness their loyal support. Both of them were apparently fair-minded, honest public servants; both in reality were subtly disingenuous to a degree beyond ordinary comprehension, for years of practise had made them sensitive to every whimsy of emotion and taught them how to play upon the psychology of the jury as the careless zephyr softly draws its melody from the aeolian harp. In a word they were a precious pair of crooks, who for their own petty selfish ends played fast and loose with liberty, life and death.

Both of them hated Mr. Tutt, who had more than once made them ridiculous before the jury and shown them up before the Court of Appeals, and the old lawyer recognized well the fact that these two legal wolves were in revenge planning to tear him and his helpless client to pieces, having first deliberately selected him as a victim and assigned him to officiate at a ceremony which, however just so far as its consummation might be concerned, was nothing less in its conduct than judicial murder. Now they were laughing at him in their sleeves, for Mr. Tutt enjoyed the reputation of never having defended a

client who had been convicted of murder, and that spotless reputation was about to be annihilated forever.

Though the defense had thirty peremptory challenges Mr. Tutt well knew that Babson would sustain the prosecutor's objections for bias until the jury box would contain the twelve automata personally selected by O'Brien in advance from what Tutt called "the army of the gibbet." Yet the old war horse outwardly maintained a calm and genial exterior, betraying none of the apprehension which in fact existed beneath his mask of professional composure. The court officer rapped sharply for silence.

"Are you quite ready to proceed with the case?" inquired the judge with a courtesy in which was ill concealed a leer of triumph.

"Yes, Your Honor," responded Mr. Tutt in velvet tones.

"Call the first talesman!"

The fight was on, the professional duel between traditional enemies, in which the stake— a human life— was in truth the thing of least concern, had begun. Yet no casual observer would have suspected the actual significance of what was going on or the part that envy, malice, uncharitableness, greed, selfishness and ambition were playing in it. He would have seen merely a partially filled courtroom flooded with sunshine from high windows, an attentive and dignified judge in a black silk robe sitting upon a dais below which a white-haired clerk drew little slips of paper from a wheel and summoned jurymen to a service which outwardly bore no suggestion of a tragedy.

He would have seen a somewhat unprepossessing assistant district attorney lounging in front of the jury box, taking apparently no great interest in the proceedings, and a worried-looking young Italian sitting at the prisoner's table between a rubicund little man with a round red face and a tall, grave, longish-haired lawyer with a frame not unlike that of Abraham Lincoln, over whose wrinkled face played from time to time the suggestion of a smile. Behind a balustrade were the reporters, scribbling on rough sheets of yellow paper. Then came rows of benches, upon the first of which, as near the jury box as possible, sat Rosalina in a new bombazine dress and wearing a large imitation gold cross furnished for the occasion out of the legal property room of Tutt & Tutt. Occasionally she sobbed softly. The bulk of the spectators consisted of rejected talesmen, witnesses, law clerks, professional court loafers and women seeking emotional sensations which they had not the courage or the means to satisfy otherwise. The courtroom was comparatively quiet, the silence broken only by the droning voice of the clerk and the lazy interplay of question and answer between talesman and lawyer.

Yet beneath the humdrum, casual, almost indifferent manner in which the proceedings seemed to be conducted each side was watching every move made by the other with the tension of a tiger ready to spring upon its prey. Babson

and O'Brien were engaged in forcing upon the defense a jury composed entirely of case-hardened convictors, while Tutt & Tutt were fighting desperately to secure one so heterogeneous in character that they could hope for a disagreement.

By recess thirty-seven talesmen had been examined without a foreman having been selected, and Mr. Tutt had exhausted twenty-nine of his thirty challenges, as against three for the prosecution. The court reconvened and a new talesman was called, resembling in appearance a professional hangman who for relaxation leaned toward the execution of Italians. Mr. Tutt examined him for bias and every known form of incompetency, but in vain— then challenged peremptorily. Thirty challenges! He looked on Tutt with slightly raised eyebrows.

"Patrick Henry Walsh— to the witness chair, please, Mr. Walsh!" called the clerk, drawing another slip from the box.

Mr. Walsh rose and came forward heavily, while Tutt & Tutt trembled. He was the one man they were afraid of— an old-timer celebrated as a bulwark of the prosecution, who could always be safely counted upon to uphold the arms of the law, who regarded with reverence all officials connected with the administration of justice, and from whose composition all human emotions had been carefully excluded by the Creator. He was a square-jawed, severe, heavily built person, with a long relentless upper lip, cheeks ruddy from the open air; engaged in the contracting business; and he had a brogue that would have charmed a mavis off a tree. Mr. Tutt looked hopelessly at Tutt.

Babson and O'Brien had won.

Once more Mr. Tutt struggled against his fate. Was Mr. Walsh sure he had no prejudices against Italians or foreigners generally? Quite. Did he know anyone connected with the case? No. Had he any objection to the infliction of capital punishment? None whatever. The defense had exhausted all its challenges. Mr. Tutt turned to the prospective foreman with an endearing smile.

"Mr. Walsh," said he in caressing tones, "you are precisely the type of man in whom I feel the utmost confidence in submitting the fate of my client. I believe that you will make an ideal foreman I hardly need to ask you whether you will accord the defendant the benefit of every reasonable doubt, and if you have such a doubt will acquit him."

Mr. Walsh gazed suspiciously at Mr. Tutt.

"Sure," he responded dryly, "Oi'll give him the benefit o' the doubt, but if Oi think he's guilty Oi'll convict him."

Mr. Tutt shivered.

"Of course! Of course! That would be your duty! You are entirely satisfactory, Mr. Walsh!"

"Mr. Walsh is more than satisfactory to the prosecution!" intoned O'Brien.

"Be sworn, Mr. Walsh," directed the clerk; and the filling of the jury box in the memorable case of People versus Serafino was begun.

"That chap doesn't like us," whispered Mr. Tutt to Tutt. "I laid it on a bit too thick."

In fact, Mr. Walsh had already entered upon friendly relations with Mr. O'Brien, and as the latter helped him arrange a place for his hat and coat the foreman cast a look tinged with malevolence at the defendant and his counsel, as if to say "You can't fool me. I know the kind of tricks you fellows are all up to."

O'Brien could not repress a grin. The clerk drew forth another name.

"Mr. Tompkins— will you take the chair?"

Swiftly the jury was impaneled. O'Brien challenged everybody who did not suit his fancy, while Tutt & Tutt sat helpless.

Ten minutes and the clerk called the roll, beginning with Mr. Walsh, and they were solemnly sworn a true verdict to find, and settled themselves to the task.

The mills of the gods had begun to grind, and Angelo was being dragged to his fate as inexorably and as surely, with about as much chance of escape, as a log that is being drawn slowly toward a buzz saw.

"You may open the case, Mr. O'Brien," announced Judge Babson, leaning back and wiping his glasses.

Then surreptitiously he began to read his mail as his fellow conspirator undertook to tell the jury what it was all about. One by one the witnesses were called— the coroner's physician, the policeman who had arrested Angelo outside the barber shop with the smoking pistol in his hand, the assistant barber who had seen the shooting, the customer who was being shaved. Each drove a spike into poor Angelo's legal coffin. Mr. Tutt could not shake them. This evidence was plain. He had come into the shop, accused Crocedoro of making his wife's life unbearable and— shot him.

Yet Mr. Tutt did not lose any of his equanimity. With the tips of his long fingers held lightly together in front of him, and swaying slightly backward and forward upon the balls of his feet, he smiled benignly down upon the customer and the barber's assistant as if these witnesses were merely unfortunate in not being able to disclose to the jury all the facts. His manner indicated that a mysterious and untold tragedy lay behind what they had heard, a tragedy pregnant with primordial vital passions, involving the most sacred of human relationships, which when known would rouse the spirit of chivalry of the entire panel.

On cross-examination the barber testified that Angelo had said: "You maka small of my wife long enough!"

"Ah!" murmured Mr. Tutt, waving an arm in the direction of Rosalina. Did the witness recognize the defendant's young wife? The jury showed interest and

examined the sobbing Rosalina with approval. Yes, the witness recognized her. Did the witness know to what incident or incidents the defendant had referred by his remark— what the deceased Crocedoro had done to Rosalina— if anything? No, the witness did not. Mr. Tutt looked significantly at the row of faces in the jury box.

Then leaning forward he asked significantly: "Did you see Crocedoro threaten the defendant with his razor?"

"I object!" shouted O'Brien, springing to his feet. "The question is improper. There is no suggestion that Crocedoro did anything. The defendant can testify to that if he wants to!"

"Oh, let him answer!" drawled the judge.

"No— " began the witness.

"Ah!" cried Mr. Tutt. "You did not see Crocedoro threaten the defendant with his razor! That will do!"

But forewarned by this trifling experience, Mr. O'Brien induced the customer, the next witness, to swear that Crocedoro had not in fact made any move whatever with his razor toward Angelo, who had deliberately raised his pistol and shot him.

Mr. Tutt rose to the cross-examination with the same urbanity as before. Where was the witness standing? The witness said he wasn't standing. Well, where was he sitting, then? In the chair.

"Ah!" exclaimed Mr. Tutt triumphantly. "Then you had your back to the shooting!"

In a moment O'Brien had the witness practically rescued by the explanation that he had seen the whole thing in the glass in front of him. The firm of Tutt & Tutt uttered in chorus a groan of outraged incredulity. Several jurymen were seen to wrinkle their foreheads in meditation. Mr. Tutt had sown a tiny— infinitesimally tiny, to be sure— seed of doubt, not as to the killing at all but as to the complete veracity of the witness.

And then O'Brien made his coup.

"Rosalina Serafino— take the witness stand!" he ordered.

He would get from her own lips the admission that she bought the pistol and gave it to Angelo!

But with an outburst of indignation that would have done credit to the elder Booth Mr. Tutt was immediately on his feet protesting against the outrage, the barbarity, the heartlessness, the illegality of making a wife testify against her husband! His eyes flashed, his disordered locks waved in picturesque synchronization with his impassioned gestures Rosalina, her beautiful golden cross rising and falling hysterically upon her bosom, took her seat in the witness chair like a frightened, furtive creature of the woods, gazed for one brief instant

upon the twelve men in the jury box with those great black eyes of hers, and then with burning cheeks buried her face in her handkerchief.

"I protest against this piece of cruelty!" cried Mr. Tutt in a voice vibrating with indignation. "This is worthy of the Inquisition. Will not even the cross upon her breast protect her from being compelled to reveal those secrets that are sacred to wife and motherhood? Can the law thus indirectly tear the seal of confidence from the Confessional? Mr. O'Brien, you go too far! There are some things that even you— brilliant as you are— may not trifle with."

A juryman nodded. The eleven others, being more intelligent, failed to understand what he was talking about.

"Mr. Tutt's objection is sound— if he wishes to press it," remarked the judge satirically. "You may step down, madam. The law will not compel a wife to testify against her husband. Have you any more witnesses, Mister District Attorney?"

"The People rest," said Mr. O'Brien. "The case is with the defense."

Mr. Tutt rose with solemnity.

"The court will, I suppose, grant me a moment or two to confer with my client?" he inquired. Babson bowed and the jury saw the lawyer lean across the defendant and engage his partner in what seemed to be a weighty deliberation.

"I killa him! I say so!" muttered Angelo feebly to Mr. Tutt.

"Shut up, you fool!" hissed Tutt, grabbing him by the leg. "Keep still or I'll wring your neck."

"If I could reach that old crook up on the bench I would twist his nose," remarked Mr. Tutt to Tutt with an air of consulting him about the Year Books. "And as for that criminal O'Brien, I'll get him yet!"

With great dignity Mr. Tutt then rose and again addressed the court:

"We have decided under all the circumstances of this most extraordinary case, Your Honor, not to put in any defense. I shall not call the defendant— "

"I killa him— " began Angelo, breaking loose from Tutt and struggling to his feet. It was a horrible movement. But Tutt clapped his hand over Angelo's mouth and forced him back into his seat.

"The defense rests," said Mr. Tutt, ignoring the interruption. "So far as we are concerned the case is closed."

"Both sides rest!" snapped Babson. "How long do you want to sum up?"

Mr. Tutt looked at the clock, which pointed to three. The regular hour of adjournment was at four. Delay was everything in a case like this. A juryman might die suddenly overnight or fall grievously ill; or some legal accident might occur which would necessitate declaring a mistrial. There is, always hope in a criminal case so long as the verdict has not actually been returned and the jury polled and discharged. If possible he must drag his summing up over until the following day. Something might happen.

"About two hours, Your Honor," he replied.

The jury stirred impatiently. It was clear that they regarded a two-hour speech from him under the circumstances as an imposition. But Babson wished to preserve the fiction of impartiality.

"Very well," said he. "You may sum up until four-thirty, and have half an hour more to-morrow morning. See that the doors are closed, Captain Phelan. We do not want any interruption while the summations are going on."

"All out that's goin' out! Everybody out that's got no business, with the court!" bellowed Captain Phelan.

Mr. Tutt with an ominous heightening of the pulse realized that the real ordeal was at last at hand, for the closing of the case had wrought in the old lawyer an instant metamorphosis. With the words "The defense rests" every suggestion of the mountebank, the actor or the shyster had vanished. The awful responsibility under which he labored; the overwhelming and damning evidence against his client; the terrible consequences of the least mistake that he might make; the fact that only the sword of his ability, and his alone, stood between Angelo and a hideous death by fire in the electric chair— sobered and chastened him. Had he been a praying man in that moment he would have prayed— but he was not.

For his client was foredoomed— foredoomed not only by justice but also by trickery and guile— and was being driven slowly but surely towards the judicial shambles. For what had he succeeded in adducing in his behalf? Nothing but the purely apocryphal speculation that the dead barber might have threatened Angelo with his razor and that the witnesses might possibly have drawn somewhat upon their imaginations in giving the details of their testimony. A sorry defense! Indeed, no defense at all. All the sorrier in that he had not even been able to get before the jury the purely sentimental excuses for the homicide, for he could only do this by calling Rosalina to the stand, which would have enabled the prosecution to cross-examine her in regard to the purchase of the pistol and the delivery of it to her husband— the strongest evidence of premeditation. Yet he must find some argument, some plea, some thread of reason upon which the jury might hang a disagreement or a verdict in a lesser degree.

With a shuffling of feet the last of the crowd pushed through the big oak doors and they were closed and locked. An officer brought a corroded tumbler of brackish water and placed it in front of Mr. Tutt. The judge leaned forward with malicious courtesy. The jury settled themselves and turned toward the lawyer attentively yet defiantly, hardening their hearts already against his expected appeals to sentiment. O'Brien, ostentatiously producing a cigarette, lounged out through the side door leading to the jury room and prison cells. The clerk began copying his records. The clock ticked loudly.

And Mr. Tutt rose and began going through the empty formality of attempting to discuss the evidence in such a way as to excuse or palliate Angelo's crime. For Angelo's guilt of murder in the first degree was so plain that it had never for one moment been in the slightest doubt. Whatever might be said for his act from the point of view of human emotion only made his motive and responsibility under the statues all the clearer. There was not even the unwritten law to appeal to. Yet there was fundamentally a genuine defense, a defense that could not be urged even by innuendo: the defense that no accused ought to be convicted upon any evidence whatever, no matter how conclusive in a trial conducted with essential though wholly concealed unfairness.

Such was the case of Angelo. No one could demonstrate it, no one could with safety even hint at it; any charge that the court was anything but impartial would prove a boomerang to the defense; and yet the facts remained that the whole proceeding from start to finish had been conducted unfairly and with illegality, that the jury had been duped and deceived, and that the pretense that the guilty Angelo had been given an impartial trial was a farce. Every word of the court had been an accusation, a sneer, an acceptance of the defendant's guilt as a matter of course, an abuse far more subversive of our theory of government than the mere acquittal of a single criminal, for it struck at the very foundations of that liberty which the fathers had sought the shores of the unknown continent to gain.

Unmistakably the proceedings had been conducted throughout upon the theory that the defendant must prove his innocence and that presumably he was a guilty man; and this as well as his own impression that the evidence was conclusive the judge had subtly conveyed to the jury in his tone of speaking, his ironical manner and his facial expression. Guilty or not Angelo was being railroaded. That was the real defense— the defense that could never be established even in any higher court, except perhaps in the highest court of all, which is not of earth.

And so Mr. Tutt, boiling with suppressed indignation weighed down with the sense of his responsibility, fully realizing his inability to say anything based on the evidence in behalf of his client, feeling twenty years older than he had during the verbal duel of the actual cross-examination, rose with a genial smile upon his puckered old face and with a careless air almost of gaiety, which seemed to indicate the utmost confidence and determination, and with a graceful compliment to his arch enemy upon the bench and the yellow dog who had hunted with him, assured the jury that the defendant had had the fairest of fair trials and that he, Mr. Tutt, would now proceed to demonstrate to their satisfaction his client's entire innocence; nay, would show them that he was a man not only guiltless of any wrong-doing but worthy of their hearty commendation.

With jokes not too unseemly for the occasion he overcame their preliminary distrust and put them in a good humor. He gave a historical dissertation upon the law governing homicide, on the constitutional rights of American citizens, on the laws of naturalization, marriage, and the domestic relations; waxed eloquent over Italy and the Italian character, mentioned Cavour, Garibaldi and Mazzini in a way to imply that Angelo was their lineal descendant; and quoted from D'Annunzio back to Horace, Cicero and Plautus.

"Bunk! Nothing but bunk!" muttered Tutt, studying the twelve faces before him. "And they all know it!"

But Mr. Tutt was nothing if not interesting. These prosaic citizens of New York County, these saloon and hotel keepers, these contractors, insurance agents and salesmen were learning something of history, of philosophy, of art and beauty. They liked it. They felt they were hearing something worth while, as indeed they were, and they forgot all about Angelo and the unfortunate Crocedoro in their admiration for Mr. Tutt, who had lifted them out of the dingy sordid courtroom into the sunlight of the Golden Age. And as he led them through Greek and Roman literature, through the early English poets, through Shakespeare and the King James version, down to John Galsworthy and Rupert Brooke, he brought something that was noble, fine and sweet into their grubby materialistic lives; and at the same time the hand of the clock crept steadily on until he and it reached Château-Thierry and half past four together.

"Bang!" went Babson's gavel just as Mr. Tutt was leading Mr. Walsh, Mr. Tompkins and the others through the winding paths of the Argonne forests with tin helmets on their heads in the struggle for liberty.

"You may conclude your address in the morning, Mr. Tutt," said the judge with supreme unction. "Adjourn court!"

GRAY DEPRESSION weighed down Mr. Tutt's soul as he trudged homeward. He had made a good speech, but it had had absolutely nothing to do with the case, which the jury would perceive as soon as they thought it over. It was a confession of defeat. Angelo would be convicted of murder in the first degree and electrocuted, Rosalina would be a widow, and somehow he would be in a measure responsible for it. The tragedy of human life appalled him. He felt very old, as old as the dead-and-gone authors from whom he had quoted with such remarkable facility. He belonged with them; he was too old to practise his profession.

"Law, Mis' Tutt," expostulated Miranda, his ancient negro handmaiden, as he pushed away the chop and mashed potato, and even his glass of claret, untasted, in his old-fashioned dining room on West Twenty-third Street, "you ain't got no appetite at all! You's sick, Mis' Tutt."

"No, no, Miranda!" he replied weakly. "I'm just getting old."

"You's mighty spry for an old man yit," she protested. "You kin make dem lawyer men hop mighty high when you tries. Heh, heh! I reckon dey ain't got nuffin' on my Mistah Tutt!"

Upstairs in his library Mr. Tutt strode up and down before the empty grate, smoking stogy after stogy, trying to collect his thoughts and devise something to say upon the morrow, but all his ideas had flown. There wasn't anything to say. Yet he swore Angelo should not be offered up as a victim upon the altar of unscrupulous ambition. The hours passed and the old banjo clock above the mantel wheezed eleven, twelve; then one, two. Still he paced up and down, up and down in a sort of trance. The air of the library, blue with the smoke of countless stogies, stifled and suffocated him. Moreover he discovered that he was hungry. He descended to the pantry and salvaged a piece of pie, then unchained the front door and stepped forth into the soft October night.

A full moon hung over the deserted streets of the sleeping city. In divers places, widely scattered, the twelve good and true men were snoring snugly in bed. To-morrow they would send Angelo to his death without a quiver. He shuddered, striding on, he knew not whither, into the night. His brain no longer worked. He had become a peripatetic automaton self-dedicated to nocturnal perambulation.

With his pockets bulging with stogies and one glowing like a headlight in advance of him he wandered in a sort of coma up Tenth Avenue, crossed to the Riverside Drive, mounted Morningside Heights, descended again through the rustling alleys of Central Park, and found himself at Fifth Avenue and Fifty-ninth Street just as the dawn was paling the electric lamps to a sickly yellow and the trees were casting strange unwonted shadows in the wrong direction. He was utterly exhausted. He looked eagerly for some place to sit down, but the doors of the hotels were dark and tightly closed and it was too cold to remain without moving in the open air.

Down Fifth Avenue he trudged, intending to go home and snatch a few hours' sleep before court should open, but each block seemed miles in length. Presently he approached the cathedral, whose twin spires were tinted with reddish gold. The sky had become a bright blue. Suddenly all the street lamps went out. He told himself that he had never realized before the beauty of those two towers reaching up toward eternity, typifying man's aspiration for the spiritual. He remembered having heard that a cathedral was never closed, and looking toward the door he perceived that it was open. With utmost difficulty he climbed the steps and entered its dark shadows. A faint light emanated from the tops of the stained-glass windows. Down below a candle burned on either side of the altar while a flickering gleam shone from the red cup in the sanctuary lamp. Worn out, drugged for lack of sleep, faint for want of food, old Mr. Tutt

sank down upon one of the rear seats by the door, and resting his head upon his arms on the back of the bench in front of him fell fast asleep.

He dreamed of a legal heaven, of a great wooden throne upon which sat Babson in a black robe and below him twelve red-faced angels in a double row with harps in their hands, chanting: "Guilty! Guilty! Guilty!" An organ was playing somewhere, and there was a great noise of footsteps. Then a bell twinkled and he raised his head and saw that the chancel was full of lights and white-robed priests. It was broad daylight. Horrified he looked at his watch, to find that it was ten minutes after ten. His joints creaked as he pulled himself to his feet and his eyes were half closed as he staggered down the steps and hailed a taxi.

"Criminal Courts Building— side door. And drive like hell!" he muttered to the driver.

He reached it just as Judge Babson and his attendant were coming into the courtroom and the crowd were making obeisance. Everybody else was in his proper place.

"You may proceed, Mr. Tutt," said the judge after the roll of the jury had been called.

But Mr. Tutt was in a daze, in no condition to think or speak. There was a curious rustling in his ears and his sight was somewhat blurred. The atmosphere of the courtroom seemed to him cold and hostile; the jury sat with averted faces. He rose feebly and cleared his throat.

"Gentlemen of the jury," he began, "I— I think I covered everything I had to say yesterday afternoon. I can only beseech you to realize the full extent of your great responsibility and remind you that if you entertain a reasonable doubt upon the evidence you are sworn to give the benefit of it to the defendant."

He sank back in his chair and covered his eyes with his hands, while a murmur ran along the benches of the courtroom. The old man had collapsed— tough luck— the defendant was cooked! Swiftly O'Brien leaped to his feet. There had been no defense. The case was as plain as a pike-staff. There was only one thing for the jury to do— return a verdict of murder in the first. It would not be pleasant, but that made no difference! He read them the statute, applied it to the facts, and shook his fist in their faces. They must convict— and convict of only one thing— and nothing else— murder in the first degree. They gazed at him like silly sheep, nodding their heads, doing everything but bleat.

Then Babson cleared his decks and rising in dignity expounded the law to the sheep in a rich mellow voice, in which he impressed upon them the necessity of preserving the integrity of the jury system and the sanctity of human life. He pronounced an obituary of great beauty upon the deceased barber— who could not, as he pointed out, speak for himself, owing to the fact that he was in his grave. He venomously excoriated the defendant who had deliberately planned

to kill an unarmed man peacefully conducting himself in his place of business, and expressed the utmost confidence that he could rely upon the jury, whose character he well knew, to perform their full duty no matter how disagreeable that duty might be. The sheep nodded.

"You may retire, gentlemen."

Babson looked down at Mr. Tutt with a significant gleam in his eye. He had driven in the knife to the hilt and twisted it round and round. Angelo had almost as much chance as the proverbial celluloid cat. Mr. Tutt felt actually sick. He did not look at the jury as they went out. They would not be long— and he could hardly face the thought of their return. Never in his long experience had he found himself in such a desperate situation. Heretofore there had always been some argument, some construction of the facts upon which he could make an appeal, however fallacious or illogical.

He leaned back and closed his eyes. The judge was chatting with O'Brien, the court officers were betting with the reporters as to the length of time in which it would take the twelve to agree upon a verdict of murder in the first. The funeral rites were all concluded except for the final commitment of the corpse to mother earth.

And then without warning Angelo suddenly rose and addressed the court in a defiant shriek.

"I killa that man!" he cried wildly. "He maka small of my wife! He no good! He bad egg! I killa him once— I killa him again!"

"So!" exclaimed Babson with biting sarcasm. "You want to make a confession? You hope for mercy, do you? Well, Mr. Tutt, what do you wish to do under the circumstances? Shall I recall the jury and reopen the case by consent?"

Mr. Tutt rose trembling to his feet.

"The case is closed, Your Honor," he replied. "I will consent to a mistrial and offer a plea of guilty of manslaughter. I cannot agree to reopen the case. I cannot let the defendant go upon the stand."

The spectators and reporters were pressing forward to the bar, anxious lest they should lose a single word of the colloquy. Angelo remained standing, looking eagerly at O'Brien, who returned his gaze with a grin like that of a hyena.

"I killa him!" Angelo repeated. "You killa me if you want."

"Sit down!" thundered the judge. "Enough of this! The law does not permit me to accept a plea to murder in the first degree, and my conscience and my sense of duty to the public will permit me to accept no other. I will go to my chambers to await the verdict of the jury. Take the prisoner downstairs to the prison pen."

He swept from the bench in his silken robes. Angelo was led away. The crowd in the courtroom slowly dispersed. Mr. Tutt, escorted by Tutt, went out in the corridor to smoke.

"Ye got a raw deal, counselor," remarked Captain Phelan, amiably accepting a stogy. "Nothing but an act of Providence c'd save that Eyetalian from the chair. An' him guilty at that!"

An hour passed; then another. At half after four a rumor flew along the corridors that the jury in the Serafino case had reached a verdict and were coming in. A messenger scurried to the judge's chambers. Phelan descended the iron stairs to bring up the prisoner, while Tutt to prevent a scene invented an excuse by which he lured Rosalina to the first floor of the building. The crowd suddenly reassembled out of nowhere and poured into the courtroom. The reporters gathered expectantly round their table. The judge entered, his robes, gathered in one hand.

"Bring in the jury," he said sharply. "Arraign the prisoner at the bar."

Mr. Tutt took his place beside his client at the railing, while the jury, carrying their coats and hats, filed slowly in. Their faces were set and relentless. They looked neither to the right nor to the left. O'Brien sauntered over and seated himself nonchalantly with his back to the court, studying their faces. Yes, he told himself, they were a regular set of hangmen— he couldn't have picked a tougher bunch if he'd had his choice of the whole panel.

The clerk called the roll, and Messrs. Walsh, Tompkins, *et al.*, stated that they were all present.

"Gentlemen of the jury, have you agreed upon a verdict?" inquired the clerk.

"We have!" replied Mr. Walsh sternly.

"How say you? Do you find the defendant guilty or not guilty?"

Mr. Tutt gripped the balustrade in front of him with one hand and put his other arm round Angelo. He felt that now in truth murder was being done.

"We find the defendant not guilty," said Mr. Walsh defiantly.

There was a momentary silence of incredulity. Then Babson and O'Brien shouted simultaneously: "What!"

"We find the defendant not guilty," repeated Mr. Walsh stubbornly.

"I demand that the jury be polled!" cried the crestfallen O'Brien, his face crimson.

And then the twelve reiterated severally that that was their verdict and that they hearkened unto it as it stood recorded and that they were entirely satisfied with it.

"You are discharged!" said Babson in icy tones. "Strike the names of these men from the list of jurors— as incompetent. Haven't you any other charge on which you can try this defendant?"

"No, Your Honor," answered O'Brien grimly. "He didn't take the stand, so we can't try him for perjury; and there isn't any other indictment against him."

Judge Babson turned ferociously upon Mr. Tutt:

"This acquittal is a blot upon the administration of criminal justice; a disgrace to the city! It is an unconscionable verdict; a reflection upon the intelligence of the jury! The defendant is discharged. This court is adjourned."

The crowd surged round Angelo and bore him away, bewildered. The judge and prosecutor hurried from the room. Alone Mr. Tutt stood at the bar, trying to grasp the full meaning of what had occurred.

He no longer felt tired; he experienced an exultation such as he had never known before. Some miracle had happened! What was it?

Unexpectedly the lawyer felt a rough warm hand clasped over his own upon the rail and heard the voice of Mr. Walsh with its rich brogue saying: "At first we couldn't see that there was much to be said for your side of the case, Mr. Tutt; but when Oi stepped into the cathedral on me way down to court this morning and spied you prayin' there for guidance I knew you wouldn't be defendin' him unless he was innocent, and so we decided to give him the benefit of the doubt."

3: The Vanishing Prince

G. K. Chesterton

1874-1936

Harper's Magazine, Aug 1920 (US)

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A Horne Fisher case

THIS TALE begins among a tangle of tales round a name that is at once recent and legendary. The name is that of Michael O'Neill, popularly called Prince Michael, partly because he claimed descent from ancient Fenian princes, and partly because he was credited with a plan to make himself prince president of Ireland, as the last Napoleon did of France. He was undoubtedly a gentleman of honorable pedigree and of many accomplishments, but two of his accomplishments emerged from all the rest. He had a talent for appearing when he was not wanted and a talent for disappearing when he was wanted, especially when he was wanted by the police. It may be added that his disappearances were more dangerous than his appearances. In the latter he seldom went beyond the sensational— pasting up seditious placards, tearing down official placards, making flamboyant speeches, or unfurling forbidden flags. But in order to effect the former he would sometimes fight for his freedom with startling energy, from which men were sometimes lucky to escape with a broken head instead of a broken neck. His most famous feats of escape, however, were due to dexterity and not to violence. On a cloudless summer morning he had come down a country road white with dust, and, pausing outside a farmhouse, had told the farmer's daughter, with elegant indifference, that the local police were in pursuit of him. The girl's name was Bridget Royce, a somber and even sullen type of beauty, and she looked at him darkly, as if in doubt, and said, "Do you want me to hide you?" Upon which he only laughed, leaped lightly over the stone wall, and strode toward the farm, merely throwing over his shoulder the remark, "Thank you, I have generally been quite capable of hiding myself." In which proceeding he acted with a tragic ignorance of the nature of women; and there fell on his path in that sunshine a shadow of doom.

While he disappeared through the farmhouse the girl remained for a few moments looking up the road, and two perspiring policemen came plowing up to the door where she stood. Though still angry, she was still silent, and a quarter of an hour later the officers had searched the house and were already inspecting the kitchen garden and cornfield behind it. In the ugly reaction of her mood she might have been tempted even to point out the fugitive, but for a small difficulty that she had no more notion than the policemen had of where he could possibly have gone. The kitchen garden was inclosed by a very low wall,

and the cornfield beyond lay aslant like a square patch on a great green hill on which he could still have been seen even as a dot in the distance. Everything stood solid in its familiar place; the apple tree was too small to support or hide a climber; the only shed stood open and obviously empty; there was no sound save the droning of summer flies and the occasional flutter of a bird unfamiliar enough to be surprised by the scarecrow in the field; there was scarcely a shadow save a few blue lines that fell from the thin tree; every detail was picked out by the brilliant day light as if in a microscope. The girl described the scene later, with all the passionate realism of her race, and, whether or no the policemen had a similar eye for the picturesque, they had at least an eye for the facts of the case, and were compelled to give up the chase and retire from the scene. Bridget Royce remained as if in a trance, staring at the sunlit garden in which a man had just vanished like a fairy. She was still in a sinister mood, and the miracle took in her mind a character of unfriendliness and fear, as if the fairy were decidedly a bad fairy. The sun upon the glittering garden depressed her more than the darkness, but she continued to stare at it. Then the world itself went half-witted and she screamed. The scarecrow moved in the sun light. It had stood with its back to her in a battered old black hat and a tattered garment, and with all its tatters flying, it strode away across the hill.

She did not analyze the audacious trick by which the man had turned to his advantage the subtle effects of the expected and the obvious; she was still under the cloud of more individual complexities, and she noticed most of all that the vanishing scarecrow did not even turn to look at the farm. And the fates that were running so adverse to his fantastic career of freedom ruled that his next adventure, though it had the same success in another quarter, should increase the danger in this quarter. Among the many similar adventures related of him in this manner it is also said that some days afterward another girl, named Mary Cregan, found him concealed on the farm where she worked; and if the story is true, she must also have had the shock of an uncanny experience, for when she was busy at some lonely task in the yard she heard a voice speaking out of the well, and found that the eccentric had managed to drop himself into the bucket which was some little way below, the well only partly full of water. In this case, however, he had to appeal to the woman to wind up the rope. And men say it was when this news was told to the other woman that her soul walked over the border line of treason.

Such, at least, were the stories told of him in the countryside, and there were many more— as that he had stood insolently in a splendid green dressing gown on the steps of a great hotel, and then led the police a chase through a long suite of grand apartments, and finally through his own bedroom on to a balcony that overhung the river. The moment the pursuers stepped on to the balcony it broke under them, and they dropped pell-mell into the eddying

waters, while Michael, who had thrown off his gown and dived, was able to swim away. It was said that he had carefully cut away the props so that they would not support anything so heavy as a policeman. But here again he was immediately fortunate, yet ultimately unfortunate, for it is said that one of the men was drowned, leaving a family feud which made a little rift in his popularity. These stories can now be told in some detail, not because they are the most marvelous of his many adventures, but because these alone were not covered with silence by the loyalty of the peasantry. These alone found their way into official reports, and it is these which three of the chief officials of the country were reading and discussing when the more remarkable part of this story begins.

Night was far advanced and the lights shone in the cottage that served for a temporary police station near the coast. On one side of it were the last houses of the straggling village, and on the other nothing but a waste moorland stretching away toward the sea, the line of which was broken by no landmark except a solitary tower of the prehistoric pattern still found in Ireland, standing up as slender as a column, but pointed like a pyramid. At a wooden table in front of the window, which normally looked out on this landscape, sat two men in plain clothes, but with something of a military bearing, for indeed they were the two chiefs of the detective service of that district. The senior of the two, both in age and rank, was a sturdy man with a short white beard, and frosty eyebrows fixed in a frown which suggested rather worry than severity.

His name was Morton, and he was a Liverpool man long pickled in the Irish quarrels, and doing his duty among them in a sour fashion not altogether unsympathetic. He had spoken a few sentences to his companion, Nolan, a tall, dark man with a cadaverous equine Irish face, when he seemed to remember something and touched a bell which rang in another room. The subordinate he had summoned immediately appeared with a sheaf of papers in his hand.

"Sit down, Wilson," he said. "Those are the dispositions, I suppose."

"Yes," replied the third officer. "I think I've got all there is to be got out of them, so I sent the people away."

"Did Mary Cregan give evidence?" asked Morton, with a frown that looked a little heavier than usual.

"No, but her master did," answered the man called Wilson, who had flat, red hair and a plain, pale face, not without sharpness. "I think he's hanging round the girl himself and is out against a rival. There's always some reason of that sort when we are told the truth about anything. And you bet the other girl told right enough."

"Well, let's hope they'll be some sort of use," remarked Nolan, in a somewhat hopeless manner, gazing out into the darkness.

"Anything is to the good," said Morton, "that lets us know anything about him."

"Do we know anything about him?" asked the melancholy Irishman.

"We know one thing about him," said Wilson, "and it's the one thing that nobody ever knew before. We know where he is."

"Are you sure?" inquired Morton, looking at him sharply.

"Quite sure," replied his assistant. "At this very minute he is in that tower over there by the shore. If you go near enough you'll see the candle burning in the window."

As he spoke the noise of a horn sounded on the road outside, and a moment after they heard the throbbing of a motor car brought to a standstill before the door. Morton instantly sprang to his feet.

"Thank the Lord that's the car from Dublin," he said. "I can't do anything without special authority, not if he were sitting on the top of the tower and putting out his tongue at us. But the chief can do what he thinks best."

He hurried out to the entrance and was soon exchanging greetings with a big handsome man in a fur coat, who brought into the dingy little station the indescribable glow of the great cities and the luxuries of the great world.

For this was Sir Walter Carey, an official of such eminence in Dublin Castle that nothing short of the case of Prince Michael would have brought him on such a journey in the middle of the night. But the case of Prince Michael, as it happened, was complicated by legalism as well as lawlessness. On the last occasion he had escaped by a forensic quibble and not, as usual, by a private escapade; and it was a question whether at the moment he was amenable to the law or not. It might be necessary to stretch a point, but a man like Sir Walter could probably stretch it as far as he liked.

Whether he intended to do so was a question to be considered. Despite the almost aggressive touch of luxury in the fur coat, it soon became apparent that Sir Walter's large leonine head was for use as well as ornament, and he considered the matter soberly and sanely enough. Five chairs were set round the plain deal table, for who should Sir Walter bring with him but his young relative and secretary, Horne Fisher. Sir Walter listened with grave attention, and his secretary with polite boredom, to the string of episodes by which the police had traced the flying rebel from the steps of the hotel to the solitary tower beside the sea. There at least he was cornered between the moors and the breakers; and the scout sent by Wilson reported him as writing under a solitary candle, perhaps composing another of his tremendous proclamations. Indeed, it would have been typical of him to choose it as the place in which finally to turn to bay. He had some remote claim on it, as on a family castle; and those who knew him thought him capable of imitating the primitive Irish chieftains who fell fighting against the sea.

"I saw some queer-looking people leaving as I came in," said Sir Walter Carey. "I suppose they were your witnesses. But why do they turn up here at this time of night?"

Morton smiled grimly. "They come here by night because they would be dead men if they came here by day. They are criminals committing a crime that is more horrible here than theft or murder."

"What crime do you mean?" asked the other, with some curiosity.

"They are helping the law," said Morton.

There was a silence, and Sir Walter considered the papers before him with an abstracted eye. At last he spoke.

"Quite so; but look here, if the local feeling is as lively as that there are a good many points to consider. I believe the new Act will enable me to collar him now if I think it best. But is it best? A serious rising would do us no good in Parliament, and the government has enemies in England as well as Ireland. It won't do if I have done what looks a little like sharp practice, and then only raised a revolution."

"It's all the other way," said the man called Wilson, rather quickly. "There won't be half so much of a revolution if you arrest him as there will if you leave him loose for three days longer. But, anyhow, there can't be anything nowadays that the proper police can't manage."

"Mr. Wilson is a Londoner," said the Irish detective, with a smile.

"Yes, I'm a cockney, all right," replied Wilson, "and I think I'm all the better for that. Especially at this job, oddly enough."

Sir Walter seemed slightly amused at the pertinacity of the third officer, and perhaps even more amused at the slight accent with which he spoke, which rendered rather needless his boast about his origin.

"Do you mean to say," he asked, "that you know more about the business here because you have come from London?"

"Sounds funny, I know, but I do believe it," answered Wilson. "I believe these affairs want fresh methods. But most of all I believe they want a fresh eye."

The superior officers laughed, and the redhaired man went on with a slight touch of temper:

"Well, look at the facts. See how the fellow got away every time, and you'll understand what I mean. Why was he able to stand in the place of the scarecrow, hidden by nothing but an old hat? Because it was a village policeman who knew the scarecrow was there, was expecting it, and therefore took no notice of it. Now I never expect a scarecrow. I've never seen one in the street, and I stare at one when I see it in the field. It's a new thing to me and worth noticing. And it was just the same when he hid in the well. You are ready to find

a well in a place like that; you look for a well, and so you don't see it. I don't look for it, and therefore I do look at it."

"It is certainly an idea," said Sir Walter, smiling, "but what about the balcony? Balconies are occasionally seen in London."

"But not rivers right under them, as if it was in Venice," replied Wilson.

"It is certainly a new idea," repeated Sir Walter, with something like respect. He had all the love of the luxurious classes for new ideas. But he also had a critical faculty, and was inclined to think, after due reflection, that it was a true idea as well.

Growing dawn had already turned the window panes from black to gray when Sir Walter got abruptly to his feet. The others rose also, taking this for a signal that the arrest was to be undertaken. But their leader stood for a moment in deep thought, as if conscious that he had come to a parting of the ways.

Suddenly the silence was pierced by a long, wailing cry from the dark moors outside. The silence that followed it seemed more startling than the shriek itself, and it lasted until Nolan said, heavily:

" 'Tis the banshee. Somebody is marked for the grave."

His long, large-featured face was as pale as a moon, and it was easy to remember that he was the only Irishman in the room.

"Well, I know that banshee," said Wilson, cheerfully, "ignorant as you think I am of these things. I talked to that banshee myself an hour ago, and I sent that banshee up to the tower and told her to sing out like that if she could get a glimpse of our friend writing his proclamation."

"Do you mean that girl Bridget Royce?" asked Morton, drawing his frosty brows together. "Has she turned king's evidence to that extent?"

"Yes," answered Wilson. "I know very little of these local things, you tell me, but I reckon an angry woman is much the same in all countries."

Nolan, however, seemed still moody and unlike himself. "It's an ugly noise and an ugly business altogether," he said. "If it's really the end of Prince Michael it may well be the end of other things as well. When the spirit is on him he would escape by a ladder of dead men, and wade through that sea if it were made of blood."

"Is that the real reason of your pious alarms?" asked Wilson, with a slight sneer.

The Irishman's pale face blackened with a new passion.

"I have faced as many murderers in County Clare as you ever fought with in Clapham junction, Mr. Cockney," he said.

"Hush, please," said Morton, sharply. "Wilson, you have no kind of right to imply doubt of your superior's conduct. I hope you will prove yourself as courageous and trustworthy as he has always been."

The pale face of the red-haired man seemed a shade paler, but he was silent and composed, and Sir Walter went up to Nolan with marked courtesy, saying, "Shall we go outside now, and get this business done?"

Dawn had lifted, leaving a wide chasm of white between a great gray cloud and the great gray moorland, beyond which the tower was outlined against the daybreak and the sea.

Something in its plain and primitive shape vaguely suggested the dawn in the first days of the earth, in some prehistoric time when even the colors were hardly created, when there was only blank daylight between cloud and clay. These dead hues were relieved only by one spot of gold — the spark of the candle alight in the window of the lonely tower, and burning on into the broadening daylight. As the group of detectives, followed by a cordon of policemen, spread out into a crescent to cut off all escape, the light in the tower flashed as if it were moved for a moment, and then went out. They knew the man inside had realized the daylight and blown out his candle.

"There are other windows, aren't there?" asked Morton, "and a door, of course, somewhere round the corner? Only a round tower has no corners."

"Another example of my small suggestion," observed Wilson, quietly. "That queer tower was the first thing I saw when I came to these parts; and I can tell you a little more about it— or, at any rate, the outside of it. There are four windows altogether, one a little way from this one, but just out of sight. Those are both on the ground floor, and so is the third on the other side, making a sort of triangle. But the fourth is just above the third, and I suppose it looks on an upper floor."

"It's only a sort of loft, reached by a ladder, said Nolan. "I've played in the place when I was a child. It's no more than an empty shell." And his sad face grew sadder, thinking perhaps of the tragedy of his country and the part that he played in it.

"The man must have got a table and chair, at any rate," said Wilson, "but no doubt he could have got those from some cottage. If I might make a suggestion, sir, I think we ought to approach all the five entrances at once, so to speak. One of us should go to the door and one to each window; Macbride here has a ladder for the upper window."

Mr. Horne Fisher languidly turned to his distinguished relative and spoke for the first time.

"I am rather a convert to the cockney school of psychology," he said in an almost inaudible voice.

The others seemed to feel the same influence in different ways, for the group began to break up in the manner indicated. Morton moved toward the window immediately in front of them, where the hidden outlaw had just snuffed the candle; Nolan, a little farther westward to the next window; while Wilson,

followed by Macbride with the ladder, went round to the two windows at the back. Sir Walter Carey himself, followed by his secretary, began to walk round toward the only door, to demand admittance in a more regular fashion.

"He will be armed, of course," remarked Sir Walter, casually.

"By all accounts," replied Horne Fisher, "he can do more with a candlestick than most men with a pistol. But he is pretty sure to have the pistol, too."

Even as he spoke the question was answered with a tongue of thunder. Morton had just placed himself in front of the nearest window, his broad shoulders blocking the aperture. For an instant it was lit from within as with red fire, followed by a thundering throng of echoes. The square shoulders seemed to alter in shape, and the sturdy figure collapsed among the tall, rank grasses at the foot of the tower. A puff of smoke floated from the window like a little cloud. The two men behind rushed to the spot and raised him, but he was dead.

Sir Walter straightened himself and called out something that was lost in another noise of firing; it was possible that the police were already avenging their comrade from the other side. Fisher had already raced round to the next window, and a new cry of astonishment from him brought his patron to the same spot. Nolan, the Irish policeman, had also fallen, sprawling all his great length in the grass, and it was red with his blood. He was still alive when they reached him, but there was death on his face, and he was only able to make a final gesture telling them that all was over; and, with a broken word and a heroic effort, motioning them on to where his other comrades were besieging the back of the tower. Stunned by these rapid and repeated shocks, the two men could only vaguely obey the gesture, and, finding their way to the other windows at the back, they discovered a scene equally startling, if less final and tragic. The other two officers were not dead or mortally wounded, but Macbride lay with a broken leg and his ladder on top of him, evidently thrown down from the top window of the tower; while Wilson lay on his face, quite still as if stunned, with his red head among the gray and silver of the sea holly. In him, however, the impotence was but momentary, for he began to move and rise as the others came round the tower.

"My God! it's like an explosion!" cried Sir Walter; and indeed it was the only word for this unearthly energy, by which one man had been able to deal death or destruction on three sides of the same small triangle at the same instant.

Wilson had already scrambled to his feet and with splendid energy flew again at the window, revolver in hand. He fired twice into the opening and then disappeared in his own smoke; but the thud of his feet and the shock of a falling chair told them that the intrepid Londoner had managed at last to leap into the room. Then followed a curious silence; and Sir Walter, walking to the window through the thinning smoke, looked into the hollow shell of the ancient tower. Except for Wilson, staring around him, there was nobody there.

The inside of the tower was a single empty room, with nothing but a plain wooden chair and a table on which were pens, ink and paper, and the candlestick. Halfway up the high wall there was a rude timber platform under the upper window, a small loft which was more like a large shelf. It was reached only by a ladder, and it seemed to be as bare as the bare walls. Wilson completed his survey of the place and then went and stared at the things on the table. Then he silently pointed with his lean forefinger at the open page of the large notebook. The writer had suddenly stopped writing, even in the middle of a word.

"I said it was like an explosion," said Sir Walter Carey at last. "And really the man himself seems to have suddenly exploded. But he has blown himself up somehow without touching the tower. He's burst more like a bubble than a bomb."

"He has touched more valuable things than the tower," said Wilson, gloomily.

There was a long silence, and then Sir Walter said, seriously: "Well, Mr. Wilson, I am not a detective, and these unhappy happenings have left you in charge of that branch of the business. We all lament the cause of this, but I should like to say that I myself have the strongest confidence in your capacity for carrying on the work. What do you think we should do next?"

Wilson seemed to rouse himself from his depression and acknowledged the speaker's words with a warmer civility than he had hitherto shown to anybody. He called in a few of the police to assist in routing out the interior, leaving the rest to spread themselves in a search party outside.

"I think," he said, "the first thing is to make quite sure about the inside of this place, as it was hardly physically possible for him to have got outside. I suppose poor Nolan would have brought in his banshee and said it was supernaturally possible. But I've got no use for disembodied spirits when I'm dealing with facts. And the facts before me are an empty tower with a ladder, a chair, and a table."

"The spiritualists," said Sir Walter, with a smile, "would say that spirits could find a great deal of use for a table."

"I dare say they could if the spirits were on the table — in a bottle," replied Wilson, with a curl of his pale lip. "The people round here, when they're all sodden up with Irish whisky, may believe in such things. I think they want a little education in this country."

Horne Fisher's heavy eyelids fluttered in a faint attempt to rise, as if he were tempted to a lazy protest against the contemptuous tone of the investigator.

"The Irish believe far too much in spirits to believe in spiritualism," he murmured. "They know too much about 'em. If you want a simple and childlike faith in any spirit that comes along you can get it in your favorite London."

"I don't want to get it anywhere," said Wilson, shortly. "I say I'm dealing with much simpler things than your simple faith, with a table and a chair and a ladder. Now what I want to say about them at the start is this. They are all three made roughly enough of plain wood. But the table and the chair are fairly new and comparatively clean. The ladder is covered with dust and there is a cobweb under the top rung of it. That means that he borrowed the first two quite recently from some cottage, as we supposed, but the ladder has been a long time in this rotten old dustbin. Probably it was part of the original furniture, an heirloom in this magnificent palace of the Irish kings."

Again Fisher looked at him under his eyelids, but seemed too sleepy to speak, and Wilson went on with his argument.

"Now it's quite clear that something very odd has just happened in this place. The chances are ten to one, it seems to me, that it had something specially to do with this place. Probably he came here because he could do it only here; it doesn't seem very inviting otherwise. But the man knew it of old; they say it belonged to his family, so that altogether, I think, everything points to something in the construction of the tower itself."

"Your reasoning seems to me excellent," said Sir Walter, who was listening attentively. "But what could it be?"

"You see now what I mean about the ladder," went on the detective; "it's the only old piece of furniture here and the first thing that caught that cockney eye of mine. But there is something else. That loft up there is a sort of lumber room without any lumber. So far as I can see, it's as empty as everything else; and, as things are, I don't see the use of the ladder leading to it. It seems to me, as I can't find anything unusual down here, that it might pay us to look up there."

He got briskly off the table on which he was sitting (for the only chair was allotted to Sir Walter) and ran rapidly up the ladder to the platform above. He was soon followed by the others, Mr. Fisher going last, however, with an appearance of considerable nonchalance.

At this stage, however, they were destined to disappointment; Wilson nosed in every corner like a terrier and examined the roof almost in the posture of a fly, but half an hour afterward they had to confess that they were still without a clew. Sir Walter's private secretary seemed more and more threatened with inappropriate slumber, and, having been the last to climb up the ladder, seemed now to lack the energy even to climb down again.

"Come along, Fisher," called out Sir Walter from below, when the others had regained the floor. "We must consider whether we'll pull the whole place to pieces to see what it's made of."

"I'm coming in a minute," said the voice from the ledge above their heads, a voice somewhat suggestive of an articulate yawn.

"What are you waiting for?" asked Sir Walter, impatiently. "Can you see anything there?"

"Well, yes, in a way," replied the voice, vaguely. "In fact, I see it quite plain now."

"What is it?" asked Wilson, sharply, from the table on which he sat kicking his heels restlessly.

"Well, it's a man," said Horne Fisher.

Wilson bounded off the table as if he had been kicked off it. "What do you mean?" he cried. "How can you possibly see a man?"

"I can see him through the window," replied the secretary, mildly. "I see him coming across the moor. He's making a bee line across the open country toward this tower. He evidently means to pay us a visit. And, considering who it seems to be, perhaps it would be more polite if we were all at the door to receive him." And in a leisurely manner the secretary came down the ladder.

"Who it seems to be!" repeated Sir Walter in astonishment.

"Well, I think it's the man you call Prince Michael," observed Mr. Fisher, airily. "In fact, I'm sure it is. I've seen the police portraits of him."

There was a dead silence, and Sir Walter's usually steady brain seemed to go round like a windmill.

"But, hang it all!" he said at last, "even supposing his own explosion could have thrown him half a mile away, without passing through any of the windows, and left him alive enough for a country walk— even then, why the devil should he walk in this direction? The murderer does not generally revisit the scene of his crime so rapidly as all that."

"He doesn't know yet that it is the scene of his crime," answered Horne Fisher.

"What on earth do you mean? You credit him with rather singular absence of mind."

"Well, the truth is, it isn't the scene of his crime," said Fisher, and went and looked out of the window.

There was another silence, and then Sir Walter said, quietly: "What sort of notion have you really got in your head, Fisher? Have you developed a new theory about how this fellow escaped out of the ring round him?"

"He never escaped at all," answered the man at the window, without turning round. "He never escaped out of the ring because he was never inside the ring. He was not in this tower at all, at least not when we were surrounding it."

He turned and leaned back against the window, but, in spite of his usual listless manner, they almost fancied that the face in shadow was a little pale.

"I began to guess something of the sort when we were some way from the tower," he said. "Did you notice that sort of flash or flicker the candle gave before it was extinguished? I was almost certain it was only the last leap the

flame gives when a candle burns itself out. And then I came into this room and I saw that."

He pointed at the table and Sir Walter caught his breath with a sort of curse at his own blindness. For the candle in the candlestick had obviously burned itself away to nothing and left him, mentally, at least, very completely in the dark.

"Then there is a sort of mathematical question," went on Fisher, leaning back in his limp way and looking up at the bare walls, as if tracing imaginary diagrams there. "It's not so easy for a man in the third angle to face the other two at the same moment, especially if they are at the base of an isosceles. I am sorry if it sounds like a lecture on geometry, but—"

"I'm afraid we have no time for it," said Wilson, coldly. "If this man is really coming back, I must give my orders at once."

"I think I'll go on with it, though," observed Fisher, staring at the roof with insolent serenity.

"I must ask you, Mr. Fisher, to let me conduct my inquiry on my own lines," said Wilson, firmly. "I am the officer in charge now."

"Yes," remarked Horne Fisher, softly, but with an accent that somehow chilled the hearer. "Yes. But why?"

Sir Walter was staring, for he had never seen his rather lackadaisical young friend look like that before. Fisher was looking at Wilson with lifted lids, and the eyes under them seemed to have shed or shifted a film, as do the eyes of an eagle.

"Why are you the officer in charge now?" he asked. "Why can you conduct the inquiry on your own lines now? How did it come about, I wonder, that the elder officers are not here to interfere with anything you do?"

Nobody spoke, and nobody can say how soon anyone would have collected his wits to speak when a noise came from without. It was the heavy and hollow sound of a blow upon the door of the tower, and to their shaken spirits it sounded strangely like the hammer of doom.

The wooden door of the tower moved on its rusty hinges under the hand that struck it and Prince Michael came into the room. Nobody had the smallest doubt about his identity. His light clothes, though frayed with his adventures, were of fine and almost foppish cut, and he wore a pointed beard, or imperial, perhaps as a further reminiscence of Louis Napoleon; but he was a much taller and more graceful man that his prototype. Before anyone could speak he had silenced everyone for an instant with a slight but splendid gesture of hospitality.

"Gentlemen," he said, "this is a poor place now, but you are heartily welcome."

Wilson was the first to recover, and he took a stride toward the newcomer.

"Michael O'Neill, I arrest you in the king's name for the murder of Francis Morton and James Nolan. It is my duty to warn you—"

"No, no, Mr. Wilson," cried Fisher, suddenly. "You shall not commit a third murder."

Sir Walter Carey rose from his chair, which fell over with a crash behind him. "What does all this mean?" he called out in an authoritative manner.

"It means," said Fisher, "that this man, Hooker Wilson, as soon as he had put his head in at that window, killed his two comrades who had put their heads in at the other windows, by firing across the empty room. That is what it means. And if you want to know, count how many times he is supposed to have fired and then count the charges left in his revolver."

Wilson, who was still sitting on the table, abruptly put a hand out for the weapon that lay beside him. But the next movement was the most unexpected of all, for the prince standing in the doorway passed suddenly from the dignity of a statue to the swiftness of an acrobat and rent the revolver out of the detective's hand.

"You dog!" he cried. "So you are the type of English truth, as I am of Irish tragedy— you who come to kill me, wading through the blood of your brethren. If they had fallen in a feud on the hillside, it would be called murder, and yet your sin might be forgiven you. But I, who am innocent, I was to be slain with ceremony. There would be long speeches and patient judges listening to my vain plea of innocence, noting down my despair and disregarding it. Yes, that is what I call assassination. But killing may be no murder; there is one shot left in this little gun, and I know where it should go."

Wilson turned quickly on the table, and even as he turned he twisted in agony, for Michael shot him through the body where he sat, so that he tumbled off the table like lumber.

The police rushed to lift him; Sir Walter stood speechless; and then, with a strange and weary gesture, Horne Fisher spoke.

"You are indeed a type of the Irish tragedy," he said. "You were entirely in the right, and you have put yourself in the wrong."

The prince's face was like marble for a space then there dawned in his eyes a light not unlike that of despair. He laughed suddenly and flung the smoking pistol on the ground.

"I am indeed in the wrong," he said. "I have committed a crime that may justly bring a curse on me and my children."

Horne Fisher did not seem entirely satisfied with this very sudden repentance; he kept his eyes on the man and only said, in a low voice, "What crime do you mean?"

"I have helped English justice," replied Prince Michael. "I have avenged your king's officers; I have done the work of his hangman. For that truly I deserve to be hanged."

And he turned to the police with a gesture that did not so much surrender to them, but rather command them to arrest him.

This was the story that Horne Fisher told to Harold March, the journalist, many years after, in a little, but luxurious, restaurant near Piccadilly. He had invited March to dinner some time after the affair he called "The Face in the Target," and the conversation had naturally turned on that mystery and afterward on earlier memories of Fisher's life and the way in which he was led to study such problems as those of Prince Michael. Horne Fisher was fifteen years older; his thin hair had faded to frontal baldness, and his long, thin hands dropped less with affectation and more with fatigue. And he told the story of the Irish adventure of his youth, because it recorded the first occasion on which he had ever come in contact with crime, or discovered how darkly and how terribly crime can be entangled with law.

"Hooker Wilson was the first criminal I ever knew, and he was a policeman," explained Fisher, twirling his wine glass. "And all my life has been a mixed-up business of the sort. He was a man of very real talent, and perhaps genius, and well worth studying, both as a detective and a criminal. His white face and red hair were typical of him, for he was one of those who are cold and yet on fire for fame; and he could control anger, but not ambition. He swallowed the snubs of his superiors in that first quarrel, though he boiled with resentment; but when he suddenly saw the two heads dark against the dawn and framed in the two windows, he could not miss the chance, not only of revenge, but of the removal of the two obstacles to his promotion. He was a dead shot and counted on silencing both, though proof against him would have been hard in any case. But, as a matter of fact, he had a narrow escape, in the case of Nolan, who lived just long enough to say, 'Wilson' and point. We thought he was summoning help for his comrade, but he was really denouncing his murderer. After that it was easy to throw down the ladder above him (for a man up a ladder cannot see clearly what is below and behind) and to throw himself on the ground as another victim of the catastrophe.

"But there was mixed up with his murderous ambition a real belief, not only in his own talents, but in his own theories. He did believe in what he called a fresh eye, and he did want scope for fresh methods. There was something in his view, but it failed where such things commonly fail, because the fresh eye cannot see the unseen. It is true about the ladder and the scarecrow, but not about the life and the soul; and he made a bad mistake about what a man like Michael would do when he heard a woman scream. All Michael's very vanity and vainglory made him rush out at once; he would have walked into Dublin Castle

for a lady's glove. Call it his pose or what you will, but he would have done it. What happened when he met her is another story, and one we may never know, but from tales I've heard since, they must have been reconciled. Wilson was wrong there; but there was something, for all that, in his notion that the newcomer sees most, and that the man on the spot may know too much to know anything. He was right about some things. He was right about me."

"About you?" asked Harold March in some wonder.

"I am the man who knows too much to know anything, or, at any rate, to do anything," said Horne Fisher. "I don't mean especially about Ireland. I mean about England. I mean about the whole way we are governed, and perhaps the only way we can be governed. You asked me just now what became of the survivors of that tragedy. Well, Wilson recovered and we managed to persuade him to retire. But we had to pension that damnable murderer more magnificently than any hero who ever fought for England. I managed to save Michael from the worst, but we had to send that perfectly innocent man to penal servitude for a crime we know he never committed, and it was only afterward that we could connive in a sneakish way at his escape. And Sir Walter Carey is Prime Minister of this country, which he would probably never have been if the truth had been told of such a horrible scandal in his department. It might have done for us altogether in Ireland; it would certainly have done for him. And he is my father's old friend, and has always smothered me with kindness. I am too tangled up with the whole thing, you see, and I was certainly never born to set it right. You look distressed, not to say shocked, and I'm not at all offended at it. Let us change the subject by all means, if you like. What do you think of this Burgundy? It's rather a discovery of mine, like the restaurant itself."

And he proceeded to talk learnedly and luxuriantly on all the wines of the world; on which subject, also, some moralists would consider that he knew too much.

4: Nice Work

Peter Cheyney

1896-1951

The Evening Standard (London) Oct 5 1936

A Lemmy Caution story. English author Cheyney's version of the hard-boiled American crime stories. The American dialect may be a bit doubtful, but the stories and novels featuring Lemmy Caution were popular in the USA.

THE GUY IN THE DIRTY GREY FEDORA looked like he might have come out of the Bellevue Morgue— off a slab. He was big and his jaw jutted over the edge of his upturned coat collar. His eyes shifted all over as if he was waiting for somebody to pick up any time. His shoes were broken and the upper of one had gone rotten with wet. Each time he took a step it squelched.

He had four days' growth of hair on his face and he kept in the shadow of the wall. His fingers inside his coat pocket, were clasped round the butt of a .38 police Positive that had once been issued to a copper who got himself cited for bravery in the line of duty the day after they buried him.

The guy hadn't got a collar or a shirt. Under the overcoat was a cotton undervest. The pant-legs showing urider the overcoat were too short and the cuffs at the bottom were grimed with mud that never came from New York.

Every time he passed a store or somewhere where it was light he stuck his head down into his coat collar. Once he saw a kid carrying some bread, and he licked his lips like a hungry dog. His nose was bothering him. He hadn't a handkerchief and it was sore. If you've ever tried blowing your nose on newspaper you'll know what I mean.

He turned off Bowery at Kenmare. He was limping. He had a blister on his right foot where the shoe was broken. He hastened his steps with an effort. On Mott he saw the newsboy.

The boy was standing on the edge of the sidewalk looking around. When he saw the guy in the dirty grey fedora he crossed the street and stood in the shadow. Further down the limping guy crossed and slowed up. Then he looked around, too, and worked up slowly towards the boy.

The boy made a play of selling him a news-sheet. The limping guy took it. On the front page he could see his own picture, and across the top of the sheet was a banner caption— 'Fremer Breaks Jail— Kills Two Guards'.

That was him.

He spoke to the boy through the side of his mouth. He licked his lips before he spoke.

'Talk quick,' he said. 'Where's that blonde of Franchini's?'

The boy grinned at him. 'You're in luck, mug,' he said. 'She's in Moksie's dive. She's hangin' around there plenty. An' is she drinkin' or is she? She's the rye queen an' toppin' off with rum. Does she get high!'

The limping guy swore quietly.

'Where's she gettin' the dough, kid?' he asked.

The newsboy spat graphically.

'She ain't,' he said. 'Moksie's puttin' it on the cuff.' He dropped his voice. 'Seen that in the sheet about you?' he muttered. 'They're offerin' five grand for you, dead or alive. How'd you like that, Pal?'

But the man was gone. The newsboy looked after him as he disappeared into the shadows and spat once more.

THE guy limped toward the waterfront. He stood up under a light in an alley and read the paper. What the kid had said was true. They were offering five grand for him dead or alive. He licked his lips and grinned—like a wolf. Then he began to walk.

It was midnight when he dragged himself down the stairs at Moksie's speak on waterfront. The place was near empty. Moksie was leaning over the bar reading a news-sheet. The limping guy walked over slowly and looked at Moksie.

'Keep your trap shut, and like it, sucker,' he said. 'I've gotta gun in my pocket that's liable to go shootin' itself off supposin' somebody starts to do anything that even looks screwy. Where's Franchini's girl?'

Moksie nodded his head towards the far corner. The guy looked over and saw her. There was a measure of rye at Moksie's elbow. He picked it up and drained it. Then he limped over to the woman.

She was twenty-eight and still pretty. She was pretty high, and a half-bottle of rotgut with a fake bacardi label stood in front of her. Her eyes were heavy and her last perm had gone haywire on her. Her skin was good and her hands were trembling. She kept tapping on the floor with a four-inch heel.

The guy slumped into a chair opposite her. She looked at it and then him.

'So what?' she said. She grinned cynically. 'You ain't the only guy worth five grand,' she said. 'Feelin' good, I suppose, because you broke out. Well... maybe they'll get you, sucker. They do get 'em, you know. An' what do you want anyhow?'

He leaned towards her.

'Listen, kid,' he said. I gotta talk fast an' you gotta listen. I been on my feet for forty-eight hours, an' unless I get under cover they'll pick me up and fry me. I'm nearly through. I'm soaked an' hungry, ah' I could use liquor'—she pushed the bacardi towards him and he took a swig from the bottle—'but I gotta contact Franchini. I tell ya I gotta. Now, don't give me that stuff about not

knowin' where he is. I know all about it. They're offering five grand for him, too, ain't they? An' you're his girl, ain't you? Well... so you *gotta* know.'

She jerked up her head and looked at him. A gleam of faint interest showed in her eyes.

I contacted Marelli to-night,' he went on. 'He says that he can get Franchini an' me away if I can lay under cover for two days. Well, where's Franchini hidin'? Join me up with him. Another two hours an' they'll have me. Marelli will get us outa this burg in two days, an' I can fix to get him paid an' he knows it. Well... I'll do a trade.

'Get me along to his hide-out. I got no dough— nothin' except an empty gun an' a cough. Fix me some eats an' contact Marelli. He'll get us out of here on Thursday. I'm tradin' my lay-up with Franchini for the getaway for him. Well... do we deal?'

She smiled. Her teeth were white and even.

'What a fine pair of killers youse two are,' she said. 'Takin' it on the lam both of you an' both scared stiff.' She looked at the paper. 'So you bust out up the river,' she said. 'How'dya get down here? Hi-jacked a car?'

He nodded. I bumped a guy in a Ford,' he said. I think I done him too. He took two slugs. They got plenty on me now....'

She took another drink and passed the bottle back to him.

'D'ya meet a guy called Lloyd Schrim in the big house?' she said. 'A young kid— about twenty-three. He got life for a killin'.'

He nodded. I know,' he said. 'He got it for rubbin' out Gerlin' at the Polecat Road-house. He told me he never done it. He said he took the rap for some other guy. He's not a bad kid. He's ill. He's got no dough, so they got him workin' in the jute mill. He's got I.B.— they get that way in the mill. I reckon he was played for a sucker by the guy who did the job, but he wouldn't talk. That's why they're ridin' him an' makin' it tough. I don't reckon he'll last much longer.' She looked at him.

'Why don't he try a break?' she asked. 'You done it. Why can't he?'

He grinned. I got friends outside,' he said, 'friends with dough. You can make a break, but it costs dough. It cost some pals of mine seven grand to get me out.'

She grinned.

'Ain't you the expensive baby?' she said. 'Seven grand to get you out and the cops offerin' five for you. You oughta feel swell.'

He coughed. Underneath the table she heard his shoe squelch.

'Listen, kid,' she said, 'I'll fix it. I'll trade puttin' you up with Franchini until Marelli can get you both away. Franchini ain't got no pals like you with dough and contacts, an' he can't put his nose outside the dump. They're offering five grand for him, too.

'Now, listen. I'm going outside to grab a cab. Pull your hat down an' get in so the driver don't see you. Get him to drop you on Tide Alley at Parata Wharf. Down the bottom is a bust-in warehouse. Franchini's on the top floor, but be careful. He's liable to shoot anybody he don't know.

'I'll be along in half an hour. When I come you tell me where I contact Marelli, an' we'll fix the job. So long— killer!'

FRANCHINI opened the door and looked at the limping guy. Franchini was tall and thin and dirty. He hadn't shaved for a week, and his mouth was still twitching from cocaine.

He grinned. 'Come in,' he said. 'You're Fremer. The dame 'phoned me. I reckon the idea of gettin' out of this hell-broth looks good to me. I'm for Canada.'

The other grinned. 'Me too,' he said.

He closed and bolted the door behind him, and took a swig at the bottle on the table. Beside it was an automatic. There was another in Franchini's hand.

Franchini put the second gun down beside the first and sat at the table with the two guns in front of his hands, which lay on the table behind them.

'You gotta gun?' he asked.

Fremer pulled the police pistol out of his pocket and threw it on the table.

'No shells,' he said laconically. 'There was only two in it, an' I used 'em on the guy in the Ford I came down in.' Franchini nodded.

'O.K.,' he said. 'We'll wait for the dame.'

They sat there waiting, taking swigs from the bottle on the table.

It was quiet. Franchini was just taking a wallop at the bottle when they heard a car grind round the corner outside. Fremer, who had his fingers under the table ledge, suddenly uptilted the table. Franchini's guns crashed to the floor. Simultaneously Fremer went across the table top at Franchini.

The door smashed open. Haifa dozen cops under a police lieutenant burst in with their guns showing.

'Stick 'em up, boys,' said the lieutenant. 'We got a date for you two with the hot seat. Take it easy now.' He snapped the steel cuffs on Franchini and turned towards Fremer with another pair.

Fremer kept his hands up.

'O.K., lieutenant,' he said. 'Just feel in the lining of my coat and you'll find my badge. I'm Lemmy Caution, New York "G" Division. We played it this way to get Franchini. I guessed the dame would come and spill the works to you.'

The lieutenant found the badge. Caution dropped his hands. Franchini began to be sick in the corner.

'You're a mug, Franchini,' said the 'G' man. 'You oughta know that dame of yours was always stuck on Lloyd Schrim. We reckoned that if we planted a fake

story about some guy called Fremer bustin' out of the big house an' taking it on the lam to New York, and splashed his picture on the front page, she would fall for the set-up.

'How the hell do you expect a woman to be in love with a guy and have two killers bottled up in a room and not squeal when she's just been told that her boy friend was dyin' of T.B. through workin' in the jute-mill; that they was ridin' him for not talkin' over a job that she knew durn well that he never pulled?

'She reckoned that the ten grand she'd get for turnin' us in would fix an escape for him. I thought she would, an' took a chance on it, Take him away, boys.'

THE 'G' man limped down the steps at Moksie's. He walked over to the bar and ordered rye. Moksie pushed the bottle over the bar.

The 'G' man picked it up and walked over to the corner table where the woman was slumped. Her head was between her arms. She was crying.

He sat down opposite her and put the bottle on the table. He put his hand under her chin and pushed her head up. She fell back in the chair.

'Cut it out, sister,' he said. 'It can be tough. I sup'pose they told you that there wasn't goin' to be no reward, huh? That it was a frame up? Well, that's the way it goes. Have a drink an' stop the waterworks. It annoys the customers.'

She took a drink from the bottle.

'You're funny, ain't you, copper?' she said. 'It's a big laugh, ain't it? You pull a fast one on me, an' I shoot my mouth an' wise you up to where Franchini is hidin' out, an' you get him fried and I'm left on the heap.'

The 'G' man grinned.

'Listen, sweetheart,' he said. 'This act wasn't so easy to put on. I ain't had any food for two days an' I walked on this broken shoe so as to give myself an honest to goodness blister.

'Another thing, it ain't so bad as it looks. You see, I handled that Polecat Inn shootin' a long time ago. I never believed that your boy friend pulled it. As a matter of fact, Franchini did it, an' Lloyd took the rap for him an' wouldn't talk. When Franchini bumped that last mug an' scrammed, an' we couldn't find where he was, I thought this little act up an' it worked.

'Have another drink an' then let's go and eat. There's a guy waitin' for you down at Centre Street by the name of Lloyd Schrim. I had him sprung this mornin'. He reckons he wants to marry you or something like that.

'An' there ain't no need to ask a lotta questions. He never worked in no jute mill an' he ain't got T.B. Say, do you know what's good for a blister?'

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5: Fishhead

Irvin S. Cobb

1876-1944

The Cavalier, 11 Jan 1913

One of Cobb's darker short stories. (The 1811 earthquake referred to centred on New Madrid, Missouri, was the most powerful in the history of the USA, totally destroyed the small town of New Madrid, and created Reelfoot Lake when land subsised as much as 20 feet.)

IT GOES past the powers of my pen to try to describe Reelfoot Lake for you so that you, reading this, will get the picture of it in your mind as I have it in mine. For Reelfoot Lake is like no other lake that I know anything about. It is an afterthought of Creation.

The rest of this continent was made and had dried in the sun for thousands of years— for millions of years for all I know— before Reelfoot came to be. It's the newest big thing in nature on this hemisphere probably, for it was formed by the great earthquake of 1811, just a little more than a hundred years ago. That earthquake of 1811 surely altered the face of the earth on the then far frontier of this country. It changed the course of rivers, it converted hills into what are now the sunk lands of three states, and it turned the solid ground to jelly and made it roll in waves like the sea. And in the midst of the retching of the land and the vomiting of the waters it depressed to varying depths a section of the earth crust sixty miles long, taking it down— trees, hills, hollows and all; and a crack broke through to the Mississippi River so that for three days the river ran up stream, filling the hole.

The result was the largest lake south of the Ohio, lying mostly in Tennessee, but extending up across what is now the Kentucky line, and taking its name from a fancied resemblance in its outline to the splay, reeled foot of a cornfield negro. Niggerwool Swamp, not so far away, may have got its name from the same man who christened Reelfoot; at least so it sounds.

Reelfoot is, and has always been, a lake of mystery. In places it is bottomless. Other places the skeletons of the cypress trees that went down when the earth sank still stand upright, so that if the sun shines from the right quarter and the water is less muddy than common, a man peering face downward into its depths sees, or thinks he sees, down below him the bare top-limbs upstretching like drowned men's fingers, all coated with the mud of years and bandaged with pennons of the green lake slime. In still other places the lake is shallow for long stretches, no deeper than breast deep to a man, but dangerous because of the weed growths and the sunken drifts which entangle a swimmer's limbs. Its banks are mainly mud, its waters are muddied too, being a rich coffee color in the spring and a copperish yellow in the summer, and the

trees along its shore are mud colored clear up to their lower limbs after the spring floods, when the dried sediment covers their trunks with a thick, scrofulous-looking coat.

There are stretches of unbroken woodland around it and slashes where the cypress knees rise countlessly like headstones and footstones for the dead snags that rot in the soft ooze. There are deadenings with the lowland corn growing high and rank below and the bleached, fire-blackened girdled trees rising above, barren of leaf and limb. There are long, dismal flats where in the spring the clotted frog-spawn clings like patches of white mucus among the weed stalks and at night the turtles crawl out to lay clutches of perfectly round, white eggs with tough, rubbery shells in the sand. There are bayous leading off to nowhere and sloughs that wind aimlessly, like great, blind worms, to finally join the big river that rolls its semi-liquid torrents a few miles to the westward.

So Reelfoot lies there, flat in the bottoms, freezing lightly in the winter, steaming torridly in the summer, swollen in the spring when the woods have turned a vivid green and the buffalo gnats by the million and the billion fill the flooded hollows with their pestilential buzzing, and in the fall ringed about gloriously with all the colors which the first frost brings— gold of hickory, yellow-russet of sycamore, red of dogwood and ash and purple-black of sweet-gum.

But the Reelfoot country has its uses. It is the best game and fish country, natural or artificial, that is left in the South today. In their appointed seasons the duck and the geese flock in, and even semi-tropical birds, like the brown pelican and the Florida snake-bird, have been known to come there to nest. Pigs, gone back to wildness, range the ridges, each razor-backed drove captained by a gaunt, savage, slab-sided old boar. By night the bull frogs, inconceivably big and tremendously vocal, bellow under the banks.

It is a wonderful place for fish— bass and crappie and perch and the snouted buffalo fish. How these edible sorts live to spawn and how their spawn in turn live to spawn again is a marvel, seeing how many of the big fish-eating cannibal fish there are in Reelfoot. Here, bigger than anywhere else, you find the garfish, all bones and appetite and horny plates, with a snout like an alligator, the nearest link, naturalists say, between the animal life of today and the animal life of the Reptilian Period. The shovel-nose cat, really a deformed kind of freshwater sturgeon, with a great fan-shaped membranous plate jutting out from his nose like a bowsprit, jumps all day in the quiet places with mighty splashing sounds, as though a horse had fallen into the water. On every stranded log the huge snapping turtles lie on sunny days in groups of four and six, baking their shells black in the sun, with their little snaky heads raised watchfully, ready to slip noiselessly off at the first sound of oars grating in the row-locks.

But the biggest of them all are the catfish. These are monstrous creatures, these catfish of Reelfoot— scaleless, slick things, with corpsy, dead eyes and poisonous fins like javelins and long whiskers dangling from the sides of their cavernous heads. Six and seven feet long they grow to be and to weigh two hundred pounds or more, and they have mouths wide enough to take in a man's foot or a man's fist and strong enough to break any hook save the strongest and greedy enough to eat anything, living or dead or putrid, that the horny jaws can master. Oh, but they are wicked things, and they tell wicked tales of them down there. They call them man-eaters and compare them, in certain of their habits, to sharks.

Fishhead was of a piece with this setting. He fitted into it as an acorn fits its cup. All his life he had lived on Reelfoot, always in the one place, at the mouth of a certain slough. He had been born there, of a negro father and a half-breed Indian mother, both of them now dead, and the story was that before his birth his mother was frightened by one of the big fish, so that the child came into the world most hideously marked. Anyhow, Fishhead was a human monstrosity, the veritable embodiment of nightmare. He had the body of a man— a short, stocky, sinewy body— but his face was as near to being the face of a great fish as any face could be and yet retain some trace of human aspect. His skull sloped back so abruptly that he could hardly be said to have a forehead at all; his chin slanted off right into nothing. His eyes were small and round with shallow, glazed, pale-yellow pupils, and they were set wide apart in his head and they were unwinking and staring, like a fish's eyes. His nose was no more than a pair of tiny slits in the middle of the yellow mask. His mouth was the worst of all. It was the awful mouth of a catfish, lipless and almost inconceivably wide, stretching from side to side. Also when Fishhead became a man grown his likeness to a fish increased, for the hair upon his face grew out into two tightly kinked, slender pendants that drooped down either side of the mouth like the beards of a fish.

If he had any other name than Fishhead, none excepting he knew it. As Fishhead he was known and as Fishhead he answered. Because he knew the waters and the woods of Reelfoot better than any other man there, he was valued as a guide by the city men who came every year to hunt or fish; but there were few such jobs that Fishhead would take. Mainly he kept to himself, tending his corn patch, netting the lake, trapping a little and in season pot hunting for the city markets. His neighbors, ague-bitten whites and malaria-proof negroes alike, left him to himself. Indeed for the most part they had a superstitious fear of him. So he lived alone, with no kith nor kin, nor even a friend, shunning his kind and shunned by them.

His cabin stood just below the state line, where Mud Slough runs into the lake. It was a shack of logs, the only human habitation for four miles up or down.

Behind it the thick timber came shouldering right up to the edge of Fishhead's small truck patch, enclosing it in thick shade except when the sun stood just overhead. He cooked his food in a primitive fashion, outdoors, over a hole in the soggy earth or upon the rusted red ruin of an old cook stove, and he drank the saffron water of the lake out of a dipper made of a gourd, faring and fending for himself, a master hand at skiff and net, competent with duck gun and fish spear, yet a creature of affliction and loneliness, part savage, almost amphibious, set apart from his fellows, silent and suspicious.

In front of his cabin jutted out a long fallen cottonwood trunk, lying half in and half out of the water, its top side burnt by the sun and worn by the friction of Fishhead's bare feet until it showed countless patterns of tiny scrolled lines, its under side black and rotted and lapped at unceasingly by little waves like tiny licking tongues. Its farther end reached deep water. And it was a part of Fishhead, for no matter how far his fishing and trapping might take him in the daytime, sunset would find him back there, his boat drawn up on the bank and he on the outer end of this log. From a distance men had seen him there many times, sometimes squatted, motionless as the big turtles that would crawl upon its dipping tip in his absence, sometimes erect and vigilant like a creek crane, his misshapen yellow form outlined against the yellow sun, the yellow water, the yellow banks— all of them yellow together.

If the Reelfooters shunned Fishhead by day they feared him by night and avoided him as a plague, dreading even the chance of a casual meeting. For there were ugly stories about Fishhead— stories which all the negroes and some of the whites believed. They said that a cry which had been heard just before dusk and just after, skittering across the darkened waters, was his calling cry to the big cats, and at his bidding they came trooping in, and that in their company he swam in the lake on moonlight nights, sporting with them, diving with them, even feeding with them on what manner of unclean things they fed. The cry had been heard many times, that much was certain, and it was certain also that the big fish were noticeably thick at the mouth of Fishhead's slough. No native Reelfooter, white or black, would willingly wet a leg or an arm there.

Here Fishhead had lived and here he was going to die. The Baxters were going to kill him, and this day in mid-summer was to be the time of the killing. The two Baxters— Jake and Joel— were coming in their dugout to do it. This murder had been a long time in the making. The Baxters had to brew their hate over a slow fire for months before it reached the pitch of action. They were poor whites, poor in everything— repute and worldly goods and standing— a pair of fever-ridden squatters who lived on whisky and tobacco when they could get it, and on fish and cornbread when they couldn't.

The feud itself was of months' standing. Meeting Fishhead one day in the spring on the spindly scaffolding of the skiff landing at Walnut Log, and being

themselves far overtaken in liquor and vainglorious with a bogus alcoholic substitute for courage, the brothers had accused him, wantonly and without proof, of running their trot-line and stripping it of the hooked catch— an unforgivable sin among the water dwellers and the shanty boaters of the South. Seeing that he bore this accusation in silence, only eyeing them steadfastly, they had been emboldened then to slap his face, whereupon he turned and gave them both the beating of their lives— bloodying their noses and bruising their lips with hard blows against their front teeth, and finally leaving them, mauled and prone, in the dirt. Moreover, in the onlookers a sense of the everlasting fitness of things had triumphed over race prejudice and allowed them— two freeborn, sovereign whites— to be licked by a nigger.

Therefore, they were going to get the nigger. The whole thing had been planned out amply. They were going to kill him on his log at sundown. There would be no witnesses to see it, no retribution to follow after it. The very ease of the undertaking made them forget even their inborn fear of the place of Fishhead's habitation.

For more than an hour now they had been coming from their shack across a deeply indented arm of the lake. Their dugout, fashioned by fire and adz and draw-knife from the bole of a gum tree, moved through the water as noiselessly as a swimming mallard, leaving behind it a long, wavy trail on the stilled waters. Jake, the better oarsman sat flat in the stern of the round-bottomed craft, paddling with quick, splashless strokes. Joel, the better shot, was squatted forward. There was a heavy, rusted duck gun between his knees.

Though their spying upon the victim had made them certain sure he would not be about the shore for hours, a doubled sense of caution led them to hug closely the weedy banks. They slid along the shore like shadows, moving so swiftly and in such silence that the watchful mud turtles barely turned their snaky heads as they passed. So, a full hour before the time, they came slipping around the mouth of the slough and made for a natural ambuscade which the mixed breed had left within a stone's jerk of his cabin to his own undoing.

Where the slough's flow joined deeper water a partly uprooted tree was stretched, prone from shore, at the top still thick and green with leaves that drew nourishment from the earth in which the half-uncovered roots yet held, and twined about with an exuberance of trumpet vines and wild fox-grapes. All about was a huddle of drift— last year's cornstalks, shreddy strips of bark, chunks of rotted weed, all the riffle and dunnage of a quiet eddy. Straight into this green clump glided the dugout and swung, broadside on, against the protecting trunk of the tree, hidden from the inner side by the intervening curtains of rank growth, just as the Baxters had intended it should be hidden, when days before in their scouting they marked this masked place of waiting and included it, then and there, in the scope of their plans.

There had been no hitch or mishap. No one had been abroad in the late afternoon to mark their movements— and in a little while Fishhead ought to be due. Jake's woodman's eye followed the downward swing of the sun speculatively. The shadows, thrown shoreward, lengthened and slithered on the small ripples. The small noises of the day died out; the small noises of the coming night began to multiply. The green-bodied flies went away and big mosquitoes, with speckled gray legs, came to take the places of the flies. The sleepy lake sucked at the mud banks with small mouthing sounds as though it found the taste of the raw mud agreeable. A monster crawfish, big as a chicken lobster, crawled out of the top of his dried mud chimney and perched himself there, an armored sentinel on the watchtower. Bull bats began to flitter back and forth above the tops of the trees. A pudgy muskrat, swimming with head up, was moved to sidle off briskly as he met a cotton-mouth moccasin snake, so fat and swollen with summer poison that it looked almost like a legless lizard as it moved along the surface of the water in a series of slow torpid s's. Directly above the head of either of the waiting assassins a compact little swarm of midges hung, holding to a sort of kite-shaped formation.

A little more time passed and Fishhead came out of the woods at the back, walking swiftly, with a sack over his shoulder. For a few seconds his deformities showed in the clearing, then the black inside of the cabin swallowed him up. By now the sun was almost down. Only the red nub of it showed above the timber line across the lake, and the shadows lay inland a long way. Out beyond, the big cats were stirring, and the great smacking sounds as their twisting bodies leaped clear and fell back in the water came shoreward in a chorus.

But the two brothers in their green covert gave heed to nothing except the one thing upon which their hearts were set and their nerves tensed. Joel gently shoved his gun-barrels across the log, cuddling the stock to his shoulder and slipping two fingers caressingly back and forth upon the triggers. Jake held the narrow dugout steady by a grip upon a fox-grape tendril.

A little wait and then the finish came. Fishhead emerged from the cabin door and came down the narrow footpath to the water and out upon the water on his log. He was barefooted and bareheaded, his cotton shirt open down the front to show his yellow neck and breast, his dungaree trousers held about his waist by a twisted tow string. His broad splay feet, with the prehensile toes outspread, gripped the polished curve of the log as he moved along its swaying, dipping surface until he came to its outer end and stood there erect, his chest filling, his chinless face lifted up and something of mastership and dominion in his poise. And then— his eye caught what another's eyes might have missed— the round, twin ends of the gun barrels, the fixed gleams of Joel's eyes, aimed at him through the green tracery.

In that swift passage of time, too swift almost to be measured by seconds, realization flashed all through him, and he threw his head still higher and opened wide his shapeless trap of a mouth, and out across the lake he sent skittering and rolling his cry. And in his cry was the laugh of a loon, and the croaking bellow of a frog, and the bay of a hound, all the compounded night noises of the lake. And in it, too, was a farewell and a defiance and an appeal. The heavy roar of the duck gun came.

At twenty yards the double charge tore the throat out of him. He came down, face forward, upon the log and clung there, his trunk twisting distortedly, his legs twitching and kicking like the legs of a speared frog, his shoulders hunching and lifting spasmodically as the life ran out of him all in one swift coursing flow. His head canted up between the heaving shoulders, his eyes looked full on the staring face of his murderer, and then the blood came out of his mouth and Fishhead, in death still as much fish as man, slid flopping, head first, off the end of the log and sank, face downward, slowly, his limbs all extended out. One after another a string of big bubbles came up to burst in the middle of a widening reddish stain on the coffee-colored water.

The brothers watched this, held by the horror of the thing they had done, and the cranky dugout, tipped far over by the recoil of the gun, took water steadily across its gunwale; and now there was a sudden stroke from below upon its careening bottom and it went over and they were in the lake. But shore was only twenty feet away, the trunk of the uprooted tree only five. Joel, still holding fast to his hot gun, made for the log, gaining it with one stroke. He threw his free arm over it and clung there, treading water, as he shook his eyes free. Something gripped him— some great, sinewy, unseen thing gripped him fast by the thigh, crushing down on his flesh.

He uttered no cry, but his eyes popped out and his mouth set in a square shape of agony, and his fingers gripped into the bark of the tree like grapples. He was pulled down and down, by steady jerks, not rapidly but steadily, so steadily, and as he went his fingernails tore four little white strips in the tree bark. His mouth went under, next his popping eyes, then his erect hair, and finally his clawing, clutching hand, and that was the end of him.

Jake's fate was harder still, for he lived longer— long enough to see Joel's finish. He saw it through the water that ran down his face, and with a great surge of his whole body he literally flung himself across the log and jerked his legs up high into the air to save them. He flung himself too far, though, for his face and chest hit the water on the far side. And out of this water rose the head of a great fish, with the lake slime of years on its flat, black head, its whiskers bristling, its corpsy eyes alight. Its horny jaws closed and clamped in the front of Jake's flannel shirt. His hand struck out wildly and was speared on a poisoned fin, and unlike Joel, he went from sight with a great yell and a whirling and a

churning of the water that made the cornstalks circle on the edges of a small whirlpool.

But the whirlpool soon thinned away into widening rings of ripples and the cornstalks quit circling and became still again, and only the multiplying night noises sounded about the mouth of the slough.

THE BODIES OF ALL THREE came ashore on the same day near the same place. Except for the gaping gunshot wound where the neck met the chest, Fishhead's body was unmarked. But the bodies of the two Baxters were so marred and mauled that the Reelfooters buried them together on the bank without ever knowing which might be Joel's.

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6: A Black Cat For Luck

Erle Cox

1873-1950

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MR. ALBERT PINCEMAN was perfectly happy. It was Saturday afternoon, and the afternoon was fine, and to make his happiness complete Mrs. Pinceman had gone to the pictures. He was sitting on his back doorstep overlooking his back garden. The front, he knew, was a picture that arrested the steps of every passerby. There were a few ragged fringes round his lawns at the back that he purposed to remedy, and as he sat with his pipe between his teeth he worked industriously at putting a razor edge on a pair of sheep shears.

He was a metal engraver, not only by trade, but by instinct, and the long sensitive fingers, as delicate as a woman's, that held the stone, carried out their office almost of their own accord. Nature, who had made Pinceman a superb craftsman, had been niggardly in the matter of brains, but generous in the endowment of his body. Given the proper costume, he would have passed as one of Ouida's guardsmen, both physically and intellectually.

He was not a vain man, and had long ago found that the same good looks that had won him his wife were the cause of that lady's ceaseless jealousy and their almost ceaseless domestic friction. Indeed, Albert sometimes wished he were as insignificant in appearance as that scrubby little animal Hicks, who lived next door, and whose wife, according to Lydia, spent her time in endeavouring to capture Albert's affections.

Neither Mrs. Hicks nor Lydia perceived how remote was the prospect of success in such a venture, for, from the sounds that occasionally came across the fence, Pinceman knew that Hicks had even a worse time than he had himself, which was some consolation.

Presently Pinceman tested the edges of the shears on his thumb nail, and was satisfied. He picked up a sack that lay beside him, and strolled across his garden. Beside one bed he stopped, and scowling angrily breathed a few such words as are written on a slip of paper and banded up for the inspection of virtuous J.P.'s. The tomato plants which he had cherished through a sickly infancy to a vigorous youth had been infamously treated. Four were completely out of the earth, and lay wilting in the sun. No need to ask the culprit s name; it was that blanked cat, Diddums.

Lydia owned Diddums, a black she-cat, for luck, and Diddums owned the house. It was Diddums who was responsible for the frieze of toms of all sizes and colours that decorated the back fence all day and made night one long classical concert, and he loathed Diddums from the innermost recesses of his

soul. He replaced the plants, gloomily, wondering whether they would survive the outrage, and cursing the criminal. Then he turned to his lawns.

Squatting on the bag he had brought with him, Pinceman trimmed the edges of the lawns with the same care as a barber would bestow upon a head of hair. As he worked, his irritation died down, and peace returned. For half an hour there was no other sound in the garden save the grating ring of the shears.

Then he happened to look up, and contentment vanished. Thirty feet away, from him on the tomato-bed, he saw Diddums, and Diddums was gardening on her own account. Albert sat up and yelled, "Shoo!" Diddums remained calm, and went on with her work. He looked round for something to throw; but his garden was bare of stick or stone.

Then, in his anger, he hurled the shears.

He had no intention of hurting the brute; he merely wished to frighten her; but he reckoned without his hands: those hands that had been trained for a lifetime to and met the commands of his brain with unerring accuracy. The twin blades whirled flashing through the air. From the corner of her eye Diddums saw them coming, and stretched her neck for flight. Too late! Even as she moved her fate was upon her; a point of the shears drove down on either side of her slim neck, and deep into the ground.

Pinceman sat paralysed at the success of his endeavour. Then he breathed one word: "Gosh!" and rose to his feet.

The guillotine could not have severed the head more completely or neatly. On one side lay the sleek black body, scarcely twitching, and on the other the small black head. Seldom had Albert thought more quickly than he did then. Diddums was deceased; that was one outstanding fact. Another was that the means of her decease must remain for ever unknown to Lydia. She had enough ammunition for nagging already without his providing such a tit-bit as the murder of Diddums.

"A black cat for luck" murmured Pinceman, looking down on his handiwork, "I wonder whose luck, mine or Lydia's or Diddums'?" Then he made a swift resolution to bury his victim deeply, and profess not only ignorance of her whereabouts, but intense sympathy for her loss.

Swiftly he went to his tool shed, glancing as he did towards the attic in the window of Hicks's house, where Mrs. Hicks sometimes sat working in the afternoon. He knew the sensations of a murderer and feared a witness. He took a spade and returned to the scene of his crime. As he turned the comer of the shed, he stood wide eyed and speechless.

Reclining on the grass beside the bed was a woman.

That in itself was sufficient to stagger Mr. Pinceman, but as his slow brain took in the details of her appearance his eyes fairly goggled with amazement. She was young, not more than 20, and beautiful.

Yes she was beautiful enough to make Albert feel almost dizzy. She was more beautiful than her costume was scandalous in the eyes of the owner of Namecnip Lodge. He wondered vaguely if mortal woman could possess such large and melting brown— no, black, eyes, as gazed up at him, or how could it be possible that the owner of such eyes could possess such a tiny scarlet flower for a mouth. Her hair (there were stormcloud masses of it) was loosely bound with a blazing band of jewels, pendants of which fell across her forehead. About her neck was a thin band of rubies that looked almost like a streak of blood. The roundness of her bosom was tightly confined in pink gauze thickly sewn with flashing gems. Below this was a hiatus; her costume petered out completely, until it recommenced with a heavy rose and gold sash about her slim waist and hips, and instead of skirts she wore trousers of pink gauze that were banded closely at her ankles. On the tiny, the absurdly tiny feet, were dainty slippers with curled up toes. Across her waist was a thin gold chain, from which hung a small jewelled knife.

Taken all in all, she was not the lady that the ordinary suburban householder would, expect to find in his back garden on a fine Saturday afternoon.

For a long minute he stood gazing at her, while the vision smiled up at him unabashed. Then the spade dropped from his hand, and with dragging feet he moved towards her trying to find words. He paused beside her. The only speech he could find blurted out: ''Who the dickens are you?"

The answer came unhesitatingly: "I am Miriam, daughter of Ben Hafiz Ben Sadi. Do you not remember?"

To Albert the only thing mundane that resembled her voice waas iced beer being poured into a crystal goblet on a hot day. But he steeled, his heart, and thought of Lydia.

"Are you?" he said, shortly. "Well, all I can say is, it's a pity. Ben doesn't look after you better. Don't you know you could be had up for coming out in those togs? You get back to your theatre quick and lively."

The girl laughed lightly, and sat up supporting herself impudently with both hands on the grass behind her. "Don't you really remember?"

"Don't be a fool," he answered irritably, "as though a man who had met you once would forget you."

She looked up at him, still smiling mischievously. "And yet, Selim, jeweller to my lord the King Solomon, you once swore under the orange-trees that death itself could not make you forget. Ah, you men! You men!"

The sign and the glance wade him quiver to his fingertips. The two were so absorbed that" neither heard the gasp of astonishment from the attic of the house of Hicks, whence its overlady had obtained her first amazed view of the scene below.

The delicate flattery of the glance was turned aside by a thought of Lydia. "Now, dinkum!" said Mr. Pinceman. "What are you trying to come at? Who are you?"

"Forgotten! Forgotten!" she sighed, "That I will tell. Our great lord King Solomon, the wisest of men, had 700 wives, and 300 of us, and I was his favourite."

The much married Pinceman interrupted. "The wisest of men— seven hun— Strewth! Must have been balmy as a bandicoot."

The girl went on without noticing the interjection, just altering her attitude to clasp her hands across her knees, and Albert unconsciously sank beside her on the grass, to the edification of Mrs. Hicks, who now had an uninterrupted view of the scene.

"We were lovers, you and I, Selim, before they took me to the palace, and you swore that you would never forget, but you never heard what happened to me."

He looked at her helplessly. "All right, have it your own war. Though mind, I'll swear I never laid eyes on you before."

She shook her head. "I was the favourite, beloved of our lord the king. He would have made me his wife also, but those others poisoned his mind with lies against me; horrible lies, and he believed, but would have pardoned me, but those wives urged and begged him night and day to punish me "

"Excuse me, Miss," broke in Pinceman, "How many wives did you say?"

"Seven hundred," she answered, "and the King yielded."

Mr. Pinceman nodded with complete understanding. "My oath he would!" he muttered.

"And Selim—" ("Name's Albert, please Miss, if you don't mind," he interrupted)— "Can you guess the punishment?"

Pinceman shook his head.

"I was transformed into a black cat by the magic of the King, who laid it upon me that I could never regain my human form until two blades on the one hilt struck off my head at a single blow."

Had anyone mentioned transmigration in the hearing of Mr. Pinceman, he would have wondered, for which race it had been entered. A wiser head might have been pardoned for doubting the sanity of his visitor, and Albert doubted frankly.

"Look here miss," he said sharply, "I don't know where you come from, but you're clean batty in the nut. You go home like a good girl.''

For answer a hand fluttered like a while jewelled moth to his sleeve. "Ah! Selim, can you not understand? I was Diddums, and you have broken the spell. You are my deliverer, and I still love you."

For the first time since he had seen the girl he remembered the tragedy, and looked at the spot where the body of his victim lay. The shears were still sticking in the ground, but the remains had vanished.

"Somebody's pinched my dead cat!" he gasped; then remembering that a dead cat was not a negotiable security, he turned to stare at the girl.

"Yes, Selim, my beloved," she went on, and again the soft cooing voice brought the vision of iced beer to Alberts mind, "Your hand has freed me, and you and I will live together for ever."

Consternation fell on the man at this announcement.

"Here!" he said aghast, "I'm married; what about my missus?"

She pouted deliciously. "Phoo! That fat cow, Selim! I can poison her. I'm quite good at poisoning. I learned from my lord the King."'

The amazing suggestion made Albert overlook the disparaging description of his wife.

"Cripes!" he gasped, "You're a bit hot, ain't you miss? Nice sort of bird that King must have been." Gradually it had filtered into his mind that there might be truth in the girl's statements.

"Oh, well," said his visitor airily, "You can keep her if you wish. I don't mind. Marry me and she will be our slave."

Said Mr Pinceman, more to himself than her, "A bonzer time I'll have, I don't think."

Up in the attic Mrs. Hicks was straining her senses to a point that threatened serious consequences in her endeavour to catch the words of the murmuring voices. Down in the yard she could see Hicks with his eye glued to a hole in the palings.

"Now look here, my girl—"

"Miriam," she corrected softly

"All right, Miriam if you like. How long ago do you think this King business happened?"

"Three thousand years ago, my Selim. Three thousand years have I lived waiting for release."

"Rats!" said Mr. Pinceman indignantly. "Why, Lydia got you as a kitten not two years ago from her sister Maggie. Cats have nine lives, but you can't kid me they live 3,000 years."

She nodded her head. "That was the worst of my punishment. Nearly 2000 times have I been born a cat. Over 700 times I been drowned as a kitten. I know, Selim, girl cats are not loved by human beings. And all this time I waited for the blow from a double-bladed hilt, and now—" She paused and looked up into his eyes.

Mr. Pinceman felt his pulses beat quicker she did so, but thought of Lydia saved him. He pulled himself together with an effort, and drew away. There was

a shade of vexation in the girl's eyes for a moment. Then she smiled at him again.

"Can you not remember, Selim?"

"No!" he said, shortly. "I'm blowed if I can. Just remember I'm married and I don't hold with carrying on with girls."

"Once," she said, softly, "you loved to see me dance. You said I was like a moonbeam glancing on a rippling stream of foam-flecked golden wine of Persia."

Albert looked at her in amazement.

"Did I ever say that, miss?'' he inquired incredulously.

"Aye," she answered, ''that and more."

"Then," he said, with deep conviction, "I must have been shickered."

She shook her head and laughed.

"Yet Selim, your tongue was very ready with sweet soft words in those days. But watch, even now I may be able to waken the old memories."

She sprang to her feet and with a wriggle of her ankles, discarded the pink slippers and stood balanced lightly before him with outstretched arms. Glancing at her tiny white feet Albert grew hot all over at an almost irresistible desire to tell her that they looked like orange blossoms dropped upon the sward. Never before had such ideas entered his head.

With half-closed eyes Miriam commenced to sway her body from the hips. Now there are some Oriental dances that may be performed before the most censorious of Occidentals without giving cause for uneasiness, and then again there are others. And the performance of Miriam, daughter of Hafiz Ben Sadi, in the back garden of Mr Pinceman in broad daylight was one of the others.

Albert sat glued to the grass. Not for a bank full of money could he have moved. But the dance had an entirely contrary effect on the shocked Mrs. Hicks. It stung her into activity. Safety first, however, was her motto, and who could blame her? Downstairs she fled, and swiftly and silently her hands pounced on the heel of Mr. Hicks, who still bent with protruding eye at the crack in the fence.

"Not a sound," she hissed, and led him indoors.

"In there, and stay there," she said as she. pushed him into the sitting-room and turned the key in the door. Then she fled to the grocers shop at the corner, where there was a public telephone. She sent her message over the wires, and sped homeward. Even before she reached her gate on the screen of a suburban picture theatre there flashed a message. "Mrs. Pinceman— Honeysuckle street— Wanted home urgently. Take a cab."

MRS. HICKS, on arriving home, was breathless with exertion and indignation, and there was Hicks back at the palings again. He had escaped through the

window. The brute! Again she descended on him like a hissing fury, and sat him a far corner of the attic, while she returned to her post.

All her strict, hopelessly commonplace training was in arms at what she saw. She breathed words like "Hussy" and "Shameless minx," and occasionally turned to call Hicks a low brute, over her shoulder and all the time she listened for the sound of wheels. But if a thunderbolt had fallen beside Pinceman at the moment it would have passed unheeded, for he was witnessing a display of temptation that had turned a much wiser head than his.

He had risen to his feet, when or how he had no notion. Gradually the swaying figure drew closer to him The strange perfume of her hair wakened memories undreamed of. His senses reeled before the out-stretched arms and the appealing, white-jewelled hands.

Before he knew it Miriam was nestling closely to him, and his arms were about her slim body. Resistlessly his head bent and his lips hovered over the red parted lips of the girl.

Then the storm smote him. One mighty avenging hand reached his ear, and another wrenched at the collar of his shirt and drew him backward as he released the girl.

"You devil!" his wife almost shrieked. "You dastardly beast! In your own home, no sooner than my back is turned. Who is this vile creature?"

The two women glared furiously at each other. Miriam's hand fell on the hilt of her knife. Albert was at no time ready-witted, and the magnitude of the disaster scattered his senses to the four winds. He just gaped.

"Who is she?" snorted Lydia.

Pinceman found his voice, A really satisfactory lie was out of the question, so he told the truth. "She's the cat, Liddy."

The disengaged hand landed swiftly on his car. "Cat! Cat! Of course she's a cat, as if I couldn't see that. What's her name?"

"Diddums!" answered the worm feebly.

Here Miriam intervened. "He speaks the truth, you fat cow! By chance he slew your cat, and I am his reward. Peace, fool! For henceforth he is mine."

The mighty bosom of Mrs. Pinceman heaved like a blacksmiths' bellows, and her face grew purple.

"Fat cow!'' she gasped. "Yours!" She released her husband and made one stride towards the girl,

Albert threw an arm round her and checked her momentum with an effort.

"Don't listen to her, Liddy, she's mad! I never saw her till an hour ago. I'll swear it."

Again the wrath of the outraged woman fell on him. '"So, for an undressed hussy like that, you forget me in an hour!"

Here a shriek from the girl cut into her speech.

"My hour is passing. My lord the King gave me but an hour to win a kiss from the man who released me, or die a cat! Selim—" she flung herself upon him, and her arms about his neck."Selim, my beloved, kiss me. Kiss me but once—"

Albert wrenched the arms from around his neck.

"Be blowed if I do," he said simply.

Speech failed Lydia, but her feelings found vent in action, and she landed one full-handed slap just where she thought it would have the greatest moral effect. The girl spun around, and a knife flashed in her hand.

"I go!" she hissed, "I go; but I take you to Gehenna with me!"

Mrs Pinceman's courage failed before the fury in the eyes, and she fled.

Up in the attic Mrs. Hicks had watched with keen enjoyment: but this new development spurred her into action, and again she fled to the grocer's shop, and this time her message sent a constable flying to his motorcycle.

Mrs. Pinceman screamed. Miriam darted after her, but Albert threw himself across her track. To dodge him the girl ran across the tomato-bed, and as she did so the shears, still sticking upright, caught her foot. She tumbled— fell— and Albert Pinceman stood staring at the ground. There was no jewelled fury there, but the body of Diddums, still twitching slightly as it lay.

Mrs. Pinceman had locked herself in the woodshed.

An intense relief filled the soul of Albert.

"Liddy! Liddy!" he called. "It's all right, she's gone."

The door of the shed opened, and the white face his wife peered out.

HAIF AN HOUR later a constable made a report at the station to the sergeant.

"Nothing doing, " he said, hanging up his helmet and laughing. "Chap named Pinkhman or something, killed his wife's cat, and when I got up there she'd hauled about three handfuls of hair out of the poor devil. I had to pull her off, or she'd have got it all. Seems he'd been cuddling a chorus girl as well. I couldn't get the hang of it altogether. No charge, anyway. Sorry for him."

The sergeant nodded sympathetically. He too, had a Lydia.

''Dashed unlucky to kill a cat!"

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7: Phalaenopsis Gloriosa

Edgar Wallace

1875-1932

The Monthly Story Magazine, Nov 1905, "by John Jason Trent"

TWO men sat over their liquor and cigars in the big library of Driscoll's country place. It was a chilly evening in April, and the great pine logs which blazed on the hearth before them and threw tremendous lightings over the books, paintings, and heavy ebony furnishings of the apartment scarcely served to dissipate the chill of the unused room.

To the right, three long French windows looked westward over acres of lawn sweeping down to the broad river, while to the south the view was shut off by dense masses of evergreen shrubbery, supplemented by vines and creepers which had flung their festoons of delicate leafage in every direction across the windows. A great elm standing guard at this corner of the house tossed its branches to and fro in the spring wind and tapped nervously on the nearest window.

The house, in spite of its wealth and beauty, impressed one with a sense of loneliness. A dwelling reflects the daily life of its tenants in the same intangible way that a man carries the reflection of his life writ large in face and person; and this stately room had the air of one who has looked on his dead and stands appalled and desolate. From the more distant parts of the house came the occasional creak of a board or the slam of a shutter in the wind, and at each fresh noise the elder of the two men turned a face full of ill-concealed uneasiness in the direction of the sound. At last the other tossed the ash of his cigar in the fire and turned to his host.

"Bob, old fellow, what's the matter with you? You're as nervous as my grandmother! Is it a ghost or *delirium tremens* that is freezing your young soul? Speak out man, what is it?"

Driscoll, thus addressed, rose, and going almost stealthily to the two doors leading out of the room, slipped the massive bolts across into their, sockets; then he came back to the fire, poured out some liquor, drank it, and pulled his chair near to Larcher.

"Larcher, you and I have been out together for big game. The tiger skin there tells one story, this leopard's skin beneath our feet another, but I have brought you here to-night to help me kill or capture the most devilish thing that ever walked the earth. You, because you are the one man whose brain and nerve and muscle I can trust."

"Good!" said Larcher. "Is it man or beast?"

"Not beast, yet scarcely human," replied the other, "but I must go back and tell you the story of this accursed thing that has come upon the place. You know

what a hobby my orchid houses have long been to me, and you have heard me speak of the difficulty I have had in getting a capable foreman to minister to my favorites. The run of these fellows know merely the few common commercial varieties, and my interest has always centred in the rarer species. Six months ago I was in such despair over my collection that I had almost decided to give up their culture entirely rather than suffer the constant disappointment of having successive importations die on my hands, when, in response to my advertisement in the *Herald*, there walked into my office one morning a fellow who seemed exactly the one for the place. I couldn't tell his nationality exactly, but his bronzed face bore out his statement that he had spent many years in the tropics, collecting orchids for one of the big English importing houses. Details were soon adjusted between us, and it was arranged that he was to come down here and begin work at once. I inquired if he had a family, and he replied that he had a wife, who would come down here with him the next day.

"As he rose to leave the office, I said: 'One thing more, Hearston. I hope you are up in growing *Phalaenopsis Gloriosa*. They are my favorite orchid, and I have a special house of them out there.' Larcher, at mention of the orchid's name I could have sworn that the fellow turned green under his tan. He caught at the chair back as though to steady himself, and answered oddly that he thought he could do nothing with them, and then added, as though he had said more than he had meant to: 'They are the most difficult orchids in the world to bloom in captivity, sir.' I smiled at the conceit of the orchids as imprisoned wild things, bade him good morning, and forgot the incident for the time.

"Well, they went down the next day, and were soon established in the pretty little cottage on the slope of the hill near the greenhouses. I went down some weeks later, found everything running smoothly, and Hearston introduced me to his wife. You know that since Mollie died, women have rather gone out of my life, and I am not easily impressed with a pretty face, but I shall never forget the exotic beauty of that woman.

"Whatever doubt there might be about his nationality, hers was unmistakable. She was pure, high- caste East Indian; you know the type, tall, slim, with exquisite features and eyes of midnight witchery. I thought as I looked at her that she had the same subtle atmosphere of mingled spirituality and splendor that my orchid blooms possess. She spoke no word of English, and stood beside Hearston as we talked, eyeing him with a world of pathos in her dark, unfathomable eyes. It was plain to see that she adored her husband from his footprints upward. You remember the handsome collie dog I had here, a beautiful fellow, who lived up to his ideals in a way to shame most humans. He had always been slow to make friends with strangers, though devoted to the old servants on the place. He came bounding up to us as we stood there, and to my surprise, ignored me to fawn at Mrs. Hearston's feet, leaping upon her with the

utmost affection. 'Your wife has made a friend worth having,' I remarked to Hearston. The man smiled and assented, and the subject passed.

"We spent the rest of the day going through the greenhouses together, and I found that I had made no mistake in my man. Such a knowledge of orchids, of their native conditions of growth and climate, and such a stock of East Indian lore was a revelation to me.

"The greenhouses have been altered and enlarged considerably since you saw them last; the chief addition being an immense circular house at the foot of the range. Here I have gathered thousands of fine plants of *Phalaenopsis Gloriosa*. Instead of the usual equipment of benches I had a number of trees on the place cut down and sunk in the ground at irregular intervals from each other, on all sides of the house, and the orchid plants were then wired to them from the ground up, interspersed with ferns imbedded in moss. Great palms were planted thickly round the trees, and hundreds of orchids were suspended by wire from the roof. The whole effect was that of a bit of tropical jungle. In spite of all my care they had never done well, and I was anxious to have, my new foreman's advice on the subject.

"Rather to my surprise, Hearston's wife accompanied us on our rounds, but when she came to the floor of the *Phalaenopsis* house, she drew back pale and shuddering. He spoke some rapid words in what I suppose was her native tongue to her, and she turned and sat on a stool in the shed outside. He murmured some apology to me about her being tired, and followed me into the house. Before communicative, the man grew oddly quiet and nervous. We were there some five minutes, and in that time he never took his eyes off the slim little figure in the shed beyond. I could get nothing out of him about the culture of the *Gloriosas*, and attributing his evident embarrassment to his ignorance on the subject, we returned to the other houses. That night I went back to town.

"I am going into all this wearisome detail, Larcher, in the hope that you, with your years of experience in India, and your knowledge of the Oriental character, may be able to see some glimmer of dawn in the darkness of the mystery that followed."

Larcher nodded, eagerly, and Driscoll continued:

"Six weeks passed, and Hearston's reports were uniformly satisfactory. At the end of that time I received a curious letter from him. It was a request for a couple of private police to patrol the place night and day, and the man urged haste as though oppressed with terror. We are too far off the turnpike here to be often troubled with tramps. Still I felt that my new foreman had deserved my confidence so far, and I took steps that afternoon to engage a couple of men for watchman's duty. The next day was Sunday, and still a bit worried by the unusual tenor of Hearston's letter, I took the afternoon train and came out here. I had neglected to wire anyone of my coming, so there was no trap at the

station to meet me, and I walked the mile to the place in a bleak February twilight that seemed to deepen in perceptible gradations.

"As I came down the curve of the drive and round the southern corner of the house, I paused, struck by the beauty of the view. Great crimson clouds were banked up on the horizon as though rolled up by a stupendous fire, while streaks of sullen red shooting almost to the zenith flung their sinister reflection on the river and the lawns. I had never seen the place take on such a lurid unearthly beauty, fit setting for the tragedy to come. The group of dwarf Norwegian pines at this corner of the house stood out against the angry sky like some exquisite tracery, and while I stood admiring their symmetry and grace, a branch not twenty feet away from me swung back and— a face looked out.

"A hideous face, such as one might conjure up in the nightmares of a fever, a yellow, square Mongolian face, seamed with a thousand wrinkles, and every seam a sin. Larcher, I saw that face as plain as I see you now. For the space of three seconds I stood still, looking straight at that grinning mask, hypnotised, perhaps, by those beady glittering eyes gazing into mine. Then the branch dropped back into place, and I, released from the spell cast over me, darted forward to the spot where it had been. It had vanished like a dream. I searched among the bushes for half-an-hour or more, but finally gave up in despair, and went into the house.

"I took occasion, while old Mrs. Mayhew was serving my dinner, to question her guardedly on the subject of tramps or strangers on the place. She told me there hadn't been a stranger seen on the place all the winter. That some of the servants had been commenting on the fact only the night before. This made Hearston's letter more inexplicable than ever, and after dinner I sent for him, intending to have a plain talk with him on the subject. He came in answer to my summons, and I jumped at sight of the man's face. White and haggard, with a certain hunted fierceness in his eyes and a restlessness in his manner which changed him utterly. I felt that the situation rose to its feet, and explained itself as a bad combination of man and whisky. I never strike a man when he's down, or preach temperance to a convalescent drunkard, so I ignored Hearston's apparent condition, told him of my receipt of his letter and the arrangements I had made for the patrolling of the place.

" 'They must be quick, Mr. Driscoll,' Hearston broke in. 'They, must be quick. For God's sake, sir, get them over here at once!' He came up to me in his excitement and laid his hand on mine. I shivered at his touch; it was so cold. His eyes blazed into mine in passionate eagerness, and then I saw my mistake. It wasn't drink that had changed the man; it was sheer, clear, cold, blue terror!

" 'Hearston,' I said, 'there is something wrong here on the place; I want you to tell me frankly what you fear.'

"Before the fellow had a chance to reply the night was broken by a succession of sharp yelps like an animal in pain, followed by a shrill scream, and on the sound the man beside me dashed through the door and out over the verandah. I followed him almost instantly and ran out of doors. There, ahead of me, Hearston was running over the lawn to his cottage, as though he had been shot from a bow. I followed him as rapidly as possible, marvelling at the speed with which he crossed the ground, and a second later I came up to him bending over his wife lying in a dead faint on the verandah of his cottage. A shadow lay at the woman's feet, and as I bent to see what it was, a pitiful little moan came up from the darkness.

"Someone brought a lantern, and by its light I saw, my collie Donald lying there, his bright fur all matted with blood from a murderous knife-wound in his side. His beautiful, faithful eyes turned up to mine as I knelt beside him, then glazed as the little life went out. Together we lifted Mrs. Hearston, and, carrying her into the house, laid her upon the bed. Hearston, wild with excitement, bent over her, begging me to do something— anything. In a few minutes she recovered her consciousness, but relapsed at sight of us into a state of helpless hysteria. They both seemed too near the verge of collapse to give me any information as to what had occurred.

"Hearston was walking to and fro like a crazy man, wringing his hands, while his wife lay laughing and sobbing uncontrolledly. The dog's death showed me that something serious was on foot on the place, and, feeling that they were probably not safe in the cottage by themselves, I proposed to Hearston that he and his wife come up here for the night. He assented with eagerness, and they came up to the house with me. Mayhew put them in a room on the ground-floor which had at one time been used as a sort of spare room when the house was crowded. It was in this wing, but on the other side and facing the greenhouses. I saw them comfortably installed, told Mayhew to see that Mrs. Hearston had everything she needed, and bade them good-night.

"I sat long over the fire that evening, trying in vain to puzzle out Hearston's behavior, and the cause of my dog's death. It all depressed me more than I can tell you, and I was filled with a miserable, presentiment of evil, try as I might to shake it off. I must have sunk into a sort of a doze before the fire, for I dreamed a curiously vivid dream. I was out on the lawn in the moonlight, pursuing a baffling shape which fled from me, eluding me ever as I gained on it, and which kept giving out yelps like the dying cry of the dog.

"Faster it fled, and I faster, with that curious rapid increase of momentum peculiar to dreams, till at last I had him by the shoulder. He turned in my grasp, and I saw again the hideous yellow face outlined against the shrubbery, and an appalling scream shot through my brain and brought me to my feet. I knew that I had dreamt the rest, but I could have sworn that the scream was real. I rushed

to the door and flung it open. The hall lay dark and silent. I threw open a window thinking the sound might have come from without, but the grave could not be quieter; and cursing my nervous imagination for the fright that it had given me, I turned in and went to bed.

"The next morning I woke early, and eager to clear up in the daylight the wretched business of the night before, I sent Hendricks over to Hearston's room to tell him I wished to see him as soon as possible. The fellow came back and said he had knocked repeatedly on Hearston's door, but couldn't rouse him, and in that instant all the vague horror of the night before returned to me. The room had two long French windows in it like these, opening out on the north verandah, so I sent Hendricks out on the porch to reconnoiter from the outside. He returned, almost immediately this time, to say that one of the windows was wide open, and he had looked in. The room was in confusion, Hearston and his wife were gone. It came to me that they might have risen early and gone back to the cottage, so I sent Hendricks for the third time to deliver my message. A third time he came back to say that they were not there. I went myself to the cottage. It was just as we had left it the night before. I hailed one of the gardeners on his way to work. 'Have you seen Hearston?' 'No,' he answered; 'perhaps he is in the greenhouses.'

"'Perhaps he is,' I said; 'we must find him. You and Hendricks take the first house and I'll take the second, and we'll go through alternating.' I started on my tour of the houses, calling Hearston's name aloud in my eagerness to find him safe, and shake off the deepening conviction that I should find him otherwise.

I reached the *Phalaenopsis* house at the foot of the range, still calling, opened the door and started to go in. The masses of greenery made the interior seem dim to me after the morning sunlight; but as I closed the door I saw something coming towards me out of the forest twilight of the place. At first I thought that it was Broughton's Great Dane— the dog is over here half the time— but it rose upright, upright and gibbering, lunged at me through the shadows of the green! I leaped to the door and crashed it behind me, and the thing fell against it heavily, and rolled over on the floor. It was Hearston; Hearston with snow-white hair and eyes of flame! Hearston, and he was mad— mad!"

"And the woman?"

"No trace! If the earth had opened and swallowed her she could not have disappeared more utterly. We captured Hearston after a terrible struggle; there was nothing to be elicited from him. Every inch of this place has been searched and searched again, and still, no trace! And, Larcher, It seems a trivial thing, a weak and empty fancy, and yet—"

"Tell!"

"Since that night when that mysterious horror happened, those *Gloriosas* seem to have taken a new lease, of life! Great sprays have started from every plant and hang laced and interlaced like some strange web on every side. Buds developed, but they do not bloom! A month ago I said to the man in charge— 'To-morrow will see this house white with blossoms.'

"He looked at me curiously. 'So I thought, sir, a week ago.'

" 'They were not sufficiently developed, then,' I answered.

" 'Yes, sir, just as they are now.'

" 'Why, man, they couldn't be,' I cried! 'look at them, they are just ready to burst open.'

" 'As you say, sir,' he answered; reservedly.

" 'But you don't agree with me?' I asked.

" 'No, sir, they were just like this ten days ago; one would say, sir, they were all ready to bloom, but— that they were waiting for something!'

"It is true! I have watched them ever since. The whole place is full of a dismal, haunting oppression that I cannot shake off or banish. An indescribable terror hangs over it, and I never want to see it again.'

Larcher rose to his feet, his face alight with excitement, and stood with his back to the fire looking down at Driscoll.

"And the motive, the clue, the explanation to it all? What do people say? What do they think?"

"Everything and nothing! A woman is made away with— by whom? By Hearston, himself, some say: Bah! The man loved her. She had no fear of him. There was a third person whom they both feared— the face in the pines."

"The other men on the place?"

"Are above suspicion! They all room together in quarters over the carriage-house, and were all there that night. They say that Hearston was a good fellow and devoted to his wife; that she was with him in the green-houses every day, and that he never seemed content unless she was close beside him. Further, it was brought out that in the ten days preceding the occurrence Hearston had seemed strangely excited and nervous, but perfectly sober and sane, and, note this, that there had been no tramp nor suspicious character seen on the place since Hearston had come on it."

"Did you tell the police of the face you had seen?"

"I did. But no one else had seen it; I had no tangible proof that I had, and the consensus of opinion seemed to be that it was the result of overstrained nerves."

"What has become of Hearston?"

"He is, or rather was, till two days ago, in the lunatic asylum, the tower of which you can see just over the trees, to the west of the place. It's about three miles distant. They said from the first that his condition was quite hopeless.

When they took him there he was almost uncontrollable; then he sank into a sullen silence difficult to break. Two days ago I received word from the superintendent that Hearston had burst the heavy iron bars at his window and escaped. They begged me, if I had any knowledge of his whereabouts, to inform them at once, and added that they were watching my place, as it was likely that he would seek his home.

"I came down here immediately, but so far, have had no sight of him. Yesterday afternoon I grew lonely and nervous. I had been in the house all day, and, thinking a little exercise would do me good, I strolled up the drive to the gate. It was almost dark when I turned to come back, and I couldn't help glancing sharply through the shrubbery as I passed along. I had on an old pair of tennis shoes I found in my room here, and the soft soles were almost noiseless on the gravel roadway. And as I walked it seemed to me I heard a sort of swish, swish, as of someone moving through the bushes to my right. I drew my revolver, and gradually slackened my speed, that whatever it was might pass me.

"The movement in the bushes slackened, too, and I knew that I was being watched. I walked on till we came to a place where the shrubbery lining the road was thinner than usual, and, wheeling suddenly, I plunged through the bushes in the direction of the sound. As I wheeled, so did the intruder, and put such distance between us that I could but faintly make out a tall supple figure in the robe of some dark stuff, wound round the waist with a scarf. I had hoped to find it Hearston. But it wasn't he, for the man glanced around just before he disappeared, and I saw again the villainous yellow face, and the beady eyes! I ran after him, discharging my revolver as I ran, but the shots went wild in the gathering night, and for a second time he eluded me. This morning I sent you a wire. You are here. That is all."

"Driscoll, you say the face you saw in the shrubbery was grinning? Did you notice anything, peculiar, about the teeth?"

Driscoll sprang to his feet with a smothered oath. "Larcher, you have seen it! Where?"

"I haven't seen it, Bob, upon my word!"

"Then how did you know that it hadn't any teeth? At least, just the two incisors, at the angle of the jaw, long and yellow like a wolf's fangs! How did you know the one thing I omitted to tell you?"

"Sit down, and I'll tell you. It's a bit of a story I haven't thought of for years," answered Larcher, lighting a fresh cigar. "By the way, since you confess so frankly to carrying a gun, I may as well unload myself of my armoury. I never stay in civilisation long enough at a time to accustom myself to going without a weapon. I'll lay it here on the table, if you don't mind. Well, you remember that I went out with the British East India Geographical Commission some seven years

ago, and you will remember, further, perhaps, that our chief mission at that time was the exploration of some of the tributaries of the Mekhong River. The British Government has ploughed India with its army, and harrowed it with its civil service, till it is surprising that there should be a wild spot left; but there are still great stretches of territory unknown and almost impenetrable, where the weeds of native custom flourish in rank luxuriance. There is probably no place on the habitable globe, under the nominal control of the civilised nation, concerning which so little is known as the valley of the Mekhong River. Immense forests, centuries o]d, stretch unbroken for hundreds of miles, hiding in dank, impenetrable morass and jungle, the wild, fierce people who inhabit them.

"We struck the Lam-nam-si River at its junction with the Mekhong, and started off to follow it to its source. We had not been out more than three days' march when we began to hear of tigers, and I determined to leave the party at Menatkong and browse round the neighborhood a bit to see if I could get a tiger skin or two. I expected to join the others about a week later at a point agreed upon. They protested that my life wouldn't be worth a farthing, alone in that country; so I compromised by taking Haranya Vatani, a native, who accompanied the party as guide and godmother. The first day we were disappointed in our game, and found ourselves at dusk, with a tropical storm on our track, near an isolated native village.

"It was the only place for miles around that offered human habitation and a shelter from the storm, but in spite of that Haranya tried to steer me past it. This only made me curious to see it, so I took the rudder in my own hands, and we stayed over night there. We were civilly received, for Vatani's fat face is a sort of general ticket of admission to that part of the universe; but the next day, the worst of the storm being over, one of the inhabitants tipped Vatani the wink that it would be more tactful if we would move on, and we, accordingly, did so. After we left the place, Vatani told me the cause of our scant entertainment. The name of the village is Kong-Satru. You know, doubtless, that practically all the *Gloriosas* come from there."

"No, I thought they came from Panom-Pehn; that is the place mentioned in the invoices."

"That is the river-port where they are packed for shipment. They are stolen from the forests around Kong-Satru by sturdy adventurers, who evidently have little love of life, and shipped by stealth and night down the Mekhong to the sea. The forests on the hills around Kong-Satru are the most magnificgnt imaginable, and teeming with this variety of orchid. A native, Haranya said, would much sooner think of selling his children than a plant of the *Gloriosas*, which are indescribably sacred to them. These people mix their religion with the culture of the plants in a manner at once horrible and grotesque. The flowers are cared for

by a band of native priests, who to the thousand other Oriental ideas, add one more, the most gruesome of them all.

"They say," and Larcher leaned across the table towards Driscoll and gazed meditatively out into the night as he continued: "They say that the orchids must have blood, human blood, and so it happens just before the plants' blooming season, the priests select a victim from among the inhabitants of the village for this sacrifice."

"And then?" asked Driscoll, as Larcher paused, still gazing past him out of the window, sunk in reminiscence.

"I was thinking of the night Haranya told me this tale, sitting in a little tent in the midst of the jungle, not 30 miles from Kong-Satru, with the tail of the storm lashing round us, and Vatani shivering with fright lest he be overheard in the telling; in India it is neither polite nor healthy to discuss your neighbor's religion."

"And then?"

"And then, on the day of the feast of the flowers, which was the festival our presence interrupted, on that full moon of April, when I unwittingly grazed Death, there is high carnival in Kong-Satru, and the priests take the victim to the forests above the town— and feed the flowers!"

"And then?"

" 'And then they bloom!' said Haranya, 'and not until then!' The priests are a vile-looking lot, with yellow skin like parchment, their teeth not gone as you describe, it, but the four front teeth blackened so that at a distance they are invisible. There is a large Chinese element in these priests, if they are not indeed full-blooded Mongolians, which marks them off from the rest of the Aryan population."

"And you think that Hearston's wife—"

"Was doomed to the sacrifice! That Hearston was in the neighborhood gathering *Phalaenopsis*, and either had seen her before, or met her while she was trying to escape; that by his knowledge of the country he succeeded in getting her to some sea-coast town where they shipped for England. Then they came here and lived content, till the fanatic face rose up at her elbow, inexorable as fate. I think myself that those priests must have some hypnotic influence over the people; you heard the girl's cry when he came to her that night? How else did he awe them to the submission and silence that followed?"

"I see it now. It must have been the priest, too, who killed my poor collie."

"Do not lament the dog, Bob; he died trying to defend the gentle soul who had been kind to him, and no death could be nobler. I think that the priest has the girl in hiding, hypnotised; he is waiting for, the hour. It has struck! This is the full moon of April, the day of the feast of the flowers. If the girl is to be saved, it must be now. We shall have an able ally."

Driscoll sprang to, his feet. "Who?"

"Hearston! He is tracking the priest; I have been watching him at it the last half-hour."

"Where?"

"There! See! The gaunt figure crouching in the shadow of the pillar on the porch! At first I thought he was the priest; and laid my gun handy; then he moved a bit, and the moonlight fell on the white hair and asylum garb. Depend upon it, Driscoll, Hearston, too, has seen that face from his prison windows and the iron bent like tin beneath the maniac strength that gathered itself and passed out to slay. See! He is watching something that is moving across the lawn from south to north. I can tell that, from his movements. It can be nothing else but the priest. Look, he is rising! Are you armed? Then come."

Leading the way, Larcher noiselessly unlatched the window and passed out on the verandah, Driscoll following. The man in front of them crept cautiously forward from the shadow of one tree to the next till he reached a clump of shrubs commanding a view of the great stone staircase which terraced the hill beside the greenhouses. He paused here, watching the stairs intently. Larcher and Driscoll at a little distance did the same.

"He's lost him," whispered Driscoll; but Larcher shook his head. A moment later the priest glided out of the bushes fringing the stairway, almost at the bottom of the hill. For an instant the supple figure stood out in the full moonlight, black against the whiteness of the stonework, listening; then, apparently satisfied, he beckoned, and a slender white figure crept out and after him as he opened a door and disappeared. In an instant Hearston was making his way down the steps, the others following as before. There was no hesitation or undue haste in his movements; as silently and relentlessly as the tide laps up the shore, so did he cover the space between himself and the priest. He reached the door of the *Phalaenopsis* house and melted into the blackness of the wall. As the door opened a low monotonous sing-song chant struck the ears of the two outside.

"Chinese, by all that's holy? Bob, he is worshipping the flowers!"

A second later they had reached the door and looked in.

It was a weird scene! Lofty trees towered sheer to the height of forty feet or more, covered with the delicate green of ferns among the darker shades of the orchid plants, while thousands of sprays of half-open flowers filled the house with a subtle and exquisite odor.

The priest stood in the centre of the house, his back to the door. He had cast off his robe, and, naked save for a loin cloth, was swaying to and fro in a sort of religious ecstasy, his arms extended towards the flowers above him, and chanting as he swayed. At his feet knelt the woman, white, unseeing, tranced!

Behind him, mute and terrible, crouched Hearston, waiting for the instant of his spring.

"Hearston's unarmed!" breathed Driscoll.

"Yes, like a gorilla! Let be! The quarry's his."

At last the priest paused in his chant and the moment came. Hearston reached out with his left hand, caught the bolt of the door, and shot it home with a crash that shook the house. It was challenge and ultimatum in one, and at the noise the priest swung round and faced his death!

He flung one arm aloft, in what almost seemed like a gesture of command; but, as he did so, Hearston's embrace went round him like a hoop of steel, crushing him in with slow, resistless force. The Mongol would have been a match for a heavier man in a poorer cause, and he writhed in Hearston's grasp, making frantic efforts to release himself, till the mighty muscles rolled under the yellow skin like the coiling and uncoiling of a cobra. A frantic tug at the loin cloth and his free arm flung upward, a curved knife in his grasp, and twice it fell in abortive strokes which glanced off Hearston harmlessly.

The men outside flung themselves against the barred door with a force that splintered the glass in the upper half, but the bolt held. Larcher reached, in through the splinters that remained, pushed back the bolt, and the two rushed in.

Suddenly, in one last supreme effort, the priest raised himself to his full height, almost lifting Hearston off his feet. Again the light quivered along the knife as it rose and fell, and as the priest sank backward, dead, he carried Hearston with him, the knife lodged in his back.

Driscoll bent over the prostrate forms, trying in vain to unlock Hearston's fingers still knotted round the priest. A cry broke from the lips of the girl beside them, and the men both turned and looked at her. She was standing gazing at Hearston in pathos unutterable; the cry that had escaped her was the long, low Indian wail for the dead. Larcher stooped, and with practised hand drew out the knife, then turned.

"Do not mourn," he said to the girl in her own tongue. "He will live, since you have come back to him."

And as he spoke Hearston released his hold on the priest, and turned and held out his arms to the girl. The flame had died out of his eyes— the man was sane!

"Driscoll," cried Larcher, in a curious toneless voice, "look up, look up at your orchids, they think they are going to be fed!"

Driscoll straightened himself from surveying the priest and looked about him. He went white as he gazed and threw a steadying hand against the nearest tree.

Multitudes of great white flowers swayed on every stalk, crisp, new blown! Wide open, each petal distended and with eager stems, as happier flowers turn to the sun, they craned their faces towards the dead priest on the floor.

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8: An Easy Errand

Carolyn Wells

1862-1942

Harper's Monthly Magazine Dec 1910

World's News (Sydney) 7 Jan 1911

"OH, JOHN," said pretty little Mrs. Hampton, as she sat at the breakfast table, "it's the cook's birthday to-day, and I haven't any present ready for her. Whatever shall I do?"

"Huh?" responded Mr. Hampton, entirely unconscious of her remark, as he was immersed in the stock reports.

"John, please do lay down that paper a minute, and listen to me, your own and only wife? It's a crisis! It's a domestic tragedy! It's a condition, not a theory! I tell you it's the cook's birthday, anl if we don't give her a present, she'll leave!"

"Yes, my dear, yes, yes; give her a present by all means. Here's the money—how much do you want?"

"Oh, it isn't that, John; I mean that isn't the point of the trouble. But you see I have a dressmaker coming to-day, and I can't go downtown to buy anything, so I want you to stop and get something and have it sent up right away. Do, Johnsie, won't you?"

The cajoling smile of Mrs. Hampton would have persuaded her John to a more difficult task than this, and, under the influence of the said smile, he responded heartily: "Why, yes; of course I'll do that for you. For you, understand, and not for the cook. She has no business to have a birthday in a well-regulated family; but if you want a cook's present, that's what you'll get. What shall I buy?"

"Oh, that's just it. I can't think of a thing; I've tried and tried. Can't you think of something?"

"Of course! Why, it's too easy! There never was but one present for a cook since Eve kept house. It would be false to all tradition to offer her anything else."

"What do you mean?" asked Mrs. Hampton, looking puzzled.

"Why, a dress pattern, to be sure. Mother never used to think of giving the servants anything but a dress pattern, all folded up, don't you know, in a box."

"Oh, yes; with narrow slimpsy blue ribbons crossing it like an 'X.' I remember mother used to give those to our maids. That will be lovely, John; just drop in to Mason's and pick one out, and tell them to send it right up. It won't be a bit of trouble, will it?"

"Oh no; not a bit! I'm glad of a chance to get into a department store! I love their cheerful atmosphere and waves of warm air!"

"I know you hate it, but you're a dear duck of a man to go so good-naturedly. Run along now, and don't dawdle."

"Hold on, milady; what color do you want this robe to be?"

"Oh, it doesn't matter; just pick out something pretty. Remember she's short and fat and blond, so blue ought to be becoming. In fact, John, she's just about your size and coloring. You can remember by that."

"Yes, so I can! You're a genius for detecting likenesses!"

On reaching the department store, Mr. Hamp-ton walked boldly in. His very soul was imbued with the masculine determination of do-ing up his errand in short order.

"Dress patterns," he said, sternly, to the young woman at the first counter he encountered.

"Third floor," she responded, with a haughty waggle of her pompadoured head.

Seeing a staircase in the distance, Mr. Hampton made for it, and laboriously climbed three flights of stairs. As his wife had implied, he did resemble the cook in the matter of avoirdupois, and the three flights were by no means flights of fancy.

"Dress patterns." he said again, but his lack of available lung-power made his tone supplicatory rather than dignified.

"Floor below," remarked the person addressed.

"She told me the third floor," declared Mr. Hampton, irately.

"Quite right; but this is the fourth floor. You came up three flights, didn't you?"

It was hard after climbing an unnecessary flight to have the fact thus rubbed in, but Mr. Hampton said nothing, as he had no breath to waste in futile speech, and, turning, he started down-stairs again.

"Why don't you use the elevator, sir?" he heard murmured respectfully over his shoulder. But a further realisation of his own stupidity roused his ire and his mendacity.

"I prefer this," he flung back, and tramped on down the long flight

Now he was really on the third floor; and, though he could see only counters piled with blankets and comfortables, he inquired of a dapper young man behind one of the counters where he might find dress patterns.

"I don't know, really," was the answer; "you should ask the floor-walker."

Now Mr. Hampton had known this well enough: what he didn't know was, why he hadn't acted upon his own knowledge.

He began to stalk the floor-walker, and to his surprise found that animal more elusive than a deer. As he would approach one, it would whip around into another aisle and out of sight; or it would begin a conversation with some ladies,

which Mr. Hampton was not rude enough to interrupt; or, in many aisles, it wouldn't be there at all.

But at last, by some rather clever manoeu-vring. Mr. Hampton ccrrallcd one, and said, meekly, in spite of himself. "Please tell me where to find dress patterns."

"Certainly, sir; six aisles over and four aisles down on the avenue side." The floor-walker turned away, as one who considers the incident closed, and Mr. Hampton started. Useless to detail his devious wanderings, his repeated inquiries, his variegated answers, his growing bewilderment, and his rising temper.

At last, when he had almost reached the point of desperation, a mild-voiced floor-walker said, a little impatiently. "Why, there are the dress patterns, sir; right in front of you!"

But Mr. Hampton could see only an upright lot of pigeonholes, something like a village post-office, with a very citified-looking post-mistress in charge.

"Certainly, sir," she said, having heard the floor-walker's speech; "the dress patterns are right here. All our patterns are right here. We keep all makes, all styles, and all sizes. Have you the number? You want a pattern for a street dress or a house dress? What size is the lady? How tall? How old? That is— I mean— is it your wife or—"

"Or my grandmother!" broke in John Hampton. "I don't want a pattern at all. If you'll kindly give me a chance to say so. That is, I want a dress pattern— not a pattern of a dress!"

The lady looked at him as if she doubted his sanity: but this was no trouble for her as she usually looked at people that way.

"All our patterns are here," she began again: "dress patterns, coat patterns, skirt patterns, waist patterns, petticoat patterns, under—"

But Mr. Hampton had walked away, with a determined though undefined intention of doing something desperate to that floor-walker.

"Look here," he said, "when I say a dress pattern, I don't mean those foolish tissue-paper things— I don't mean a pattern to cut out by— I mean a dress pattern, enough stuff to make a dress for a woman— a woman short and fat and blond."

"Oh, enough material for a dress! Why, my dear sir, we can sell you a dress pattern of any material in the house. What you want is the dry-goods counter."

"Of course I want the dry-goods counter! Do you suppose I want a dress pattern of linoleum— or wall-paper? Where is your dry-goods counter?"

"First floor; the elevator is directly oppo- site." With a curt bow of acknowledgment, John Hampton strolled across the floor to the ele- vator.

"Going up," said the boy; but, unaccustomed to departmental regulations, Mr. Hampton stepped in. As a result he went up to the 15th story, and down

again, pausing at nearly every floor. His temper rose by regular instalments on the upward trip; but, descending, it calmed down again, for he had time to realise that no one had been to blame but himself.

"I suppose I ought to have said dress pat-terns made of dry-goods, in the first place," he admitted to himself, which proved what a wise and just man John Hampton was.

It was not entirely a path of roses that led to the dry-goods counter, nor was it without difficulty that he finally brought up at the par-ticular division where cotton goods were sold. The array was bewildering. Here were patterns blue enough to suit any short, fat, and blond person. His spirits rose; and it was with something of his original hauteur that he said, "A dress pattern, please," secure in the conviction that he would not here be offered tissue paper.

"We can sell you a dress pattern of any of these materials," was the polite response. "How many yards do you require?"

"But I don't want it that way; I want it in a box— tied up, you know."

"Well, we can put it in a box, if you wish, and we can tie it up. How many yards?"

"But you don't understand. I mean the kind that's all ready in a box; and you have to take the whole thing, no matter how many yards there are. It's in the box before you see it."

"Oh. you mean a pattern dress—a robe dress." "Well. I've always said dress pattern, but as everything is reversed nowadays. I suppose I must say pattern dress. All right, where are your pattern dresses?"

"Six aisles over and three aisles back, on the street side."

Buoyed up by hope, and not daring to look at his watch, John Hampton started on what he fondly hoped was his last tack.

He neared, as he followed instructions, counters piled with rich and handsome materials, and he wondered if the low-priced stuff he was in search of would be forthcoming.

"Dress patterns— in boxes?" he asked of a specially dapper floor-walker.

"Certainly, sir; right here, sir," and a grandiloquent wave of the hand indicated Mr. Hampton's haven at last.

A good-looking young man said pleasantly, "What material, and what color?"

"Blue," said Mr. Hampton, sure of one detail, at least; "for a lady— short, fat, and blond."

The obliging clerk took down several large, flat boxes. With a flourish he threw off the covers, and exposed to view daintily folded and exquisitely embroidered fabrics in varying shades of pale blue.

"Oh, Lord!" groaned John Hampton, "not that kind! I want calico, man. for the cook!"

"You want an embroidered dress pattern for your cook!"

The man's attitude was only slightly surprised, for he well knew to what lengths fashionable people must go to retain their cooks' services.

"I didn't say embroidered! I don't want silk or satin! I want a dress pattern of blue calico for a cook in a box!"

"Is that the only way you can keep your cook— to box her?" inquired the young man, interestedly.

But John Hampton had once more sought the floor-walker.

"Will you kindly conduct me to the head of this department?" he said, in tones of deadly desperation.

"He's— he's in his office." stammered the floor-walker, who had little liking for this distracted customer.

"I don't care if he's in his office, or in his bath, or in bed; I'm going to see him, and I'm going to see him now!"

With real determination, it is not difficult to see heads of departments, and soon John Hampton was face to face with the object of his quest.

"What can I do for you?" inquired the object, kindly.

"I want a dress pattern." said Mr. Hampton. "Now, wait a minute; by a dress pattern I mean a sufficient number of yards of cotton material to make a dress for an average-sized woman. I mean that this material, previous to my view of it, shall have been cut off, neatly folded, placed in a box that exactly fits it; the box being perhaps 12 by 15 inches, and the whole affair to be either with or without the mere technical detail of two narrow slimpsy blue ribbons, crossed diagonally over the material. I have no hope that you will understand this description, but that is the article that I am in search of, and I wish to know where to find it in this magnificent, but so far unsatisfactory, emporium of yours."

"Oh, those," said the man, as, with a bored look, he turned back to his desk; "we only keep those dress patterns at Christmas-time."

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9: Altitude

Leland S. Jamieson

1904-1941

Blue Book, March 1929

THE SILVER SPHERE that was the *Marie IV*, the balloon of all balloons to Captain Conway, tugged lightly at the sandbags that held her to the floor. A faint chill breeze whipped around the corner of the open hangar and swayed her gently; the grace of the oscillations suggested an eagerness to tear away from the moorings that lay in a neat square below her basket. Big beyond comparison with other free balloons, she was an object of affection from airmen. She was not just a free balloon, a fabrication of cloth and rope and wicker, filled with hydrogen; she was the *Marie IV*; her name was painted in tall blue letters on her side beneath the netting, and men spoke of her by name. To those familiar with her exploits she had a definite personality, as inanimate things may often have.

In the semi-gloom inside the hangar two men were working. Conway, the larger of these men, was standing in the wicker car of the balloon. Kisner, his aide on many past occasions, knelt upon the floor and sorted paraphernalia, pausing, now and then, to stand and pass some object up to Conway. It was cold; the mercury of the thermometer in the basket huddled in the tube at ten degrees above zero; both men wore heavy fur-lined flying clothes, though only Conway was going on the flight. Their hands were mittened and were huge, like paws; their feet were incased in awkward fleece-lined moccasins.

Kisner lifted a small steel cylinder, upon which was attached a parachute pack, and handed it to Conway; the larger man stepped to the opposite side of the wicker cage and tussled clumsily with the straps and lines that were meant to hold the cylinder in place against a framework on the outside of the car. His hands were all thumbs, and he had difficulty. Finally, in exasperation he turned to Kisner.

'Here, fella, give me a hand. I've got too many mittens.'

'Take 'em off,' Kisner suggested gravely, stepping around the basket. 'You can't tie knots in a piece of rope with two thumbs.'

Aiding one another, the two accomplished the task, and Kisner turned back to sorting the various lines and gear on the floor.

AN AUTOMOBILE drew to a stop just within the doorway of the hangar, and another man, also dressed in flying clothes— the best protection from the cold— climbed out. Opening the rear door of the car he removed three small, black rectangular boxes. Handling them with infinite care, he walked toward the *Marie IV*. Conway saw him coming and turned to Kisner.

'Here comes Welkfurn with our instruments. We're just about all set now.'

The man named Welkfurn called, as he approached the balloon: 'You guys must ’a’ been working all night, to be out here this time of day. How you making out?'

'Fine,' Conway replied. 'Set those barographs down and give us a hand here. What’d the jeweler say? I guess he got the oil off all right.'

'Should have,' said Welkfurn. 'Told me he worked all night on ’em. Got a fine day for a trip like this, eh? Awful cold down here, though.... Say, Charley Redfern ran into a culvert with that big new car of his last night. Saw the wreck a while ago as I was going to town. Tore her up mighty bad; Charley didn’t have it paid for either. Don’t know what he’s— '

'Brought everything back from town, did you?' Conway interrupted.

'Yeah, everything you sent.... Hello, Kisner! Got you working! How come? Say, Con, what time are you going to take off? Morning papers carried a story on you and the *Marie*; there’s going to be a crowd out to see you shove off. I was talking to that skinny little reporter that covers the field on this kind of stuff: he was looking for you to get a write-up, and he wants to get a yarn and some pictures for a full page for Sunday. Told him you’re busy as hell and that he’d get run off the place if he showed up out here, but he said: ‘Got to do it, Lieutenant; guess I better get out there right after noon and see the Captain.’ I’m going to get me a club and wait for him. Say, Kis, how about a cigarette?'

'You through talking?' Conway grinned. 'Kisner’s got a lot to do down there before I take off. How about doing a little work yourself?'

'Work?'— indignantly. 'Say, who was it got up at seven o’clock this morning and drove thirty miles to get those barographs? Battery frozen, too; had to crank the bus by hand. Nearly froze to death! Just got the seat warmed up as I was driving up to the hangar— '

'Hand me those instruments,' Conway interrupted. 'Be careful with ’em too!'

Welkfurn handed the black boxes up, one at a time. Then he turned and squatted beside Kisner, busied himself with the adjustment of a sand-release on an empty sandbag.

Occasionally Kisner or Welkfurn looked up and directed some question at Conway, queried this or that in connection with the preparation for the flight. Kisner was all engaged with the work he had to do; Welkfurn, on the other hand, kept up a running conversation. From time to time he made some friendly jest about Conway’s ability as a balloonist.

'Ought to get the record this time,' Welkfurn called. 'Tried it three times now; had lots of practice trying to get it. Better make it on this trip; you’ll be running out of excuses pretty soon.'

Conway paused, stopped his work and stood with mittened hands upon his hips.

'A helluva lot you know about altitude records, fella! Want to fly this one, for a change? I'll let you!'

'Guess not this time. *Marie* and I don't get along so well. I haven't got the master's touch.' And Welkfurn laughed.

'Say, Con, I'll order flowers this afternoon. Got a friend in town who's a florist. I can get 'em cheap,' he added.

'I'm supposed to laugh at that, I guess!' Conway said to Kisner. Then to Welkfurn: 'Little stale this morning, son.'

Kisner seemed annoyed.

'You talk like a fool, Welk!' he said soberly. 'You talk like that, and something might happen!'

'Don't see any harm in it,' Welkfurn replied defensively. 'No harm meant; you don't need to get sore about it.' He slipped into a moody silence.

Kisner climbed into the basket to help Conway with the equipment there. For two hours the three men worked, saying little. The sun crawled up in the east and stood almost overhead, but it brought no warmth as it climbed.

When the preparations for the flight were almost completed, Conway sent Welkfurn down to headquarters on an errand. Welkfurn was gone almost an hour, and when he returned Conway yelled to him:

'Hey, fella, where's my clock?'

'Clock?' Welkfurn asked blankly. 'Search me; didn't know you sent a clock.'

Conway paused. 'Sure I sent one. Sent it with the barographs to have the oil cleaned out of it.'

'Use another one,' Welkfurn suggested. 'I'll get one out of another balloon.'

'Use another one?' Kisner asked sourly. 'Gosh, I thought you knew more than that! Con's got to have a clock that's dry— no oil inside of it— or the oil'll get stiff up high where it's cold, and the clock'll freeze! He's got to have that clock running to tell him when it's time to start back down. He's got oxygen for an hour and a half; he's got to save enough oxygen to get back down to fifteen thousand feet— where he can breathe air again. If the clock stops up there and he uses up all his oxygen— not knowing when the time'll be up— he'll suffocate before he gets back down!'

Conway laughed at Kisner's agitation.

'You better go back to town and get it,' Kisner said. 'Con's got to have it. And don't waste any time!'

'I don't think he's got time enough now,' Conway said dryly. 'I'm going to take off right after lunch, and Welk might get to talking downtown and not get back in time. Eh, Welk?'

Welkfurn looked up at the two men in the basket a moment, then at the floor. He tried to grin.

'I'll get your damn' clock!' he said hastily. He ran to the automobile, climbed in. Gears clashed for a moment, and he was gone.

'Good scout, Welkfurn,' Conway said to Kisner. 'Just young and inexperienced. Means everything fine. Just like a woman, though— always talking. Gets started to talking and forgets everything else. He doesn't remember it, but I told him yesterday about that clock. Some day he'll have to make a parachute jump from a balloon— if there's anybody else in the basket, Welk'll get started talking on the way down and forget to pull his rip-cord!'

CONWAY WAS SCHEDULED to begin his flight at one o'clock that afternoon; he could not well delay it beyond two-thirty because, in doing so, he ran the risk of landing his balloon in strange country after night with the consequent hazard of being killed; or, if his parachute was resorted to, of losing the balloon.

The flight had been planned with infinite attention to detail in equipment and the weather. The equipment had been ready for a month, but the weather until now had made the flight impossible.

Captain Conway wanted to be the man who had gone to 'the highest point up' ever attained by man, and he had made of that desire a lifelong ambition. For three years after entering the service he had studied and trained and worked unceasingly. At the end of that time he took a small balloon and flew it as high as he could go without oxygen— some twenty-six thousand feet. That was the beginning of a series of flights, each a little higher.

The result of this procedure was that after ten years in the service, Conway knew more about balloons and high-altitude balloon flying than any man had ever known before. But still, he didn't hold the record: He had held it, to be sure; but each time he got it in his grasp some other man, in a balloon or airplane, went up a few feet higher.

Conway wanted to stop that. He wanted to go so high that his record would stand until some one built a bigger balloon than his and learned to fly it better than he could fly the *Marie*.

Conway and Kisner were through with the balloon by twelve o'clock, but now, to occupy their time, they made another inspection of the basket, checked every instrument carefully, examined the sand-releases, the barographs and radio. There was nothing more to do, and they drove back to the club and went to lunch, trying to calm their excitement in activity, as the time for the take-off drew nearer.

FROM THE FLYING FIELD to Greenburg was about fifteen miles; a car like Welkfurn's should have been able to traverse the distance in twenty minutes, or thirty at the most. Conway expected Welkfurn back within an hour, and when he returned to the balloon hangar after lunch he looked around for Welkfurn's

car, but could not find it. The sergeant left with the balloon had seen nothing of Welkfurn.

'That little cuss!' said Kisner angrily.

'I wonder where he is?'

Conway did not reply. He was looking appraisingly at the sky, as if he saw it now for the first time that day. High clouds were pushing rapidly in from the southwest. There had been no sign of them that morning; now they had slid well overhead. The sun's rays were dimming slowly, would be obscured soon. Already the shadow of the hangar was blurred.

'Snow tomorrow, Kis,' said Conway. 'If it warms up, it'll rain. We're in for a bad stretch of weather; there are the signs!'— pointing.

'Something's happened to Welkfurn!' Kisner declared. 'It's one-thirty. He's had plenty of time— something's happened to him.'

Conway stepped briskly out to where he could view the road that led to the balloon hangar, examined the road carefully, looking for Welkfurn's car approaching. No car was in sight. He returned to the doorway of the hangar, waited briefly, then went out again. Still Welkfurn did not appear.

'If he doesn't hurry up, you can't go!' Kisner muttered angrily. 'He knows better than to delay like this.'

Conway studied the sky in silence. He finally shook his head.

'Say, Kis, call the jeweler; find out if Welkfurn's been there! Why didn't we think of that before?'

Conway stood by and listened while Kisner called his number. He looked at his watch— one-thirty-seven.

'Hasn't been there?' he heard Kisner question. 'Haven't seen him? What the hell! Well, when he comes in there, tell him we're waiting for that clock!'

WELKFURN LEFT CONWAY and Kisner in a mood of anger with himself. He realized that the clock was necessary for the flight. He hadn't thought of it before— a clock freezing in the air; but he could readily see, now that Kisner had explained it, that Conway ran a risk of death if his timepiece failed him on the flight. And Welkfurn knew Conway well enough to know that the balloonist would take off without the clock rather than postpone the trip. Well, he'd get it there in time. Conway wanted to take off at one o'clock, which gave Welkfurn a few minutes more than an hour to make the trip.

He drove furiously toward Greenburg, holding the car at its greatest speed, slowing only slightly for the turns. He knew that he could make the trip, with luck, in fifty minutes— even less than that. He wanted a good margin of time on the return trip. Conway had always laughed at him for talking constantly and forgetting things; and he knew that the other man had been justified in doing so.

Welkfurn had come some three miles toward Greenburg when he was startled by a blatant siren just behind him. He pulled carefully to the side of the road, holding his speed, to let the other vehicle pass; but the sound persisted. Then he saw, through the window in the rear, a motorcycle policeman riding close behind and to the side.

He had a crazy impulse to cut suddenly across the road, to wreck the officer's machine; but he realized the idiocy of that procedure and slowed angrily to a stop. The cop rode up alongside, rested his foot leisurely on the running-board of Welkfurn's car.

'Nice speedway here, ain't it?'— acidly.

'What's the idea of stopping me?' Welkfurn barked in reply. 'I'm going to town on official business; you can't stop me like this! I'm in a hurry!'

'Can't stop ya? That's too bad! You ain't on the reservation now, buddy. Yer on the State highway, and yer speedin' somethin' awful!'

'I'll have your job!' Instantly he wished he had been silent. The policeman looked at him appraisingly, then smirked:

'You couldn't hold it!'

'Listen, Mister,' Welkfurn said appeasingly, trying to hurry the matter, 'a friend of mine's liable to get killed if I don't get back to the field in a hurry! Can't I sign a bond and then go on?'

'That's better. Yeah, you can sign a bond.' He produced it, filled it out, and Welkfurn signed it hurriedly. 'I'm goin' into town behind ya,' the cop continued. 'Better not go no faster'n the law allows, or you can't sign a bond next time!'

Welkfurn drove ahead at what seemed to him a snail's pace, the cop following at a distance.

IN TOWN AT LAST, and free of the policeman, Welkfurn opened up his car and tore through traffic toward the jeweler's place. Twice he was whistled at by traffic-officers, but both times he got away. He thought, mirthlessly, 'I'll be afraid to come to town for a month after this ride!'

Ill luck pursued him, as it often does when haste is most essential. Rounding a corner at thirty miles an hour, he was suddenly confronted by a huge truck that almost blocked the street. He tried to dodge through— thought he had made it. There was a crash, his car careened drunkenly and skidded to a stop. A rear wheel lay splintered on the pavement; the axle of the car was resting on the curb.

It required ten precious minutes to pacify the truck-man. Welkfurn was made to fill out a card, giving his name and address and phone number. At last he was allowed to go, and he ran frantically to the store. He burst in and asked, breathlessly, for the clock.

'Somebody just called about you,' the jeweler told him. 'Seemed like he was sore about something. I told him you hadn't been here, and he said for you to hurry up, that they were waiting for you out there.'

'Good! If he'll only wait, everything'll be all right. If he takes off without this clock, there'll be hell to pay!' He grabbed the instrument and hurried out. He found a cab and gave the driver directions, offering a double rate for speed. But on the highway the cab moved along at a speed within the limits of law. Looking back, Welkfurn saw the same motorcycle cop who had detained him earlier riding steadily along a hundred yards behind.

The cab left the highway and entered the reservation. The driver shoved the throttle down now, and in less than a minute more turned onto the road that led to the balloon hangar. And at that moment Welkfurn saw the *Marie*, gray and stately against the haze, rise slowly in the air.

WITH THE WEATHER all against him if his flight should be delayed, Conway decided, at two o'clock, to fly the *Marie IV* into the subzero temperatures of the upper air with an ordinary clock. Kisner tried in every way to dissuade him, but without success. Kisner persisted, like a mother who argues with a wayward son, until the other man turned on him impatiently.

'I know what I'm about!' Conway snapped. 'Get the crew and put the *Marie* outside. If I don't go today I'll not have another chance before spring!'

'But see here, Con,' Kisner said desperately. 'That clock'll stop and you'll run out of oxygen up there! You'll die before you can get down! Dammit, you don't have to kill yourself trying to get that record!'

But Kisner saw that Conway was in earnest and he reluctantly put the crew to work. They hauled the balloon outside the hangar, took the place of the sandbags that had held it to the ground.

Conway came presently and shoved through the crowd of curious people, climbed into the basket and put on his fur-lined helmet and his parachute. He made a last-minute inspection of the oxygen equipment and spoke quietly to Kisner, who stood close by. He was in a good humor now that the flight was definitely under way.

'Tell that little cuss I'm going to break his neck when I get down,' he said, referring to Welkfurn. 'Going to get a dub and run him all over this flying field!'

Kisner nodded gravely. He was in no mood for joking. He was tempted to try again to persuade Conway to postpone the flight, but he knew that it was useless. He reached up and grasped the furry paw that was extended down to him.

'Good luck, old man,' he said, keeping his voice steady with difficulty. 'Call me up as soon as you get down and I'll come after you.'

But Conway didn't notice his agitation.

'Thanks,' he replied absently.

The *Marie* took off for altitude at two twenty-three that afternoon. The wind had died down during the day from a fitful, biting breeze to a dead calm; overhead the clouds had thickened perceptibly.

The weather was ideal. Cold air, dry and heavy; the balloon would go up into the higher reaches in a steady climb that would take it to forty thousand feet within an hour— or sooner, if Conway wanted it.

But Conway had no particular desire for speed. Rather, he wanted to go up slowly so that the effects of the change of atmospheric pressure on his body would not be acutely uncomfortable; he wanted to go up slowly, also, so that he might study the conditions of the air at varying elevations. When once at the top of his climb, with the record his, he wanted to remain there several minutes— as long as his oxygen supply would permit— to study the conditions there. For while he wanted the altitude record, he also wanted to make his flight of value to other flyers.

He had changed his clothes at noon, and now wore garments that were heated by electricity from the battery in the basket. His oxygen mask, which he would put on when rarefied air was reached, was heated also; and his goggles likewise. His helmet was equipped with earphones, and in the wicker cage a radio was rigged to bring in entertainment from the ground when he was flying high above the earth.

The *Marie* drifted lazily into the air, looking, from the ground, like a huge gray soap-bubble on which a drop of water clung. Conway stood at the rim of his tiny car and watched the earth drop slowly away below. He was watching nothing in particular, seeing the crowd and the flying field and Greenburg through the haze abstractedly. He noticed an automobile, a cab whose vivid color was its trademark, race along the road toward the balloon hangar. It came at last to the crowd, broke through the cordon of soldiers that had surrounded the *Marie* on the ground, raced to a spot directly underneath the balloon. A figure leaped out, waved frantically.

Conway did not recognize the car as Welkfurn’s. He had been glancing at the road occasionally, hoping that the other man would arrive at the field in time. He knew the dangers of going into the cold of high altitudes with an oily clock, and he planned, if Welkfurn came in time, to return to earth to get the other timepiece.

He watched the waving figure for a moment and thought: 'Must be that fool reporter. Too late even for a picture!'

The mottled earth dimmed slowly through the haze as the *Marie* went skyward.

Conway reached for his collar clumsily with his mittened fingers and adjusted the fur around his throat. Idly he watched a lone buzzard circle in the

bleak and forlorn cold at two thousand feet. Slowly the balloon reached a level with the bird, went on up until Conway lost sight of the wheeling speck of black. The thermometer in the basket registered five degrees above zero; not cold, in comparison with the cold that would be encountered in the upper air, but cold enough that Conway's face felt drawn and hard and bitten. In a few minutes he would put his face mask on.

At five thousand feet the haze was denser; he could still see the earth below, but faintly now. The flying field stood out dimly from the other land surrounding it, but the giant hangar in its center seemed to fade imperceptibly into the haze.

The radio brought a rakish melody faintly to the earphones. The music soothed Conway, though if he had listened to it on the ground he would have turned to something else. It made him forget to some extent the loneliness of the infinity that stretched away above him. The earth was invisible now.

At fifteen thousand feet the temperature had dropped to five degrees below. Conway put on his mask and adjusted it.

His goggles began to fog and, reaching down, he turned on his batteries; then, picking up his log sheet, made an entry:

'4 volts; much colder.'

The air was becoming thinner, lighter. There was less oxygen to breathe, and he found himself sucking in the icy air in greedy gasps. Stooping, he twisted a valve that opened an oxygen tank. After that his breath came normally.

An airman going rapidly aloft to great altitudes sometimes experiences an acute discomfort called, in aviation parlance, 'bends,' or sometimes 'rickets.' These 'bends' may produce pains behind the flyer's ears, like mastoiditis, or an apparent buzzing in the ears and head. If prolonged these pains become unbearable. Conway suffered from this trouble now, and slowed the progress of the balloon until his body could become accustomed to the change in pressure of the air.

At sixteen thousand feet the *Marie* entered the first layer of clouds. The mist hugged tight around the basket; whereas before— when in clear air— Conway had been able to see a distance of fifty miles, he could scarcely see ten feet now. The feeling of isolation and aloneness was even more pronounced. The temperature was fifteen degrees below, yet snow filtered down from the clouds above, passed Conway slowly, Gradually the rounded top of the huge bag was covered with snow, a perceptible weight to carry into the rarefied air as the flight progressed. Conway spilled more sand from his ballast bags, a thin yellow stream of grains that fell away like beads of amber glass.

At twenty thousand feet the *Marie* lifted herself out of the clouds and into clear sunshine. The sky here was a deep and lifeless blue. Clouds stretched out in all directions— seemingly into infinity, low ridge after low ridge, with valleys

in between: a flat plain of brilliantly white mist that was painful to the eye. Above these clouds there was no haze; the sun was intense, yet cold, unfriendly.

It was ten minutes until three o'clock. The radio was still bringing in music from an invisible, distant world. The bends grew less painful as the minutes passed.

But Conway's body was gradually growing numb from the lack of pressure on it— a normal phenomenon at extremely high altitudes. Some men may go to forty thousand feet before this sets in; others feel it coming on at thirty thousand. Conway began to suffer from it at thirty-five. He felt no cold, no pain; his body seemed to rest comfortably, with a kind of sensuous inertia that lulled him toward a seductive semiconsciousness. He tried to fight this feeling, tried to rouse himself. He knew its symptoms and its dangers: in its final form a few minutes of complete paralysis, then sleep. The oxygen would feed his lungs until it became exhausted, then sleep would carry him to death in the thin, anaemic air eight miles above the earth. He had felt that way on other flights, although less so than now. And he still had nine thousand feet to go before the record would be safely his.... The mercury in the thermometer had tumbled down to twenty-nine below.

THERE was a sudden suffocating feeling in Conway's lungs. Quickly he changed from the first oxygen tank to the second; then, with a knife that dangled on a string inside the basket he cut the rubber tubing of the first tank and hacked at the lashings that protruded into the car. The empty cylinder fell silently away; the balloon lunged upward gently, hesitated with a slight jerk, then went up again.

Conway was dimly conscious that his radio was silent. He tuned it carefully, examined it at length without success. Finally he leaned over the side of the basket and looked down at the antenna— it was gone. Slowly he scrawled on his log:

'Cyl. dropped. Broke antenna off; no more music.'

He busied himself for some minutes with entries in his log, writing now in an unsteady hand, clumsily. He set down the time shown on the clock and the voltage being drawn from his batteries— anything he saw or anything he thought about recording to occupy his mind.

Insidiously the numbness grew upon his body. He seemed unable to see his instruments clearly; he was like a drunken man, his vision blurred. Doggedly he shook his head, trying thus to clear his sight. His senses seemed all befuddled. Foolhardy though he knew the expenditure of energy to be— for he was not cold— he took to waving his mittened hands, clapping them together gently, as a freezing man might do when slipping into a fatal stupor in the cold. But that did no good; and he took up his pencil again and tried to make another entry in

his log. His mind seemed to work in vagrant opposition to his will, disobeying reason and experience.

He read his altimeter and his clock and thermometer. These readings he put down carefully, with painful labor. The altimeter registered thirty-eight thousand feet; it was three-twenty by the clock; the temperature was down to thirty-four below. He found the line on the log below where his last entry had been made. There was something distantly familiar about the figures already there and the ones he was trying to write; he fumbled in his mind to recall the connection— failed.

Time passed now in endless throbs. His legs felt numb; his feet like slugs of lead that hung inside his fur-lined moccasins in curious detachment from his body. With difficulty now he made new figures on the paper. Wearily he glanced at other entries and wondered where he had seen them; he glanced at all his instruments and back to the log once more. Slowly realization came to him.

There were three entries that gave the time of day as three-twenty! The clock, also, said three-twenty! He puzzled that; finally, through a blur, knew that the clock had stopped! He stared out into space, trying to collect his wits, incredulous.

'The oil!' he thought. 'How long ago?'

The altimeter registered forty-one thousand feet. He knew, dimly, that he must hurry; but there was no conscious fear among his muddled thoughts. Suddenly there was that suffocation in his lungs; he changed to the third cylinder of oxygen, his movements heavy. It was later than he had thought— the time was now almost too short!

Speed! Conway dropped the remainder of his sand, cut away the second cylinder to lighten the balloon still further. His movements were sluggish, and he fumbled stupidly. The paralysis was moving upward in his body, was seeping into his arms already; would soon sweep up and touch his sight and hearing and his brain.

His foggy mind worked incoherently. Up two thousand more.... Down twenty thousand— the air was thick down there.... Thirty minutes on the last tank.... Never make it! Go down now! But a dogged disregard for safety made him go ahead.

Vaguely he remembered dropping his batteries to lighten the balloon still more. Speed! If he got caught up there without oxygen, he’d be dead before he could get down! The altimeter registered forty-two. He reached for the valve-cord with clownish awkwardness, then released it: he’d go on up. His mind worked things out in blurred succession as the needle crept slowly around the dial.

A free balloon is equipped with a 'rip panel' in its top, which, when torn free, allows a complete deflation of the bag. The loss of gas permits the cloth of the

bottom portion of the balloon to fold back within the upper portion, forming in that way an enormous cap, umbrella-like, over which the netting hangs. The netting holds this cap in place, and the balloon parachutes to earth. The descent is rapid.

The needle of the altimeter paused at forty-three thousand as the nerves in Conway's muscles died. He found himself unable to grasp the valve-cord with his hands; his arms were like wooden stakes, detached entirely from his shoulders. He could still hear and see, although there was a roaring in his brain. The balloon had stopped its climb, had reached its peak, would go no farther.

Conway realized that death was near. Unable to pull the cord that would release the gas, helpless at an altitude where life would perish without oxygen, he would be snuffed out in a few quick minutes when the last cylinder was empty. The rip-cord and the valve-cord dangled temptingly in the basket just in front of him; either would have served his purpose, would have sent the balloon back to earth again. But he could not control his muscles enough to pull either one of them. Every muscle in his arms and legs was uncontrollable. Only his head and neck were still unparalyzed.

There came that suffocating feeling now again. The tank was almost empty, would be gone in one more breath! Desperately, with strength born of panic, he sucked his lungs full. Then he bent his neck and raked his face against a rope that extended upward from the corner of the basket. His lungs seemed bursting; the mask still clung tenaciously on his face. He raked again, a grotesque movement, and the mask came halfway off. His head swam, reeled crazily; he wanted air— he had to breathe! He set his teeth hard over the cord that extended to the rip panel, bit hard down upon it, tried to jerk it with his head. He lost his balance, crumpled forward and lay, unconscious, on the basket floor.

IN THE DEATHLIKE SILENCE of the upper air the rasping sigh of escaping hydrogen echoed hollowly. The huge bag of the *Marie IV* crumpled slowly, collapsed, the bottom portion folding upward in the netting. It started down, gaining momentum rapidly. Air, passing through the ropes and rigging of the balloon, turned to howling, shrieks as speed was gathered.

The *Marie* fell three thousand feet while the hydrogen was going out. When the bag was empty it should have parachuted, but it did not. It folded up into a knot in the apex of the netting, like a huge fist, gnarled and bulging on one side. Helpless from the force of gravity, the derelict was falling at a speed of two hundred miles an hour, the cloth and netting whipping violently upward in a high-flung streamer. The figure in the bottom of the basket lay as it had fallen, crumpled grotesquely.

The balloon plunged earthward at a constant speed now— air resistance was so great that it could gain no greater velocity. As it descended and reached

denser air it even slowed a trifle, but still fell like a rock nearly three miles a minute. The flat plain of the clouds seemed to lift steadily up toward the basket of the balloon; the balloon itself seemed to drop but slowly. Then, at twenty thousand feet, the clouds enveloped it and there was no trace left of where the falling derelict had gone.

KISNER AND WELKFURN, waiting at the club for hours now, were silent as the minutes passed and brought no word of Conway. At first there had been tense moments of angry denunciation from Kisner, a hysterical venting of his fears and feelings of impending evil. Welkfurn realized fully now the gravity of his failure to return in time with the clock. At first he made explanations hotly, told of his experiences in town, tried to pacify and allay Kisner's agitation; but the other man would not listen.

They waited anxiously until the time when Conway should have returned to earth again: they knew how much oxygen he carried, how long it would supply him; and when the time was up, they drove silently from the club to the balloon hangar and waited there, scanning the sky and hoping desperately to see the balloon descending near at hand, yet knowing that winds in the upper air were apt to drift the bag many miles Before it returned to earth. Time passed, and no word came of it. They waited now apathetically. They were sure that Conway was dead, and Kisner blamed Welkfurn bitterly.

'Why are we waiting here?' Welkfurn asked woodenly. 'The balloon won't come down around here— the wind will drift it.'

'All kinds of winds up there. Can't tell where it went. One wind might drift it one way, then up a little higher another wind might blow it back. Anyhow— '

Suddenly Welkfurn cried eagerly:

'Kisner, *look*!' He pointed up as he spoke, and finally Kisner saw a speck of gray above another speck of dark, three or four miles to the east. These specks fell together, rapidly, in a straight line earthward. Kisner, running to his car, obtained binoculars, focused them quickly.

The basket of the balloon stood out quite plainly through the glass, the bag above it twisted hopelessly in the netting. There was no one in the car, and for a moment Kisner hoped that Conway had left his craft when higher up, was somewhere now coming down dangling on his parachute. The wreck hurtled toward the earth. Kisner judged that it was at six thousand feet when he first saw it. It reached four, then three; was plainer to be seen as it descended.

Then something lifted itself up inside the basket, seemed to hang a moment on the rim. It moved! Kisner saw it clearly! Then it sank again. The *Marie* was almost to the ground— two thousand feet, dropping at one hundred fifty miles an hour. The figure rose again, dully, lethargically. Slowly it climbed up higher in the basket, seemed to try to struggle free. It seemed to slump again, but rose a

moment later, and toppled from the car, falling for a time in line with the plunging wreckage. Something white bubbled up above it, checked its fall. Lazily it drifted down. The balloon struck the ground four hundred feet below. Before the parachute had come to earth, Kisner and Welkfurn rode frantically along a road toward where it would come down....

Six minutes later they were lifting Conway carefully into the car. Nearer dead than alive, he fainted as they put him in.

LATE THAT EVENING Conway— the altitude-record holder of the world— and Kisner and Welkfurn sat before a roaring fire in the club. The balloonist was slightly pale, and was weakened from exposure. He should have been in bed recuperating, but his excitement had not waned, and he was not sleepy. From time to time he sucked deep breaths of air hungrily, held them in his lungs, and let them go.

'Can’t explain it all,' he said. 'Can’t see how it happened.'

'What’s the last thing you remember?' Kisner asked.

'That clock! I saw three entries on my log, all the same! It woke me up a little, scared me. After that I don’t recall what happened. Must have been out on my feet; don’t recall a thing.

'How I pulled the rip-cord of the balloon I can’t see. When I came to, we were coming down like a brick— she hadn’t parachuted normally at all. I saw the cloth of the bag rolled up in a ball in the top of the netting, just enough to slow us up a little. By the time I got my mind working, we must have been down low— I didn’t see the altimeter. Just remember thinking: ‘Big boy, you gotta jump!’ Had a hard time getting out, too; just did make it. Kept thinking, ‘Must be awful near the ground. Hurry! Hurry!’ Well, you saw me come over the side.'

'Good thing she *didn’t* parachute just right up there,' Kisner pointed out. 'Your oxygen tanks were empty— if you hadn’t come down fast, you’d have died before the balloon got down where the air was dense enough that you could breathe!' He puzzled the matter a moment, shook his head. 'Don’t see how you did it, Con.'

'Well see what I put on the log when I was up there,' Conway said tiredly. 'Say, Welk, you run over and get it— get the log. We’ll have a look at it.'

Welkfurn nodded and arose, pulled on his overcoat. He started toward the door, and Conway called after him, grinning:

'Don’t be gone long, Welk; don’t get to talking on the way!'

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10: Vengeance in the Fog

Douglas Newton

1884-1951

Tit-Bits, 28 August 1937

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THE *CALANTARA'S* siren roared like a blinded bull. John Farne, peering over the bridge dodger into the fog, strained his ears for a land echo.

"No throwback yet, Mr. Nagle?" he said.

"Nothing, sir," his first officer answered. "They say the Maiden Point blankets sound— or swings it away in some fashion."

Nagle spoke with an odd, thick hesitancy that was both surly and nervous. John Farne knew why. Somewhere off the *Calantara*'s port bow, perhaps a mile away, perhaps less, was the long, submerged reef under the Maiden where, in just such circumstances as these, the last three Farnes to follow the sea had been lost with all hands.

John Farne could almost feel Nagle thinking: "It was bound to come. The fog, the Maiden, and the homeward passage always wait to catch a Farne— we're as good as dead."

It was already a sea legend. To sail with a Farne was to sail with a Jonah.

John Farne's great-grandfather, John Farne I, had started the thing. The Farnes had always followed the sea, commanding ships since the days of the first Atlantic adventurers. Great-grandfather John had been the finest seaman of the line, more daring, fiercer of temper, with a grim will of his own— and more far-seeing.

It was he who first defied the tradition of his line by throwing over sail and becoming one of the first masters to risk a reputation in the then new-fangled iron-built steamers. But he had done more than defy tradition; he had split and ruined the family. He told them he was changing over because sail was doomed.

When he made it plain that he also meant to withdraw all his money, a half of their holdings, from the Greywing Line, and invest it in the new Ironholt Steamship Company, their bitterness turned to rancor, the more acrid because they had convinced themselves that it was not shrewdness that swayed old John, but lovesick dotage.

In his 57th year, a widower, and with a son of his own old enough to be standing for a second mate's ticket, Old John had fallen under the spell of Irene Withers, only daughter of Abel Withers, owner of the new Ironholt Line.

To old John's brothers and sisters, even to his own son, the woman explained everything. Senile infatuation had destroyed old John's common sense, and he was ready to fling away solid Farne money in this gamble on smoke-belching rattle traps that could have no future outside bankruptcy.

Tradition has it that his two seafaring brothers, Captain Adam and Captain Harry Farne, nearly fought him, so ugly was the tension. It was the shore-living brother, George, who prevented that. George, the foxiest of ships' brokers, had a scheme that that would serve even better. It involved a good deal of underhand financial trickery, whereby the still insecure Ironholt Company could be wrecked into bankruptcy before Old John could return to save it with Farne cash.

A nasty bit of business, yet since there seemed no other way of preventing Old John's making a fool of himself and ruining them, they all agreed to it, even old John's son, John II.

This was the cause of the tragedy.

Old John got word of the treachery as he lay waiting on cargo in Clinton, his outward port, and after two days of fury and harrying on the loading, he turned the "Western Dawn round for a record run home to Sarum.

Perhaps his fury made him reckless; perhaps he was so confident in the powers of steam that he over-tried them; whatever it was, he pushed the *Western Dawn* as no other ship had been pushed before.

Even when he reached the Maiden Passage, with its dread current sets and its deceptive windslants between close-hemmed shores, and found it blind with fog he still drove his ship. Perhaps he felt that engines could claw him off any danger in time. In this he was dreadfully wrong, it was her very engines that drove the *Western Dawn* too quickly and too high on to the reef beneath the Maiden, breaking her back so sharply that she slid in halves into deep water, drowning all her passengers and crew before they had even grasped what happened.

So old John had died, a victim of unsailorlike steam, the Farnes said, but there were those who held that his family had been the cause.

MANY men at Clinton had heard old John raging against the treachery of his family. They had heard him swear an oath that he would make his kin pay for their black plotting if it cost him heaven itself.

When, less than a year later, fog caught Captain Adam Farne in the Maiden on his homeward run, and caused him to pile up the *Gannet*, crack clipper of the Greywing Line, on the very reef where his brother had died, and to the same total loss, men were not backward in declaring that old John was keeping his word; that even in death he was avenging the wrong done to him and his wife.

The talk increased four years later, for his other seafaring brother, Captain Harry, master of the *Kestrel*, a new steel four-master, went down at the same spot, and under the same conditions— fog thick under the Maiden and the *Kestrel* homeward bound.

Men now held that there was that in the Passage that caution and good seamanship could not beat; something that spelt sure doom to all Farnes. They watched old John's son, John II., for the crowning proof.

They had a long wait— seven years. Meanwhile, by first-rate seamanship, John II. had lifted himself to command his line's crack, the *Dan O'Connell*, and in his second year on her he was put under orders to call at Sarum on the homeward run. That meant the Maiden Passage.

Possibly his owners had forgotten the hoodoo story, or thought it forgotten. John II., at least, learnt it was still remembered when he found his deck hands deserting and his second-officer developing a mysterious illness. A winter home run, with its certainty of fogs in the Maiden Passage, with a Farne commanding, was too much for some memories.

Yet that may have been the very cause of the disaster. John II. Had to sail with a scratch crew, while his new second mate was known to be a confirmed boozer, who had to stiffen himself with a bracer whenever he took over the bridge.

How much that sort of thing was responsible for what happened, living men will never know, for after the fog in the Maiden Passage engulfed the *Dan O'Connell*, nobody saw her or her crew again.

That stamped and hall-marked the legend. It became authentic sea lore.

Harold Farne, John ll.'s son then in his apprenticeship with the Shamrock Line, found this out to his cost. Men refused to sail with him aboard, and presently ships refused to have him. That decided him to take a shore job.

With him, the Farnes left the sea for 20 years, and, without victims to sustain it, the legend became a fainter memory, and seemed to die.

But sea legends never quite die.

Harold Farne's son, John III., found that so when he took to the sea. After that long absence, the family passion broke out strongly in him. It was sailoring or nothing with John III.

He was lucky to be articled to the great Longcape Company of de luxe passenger ships sailing from Earlhampton in the North. No route through the Maiden for them, no danger for a Farne. Not much memory of it left, either, though now and then an oldster eyed him queerly on hearing his name. But, on the whole, the thing did not bother John III. much, and as he rose surely through the years without an accident or a black mark to his name, he had a right to count the superstition dead for good.

Like old John, John III. was a brilliant seaman, although he hid it under a more modern polish and the suave, gilt-braid diplomacy proper to the Commodores of luxury passenger craft.

He was already master of the *Calantara* by the time that the Longcape directors decided to change all their sailings from Earlhampton to the more central southern port of Sarum.

The first time John Farne III. had to take his 50,000 tons of gilt, gadgets, and steel homeward through the Maiden Passage, he had, even against that hard will of his, felt a thrill of dread. He knew, too, that the men on the soaring bridge with him, Nagle, the quartermaster at the wheel, the signal officers, and the rest, had all felt it. He could feel them watching, expecting, and fearing the Fate of the Farnes.

But it had been summer then. Sun sparkling on the water as they steamed through the narrow Passage, visibility perfect, the treacherous tide drags and the wind asleep. They had come through like a train running to timetable, as they had to, and again and again the next voyages. It was as though the old legend had ceased to have any meaning.

But John III. knew that that thought was false comfort. He knew that Nagle and all those others were saying in their hearts: "Wait until fog catches Farne in the Maiden, homeward bound... Wait for the fog."

And now at last the fog had them.

It had swept on to them as they entered the Passage; fog so thick that even their own fo'c'sle head became a mere guess amid trailing shadows. Fog that not only blotted out all land close, dangerously close, though it was on either beam, but all sky and all sea beyond an oily lift alongside.

They had rung down to quarter-speed, of course, but they could not heave to. Luxury liners running on a schedule must not lose time. They must go on, feeling their way, relying on seamanship.

Again the ghostly bull voice of the siren roared behind them. Again John Farne III. hung tense on the rail, listening.

"No land echo, yet," he said.

"No echo yet, sir," Nagle answered, and John III. knew he was thinking: "There never will be— for a Farne."

John himself was thinking of that lack of echo. Had that been the reason for those old disasters? Was there some ground slant ashore that would not throw sound back, especially when blanketed by fog? That seemed to him a more sensible explanation than any hoodoo story. The Passage was a wicked channel and had been a devil's boneyard ever since ships sailed into history. The double shore, only a mile and a half apart at its widest, the fantastic jut of headlands, the reef that played old Harry with the current, and the ever-shifting shoals, made it a dangerous and unpredictable place.

No man ever quite knew what the Maiden Passage was going to serve up for him.

AND there was little way of judging. Even in fine weather John had learnt that the peculiar set of the land made underwater signalling useless. There was nothing, in fact, to help one in a fog like this, save seamanship. One had to feel or smell one's way forward by an old sailor instinct, as old John I. Had invariably done.

Yes, there lay the real danger of the Passage. His great-great-uncles and his grandfather had put their ships on to the reef because they had less of the seaman's soul than old John. Old John would never have wrecked his vessel if treachery had not harried and blunted his instincts. Well, he, John III., was old John alive again, with the added science of his age to help him. He had nothing to fear.

A telephone buzzed. Nagle answered. The bow look-out was reporting.

"Broken water ahead, sir," Nagle said. "No, he does not seem certain of its exact bearing. He seems confused... says there's an echo... But he's nearly sure it's dead ahead "

Dead ahead... The reef under the Maiden dead ahead! John Farne's judgment could not accept that; he'd plotted his course so surely— yet how could he be sure?

For a moment he had a picture of what the momentum of 50,000 tons, moving at quarter speed, would do to the *Calantara* if she hit that reef dead ahead. He thought of the 2,000 lives in his charge— not even old John nor his other forbears had faced such a disaster as threatened him.

He gripped the bridge rail. What should he order: "Stop? Go astern? Hard a-starboard?" If the reef were dead ahead, either of the first. If the reef was where he judged it to be, the latter. The latter was a liner captain's order, for it would keep him moving to time-table; yet there was risk in it. The slightest miscalculation might pile them up on the shoals on the shore to starboard.... Yet, with broken water dead ahead he must do something.

What?

He knew that Nagle and all on the bridge were watching him, watching him as men certain of his and their doom.

Yet he could only stare ahead, unsure, hesitant for the first time in his career.

And as he stared he saw the ship....

it was no more than a black bulking in the fog, a smudge of darkness, indefinable and grotesque, but a ship nevertheless, crossing his bows from port to starboard. How far ahead she was he could not calculate because of the fog. But his seaman's judgment told him that he must ram her in the next few minutes, just as his instinct assured him that by swinging hard a-port, he might just shave by her stern, or, by turning sharp to starboard and ringing for speed,

might turn a trifle quicker than the other and in her own line, and so just scrape clear of a collision.

Both manoeuvres were dangerous. Turning to starboard and at speed was almost bound to put him aground on the shoals there. Going to port would be worse. The reef was there, too close for clearance. He would pile the *Calantara* up on it as Farnes had piled up those other ships.

Farnes! Suddenly he realised that this was the Fate of the Farnes. He alone seemed to have seen the ship. No man had shouted, none had seen the danger ahead— only a Farne could see it.

Abruptly, too, the vessel ahead seemed to define itself— antique clipper bows, sail spars to her masts, an absurd, tall smokestack— vague, smudgy, but the *Western Dawn* as he knew her from the picture on the wall of his father's home, the ship old John had wrecked in the Maiden Passage!

This then was how old John had taken his revenge on the others. By planting the old *Western Dawn* across the fairway, he had left them no choice but an abrupt panic swing on to the reef to avoid collision.

It was against reason, incredible, but John III. knew now this was how those other Farnes had died, how he must die unless he out-matched old John. As he could, because he was old John born again. It was the old John in him that set his face in grim and reckless lines, made him snap his order:

"Keep her as she is..."

Keep her going straight ahead. Old John's "Western Dawn" blocked his course, but that meant she was in deep water, anyhow; and if she really was the old *Western Dawn*, she was a ghost— and you don't need even collision mats when ramming ghosts.

And if she wasn't a ghost, why, there was more chance in ramming a solid ship than ramming a reef. The whole thing happened in a matter of seconds only. Nagle had no more than hung up the telephone after taking the report from the bows when he heard John Farne's order. He came along the bridge nervously.

"If it's the reef dead ahead, sir, he began— then he let out a cry. He saw the *Western Dawn*. He gripped John Farne's arm, cried: "Heavens! Don't you see, sir... We're running her down..."

John Farne's heart went dead. Had his brain, his cunning fooled him? It was a real ship, not a phantom—Nagle saw it. Others on the bridge saw it. Had his preoccupation with his family hoodoo blinded him to concrete facts, to common sense? The shock paralysed him. He could not act or speak. And it was too late to give fresh orders, anyhow. They must ram at any moment.

He stood rooted to the deck, struck dumb by the inevitableness of this Fate of the Farnes. He heard Nagle shouting something. Others on the bridge called out in fear of the imminent collision...

Then Nagle's voice faltered.

A man giggled foolishly under the relaxing of the nervous strain:

"Well, I'm perished— only a hole in the fog.... That was all it was."

THEY never got closer to the spectral ship. It kept its vague and misty distance all the time, and then quite suddenly it was not a ship at all.

Some slant of the land made a channel for a current of air that cut a queer funnel of clearness through the fog. And through that clear gap they had been looking not at any ship, but a configuration of land that, for a brief spell, suggested a ship— nothing but a distant view, a mirage distorted by the fog into a shape to play tricks with an already nervous imagination.

"And I could have stood by my oath in court that it was a vessel ahead," Nagle said, mopping the perspiration from his face.

"An old, clipper-bowed, sail-aided steamer, eh?" John Farne said, grimly.

"Yes, sir— just that," Nagle answered.

"Strange how cruel imagination can be to the ready mind," John Farne said.

"You mean, you think that's what killed your— the other Farnes?"

"More than likely," John Farnes said. "Didn't your instinct demand that we should go hard a-port directly you saw, or thought you saw, that ship?"

"That's right, sir," Nagle nodded, "and that would have sent us bang on the reef."

"Yes, you can take it that that same instinct wrecked those others," John Farne nodded, grimly. "We'd better log and report the phenomenon. It looks like a constant."

"Yes, and 'it, explains a good many wrecks in the Passage," the first officer agreed, but he looked queerly at John Farne III. "Just why didn't you go hard a-port, sir?"

"Too much like old John," John III grinned. " 'Ram and be damned' would have been his line— better than going on that reef, anyhow."

"Queer though that that log mirage sunk him," Nagle said.

"May have, but I don't think it did," John III answered. "I think his anger and his hurry did that. I think his instinct would have saved him if he'd been himself, just as it saved me." He stared ahead into the fog now thinning as they left the Passage. "Old John's spirit saved me. That might be worth logging, too, eh, Nagle?... Just to show that the old Farne hoodoo is dead."

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11: The Ivory Leg and the Twenty-Four Diamonds

Fergus Hume

1859-1932

The Idler March 1894

Collected in: *The Dwarf's Chamber*, 1896

The story is told by an unnamed police officer called in late into investigate

MEMBERS of a family may be selfishly proud of their individual perfections, yet take a collective pride in some special attribute or possession of their race. The O'Gradys, for instance, flatter themselves on owning a genuine Banshee; the Macsniffs think highly of the hoary tower built by Noah Macsniff to escape a second Flood; and the Fitztudors are proud of their royal descent from a frail ancestress and a dissolute king. Such-like trifles give satisfaction to the most aristocratic families, and raise them (in their own estimation) above the commonalty. These do not recognize Adamic relationship otherwise than that they belong to the human race.

The Dreuxfields, having made money by army contracting during the Peninsular War, cast round for some fetich to boast of, to expatiate on, and to bore their friends with. They had no ancestors worth talking about; their baronial halls were a recent purchase, and the family ghost of the former proprietors, not being a fixture, had passed away with the ancient stock. Ultimately they hit on jewels as the most respectable things to be proud of, and, in pursuance of the idea, they acquired twenty-four diamonds the like of which had never been seen since Aladdin looted the Cave of the Lamp.

These were not all bought at once, or by one person. Such wholesale buying would have reduced the whole affair to the level of a Bond Street purchase. The collecting of these gems took time and money, and (possibly) the loss of immortal souls. For the last fifty years every member of the family who could beg, borrow, buy, or steal a particularly fine diamond, forthwith contributed the same to the Dreuxfield fetich. Each jewel, worth no end of money, had a history, reputable or otherwise, and, finally, four-and-twenty gems of the first water were brought together to constitute the heirloom of the Dreuxfields.

The fetich ever consisted of these twenty-four diamonds, but the stones varied in the setting according to the taste of the Mrs. Dreuxfield then in possession. They glittered a tiara for display at St. James's, or flamed a jewelled belt for a waist. Sometimes they separated into bracelets of twelve gems each, or again collected into a necklace shooting twenty-four sparks of fire. In this latter form they were now, as the present Mrs. Dreuxfield's fine neck and shoulders formed an admirable background for the display of their splendour.

Experts valued the necklace at twenty thousand pounds, and it fully justified in worth and appearance the pride of its possessors. All the thieves in London had seen those diamonds going to Court on the fair neck of Mrs. Dreuxfield, and had calculated the chances of getting them into their clutches. They never found an opportunity of stealing them, however, as when not in use they reposed in the strong-room of Dreuxfield Hall, Malvern, the key of which was attached to the Squire's watch-chain. Yet, notwithstanding the impossibility of a successful raid, one famous cracksman swore loudly that he would yet steal the jewels. So far he had not succeeded. His name was Cracky Bill, of Whitechapel, and he was wanted by the police. Cecil Dreuxfield, who had lately succeeded to the property, was a young man of thirty, whose parents dying within a year of each other had left him and his wife in possession of the Hall and the diamonds. With them lived Cecil's sister Kate and Mrs. Dreuxfield's uncle, Josiah Onslow. The young couple were handsome and agreeable, the sister was a pretty girl fond of the Curate, and the uncle a bad-tempered ancient who owned an ivory leg. This latter curiosity deserves special mention.

It is not every man who possesses an artificial limb made of ivory, and the Major (he had retired from service of the H.E.I.C. with that rank) was as proud of it as was Pelops of his ivory shoulder. Not born a Dreuxfield, he took no especial interest in the necklace, and bestowed all superfluous pride on his ivory leg. Onslow had imagination, and should have been a novelist. As it was, he told stories about that leg which outvied the "Arabian Nights." There were fifty distinct narratives as to how he had lost his limb and gained the artificial understanding. He never repeated himself, and lied like a journalist short of news. The leg was turned like that of a pianoforte, and carved out of all smoothness. If any one asked him if it was vegetable ivory he threw everything handy at the head of the inquirer.

"Vegetable ivory, you qualified fool!" he would roar, "no! genuine ivory—elephants' tusks, bless me! The Rajah of Dum-Dum gave me the leg for losing my own in killing a heavenly elephant that blessed nearly killed him."

The adjectives in this speech must be read contrariwise.

Onslow was not a nice man, and no great favourite with the young trio. He drank sherry, which was bad for his liver, and played cards for stakes ruinous to bis meagre purse. Only the love Dreuxfield had for his wife prevented him turning her relation out of doors. By dint of much self-control they put up fairly well with his tantrums, and were glad when he visited London (which he did twice or thrice a month) to lose money at his favourite pastime.

No one loved the old reprobate. Not even his servant, whom he bullied unmercifully. Perhaps the present valet had not been long enough in his situation to love the Major, for he was a new importation. Onslow rarely kept his men longer than a month. The incessant exercise of dodging missiles wore

them thin. The new valet fared better, as he was deferential, and had been an attendant in a lunatic asylum. Moreover, he took a great interest in the Major's ivory leg, and, when it was unstrapped at night, he always carried it to his own room to polish up for the morning. These little attentions pleased the crusty old man. One evening in April the Curate came to dinner. He was a handsome, earnest young fellow, much in love with Kate Dreuxfield. His affection was returned, and it seemed probable that there would be a match. Every one favoured the idea, save Major Onslow, who hated the Curate like poison. All the scandal he could gather about the parson he repeated to Cecil, but as he had discounted his veracity by ivory leg stories, this gossip merely provoked distrust. After dinner the Curate followed Kate into the drawing-room, where he made love, with the consent and in the presence of Mrs. Dreuxfield. Cecil, left alone with Onslow, drank his wine, smoked his cigar, and listened to the Major raging. He was particularly offensive this evening, and his speeches need expurgation.

"I hate that sneaking parson," he began without preamble. Dreuxfield interrupted him smartly.

"You are in the minority then. Jenny, Kate, and myself think no end of him."

"Particularly Kate," sneered the Major. "I suppose she will marry the fellow."

"If by the fellow you mean Clarence Newall, I have no doubt she will," retorted Cecil, pointedly. "I know of no man to whom I would so willingly give my sister."

"I thought you didn't like parsons."

"Then you thought wrong, sir. I am not aware of having manifested any particular dislike to the Church. Besides, I was at college with Newall, and I know him to be a good, honest fellow."

"I've heard different stories," said Onslow, enraged by these contradictions; "it is said that Newall was in a fast set."

"Maybe; but he was not fast himself. You are thinking of his cousin, Clive Newall— the initials are the same, the natures are not."

"You believe in him, I see," said the Major, huffily, making for the door, "but, mark my words, he'll sell you yet. I never knew a parson that didn't."

"Newall is quite sound, Major— as sound as that ivory leg you-—"

His speech was interrupted by the banging of the door. Onslow did not like his leg being made a jest of, and, moreover, finding he was getting the worst of it, he retired to bed. By no means sorry to see the back of this cantankerous elder, Cecil finished his claret, and went to the drawing-room. Here he found the two ladies and Newall in eager conversation.

"The Major has gone to bed, Jenny," he said to his wife. "Lost his temper, as usual."

"What a cross old man he is," said Mrs. Dreuxfield, shrugging her shoulders. "Cecil dear, I hope he has not vexed you. I really think we ought to take away his ivory leg until he promises to behave better."

"Never mind, Jenny," whispered Kate, "he is going to town to-morrow, and will be away some days."

"You look tired, Bewail," said Dreuxfield, patting his friend on the shoulder.

"I have been husy to-day," answered the Curate, "and, besides, I'm rather worried over a family matter."

"That scamp Clive again? " asked Cecil in a low voice.

Bewail nodded, and would have continued speaking but that Kate interposed.

"What are you two talking about? " she said; then, without waiting for an answer, added, " Oh, Cecil, I want you to show Mr. Bewail the necklace. He has never seen it, and you promised me this morning at breakfast to bring it out."

"Come to the next Drawing-room, Mr. Bewail," said Mrs. Dreuxfield, amiably, "and you shall see it on my neck."

"I think he would like a closer inspection," laughed Cecil. "I'll fetch it down here."

"Do," said Bewail, eagerly, "you have no idea how anxious I am to see the Dreuxfield diamonds."

"What a curious odour," observed Dreuxfield, snifling; "you haven't any drugs in your pockets, have you, Bewail?"

"Botthat I know of," replied the Curate, smiling, "but I was taking some medicine to a parishioner to-day, and the cork came out of the bottle. Bo doubt some of the contents were spilt."

"Oh, that is it! You ought to be more careful. I declare you scent the room like a— perambulating drug shop. Sweet! heavy! sickly— ah! ah! Chloroform! " finished Cecil, and departed for the strong room.

It seemed to Kate, who was watching his face, that her lover paled a trifle at this last remark. The momentary emotion passed, but she thought it strange. Then they fell to talking of the necklace and its worth.

"I declare," said Mrs. Dreuxfield, with a pretty shudder, "that I am always nervous when going to the drawing-room. To sit in a carriage with hundreds of curious eyes fastened on those diamonds is enough to shake stronger nerves than mine.''

"I don't see why you should fear, Jenny. No one can steal that necklace! It is too well guarded."

"Let us hope no one will attempt so daring a theft. Ah! here comes Dreuxfield with the jewels."

Cecil placed the morocco box on the table and lifted the lid. In the lamplight a glory streamed from the twenty-four gems. Even the two women, well

accustomed to the sight, could not restrain a little cry of delighted surprise. Newall drew a long breath and gazed steadfastly at the glitter before him. The stones, but slightly set and connected, flashed a circle of sunbeams.

"A king's ransom!" he said, and turned away as if to shut out the too fascinating sight. They amused themselves with the necklace for some time and then closed the hox. It was left on the table. Shortly afterwards the ladies retired to bed, and Newall went up to the smoking-room with Dreuxfield. Hardly were they outside the drawingroom door when Cecil uttered an ejaculation of annoyance.

"What a fool I am!" said he, "I quite forgot the necklace. You know where the smoking-room is, Newall. Just go to it while I replace the diamonds in the strong room."

Newall assented and moved away, while Dreuxfield went back for the necklace. The box was still on the table, and a glance inside assured him that the jewels were safe. Blaming himself for his inconceivable rashness in leaving the treasure even for a moment, he went to the strong-room. It was on the ground-floor, and approached by a long and somewhat dark passage. With the case under his arm Dreuxfield fumbled at the lock of the door, when suddenly an arm was thrown round his neck, choking the cry on his lips. A cloth saturated with chloroform was clapped over his mouth, and he heard the morocco box clatter to the floor as he lost his senses.

Mrs. Dreuxfield in her dressing-room chattered with Kate about the Curate, and playfully bantered her on her chances of becoming a clergyman's wife. Then Kate retired, and Mrs. Dreuxfield prepared for bed. Somewhat astonished at the unusual absence of her husband, she was about to seek the smoking-room and reprove him when she heard a loud cry. In a few minutes she was down-stairs, and found Newall in the hall bending over the unconscious body of Cecil.

"What is the matter?" she cried, alarmed by this spectacle.

"I don't know," gasped Newall, with a remarkably pale face; "he left me to put away the jewels. I waited his return in the smoking-room. He did not appear, and I went in search of him. He was lying unconscious by the strong-room door."

By the time this breathless explanation came to an end, the whole household thronged the hall. Last of all the Major, followed by his valet Jenkins, stumped down the stairs, loudly excusing himself for so late an arrival.

"Jenkins took my ivory leg to his room to clean," he explained. "I came down the instant it was strapped on. Now what is all this?"

Explanations were made, a doctor appeared on the scene, and Cecil sat up confusedly to give his version of the episode.

"Chloroform! " exclaimed the doctor.

"The diamonds! " said Dreuxfield. "I have been robbed."

This explanation did not mend matters. The moment before they had been concerned for the safety of their master, now each and all wondered what was the penalty for robbery. Pale servants looked askance at one another, and the female domestics shrieked themselves into hysterics. Kate kept her head and bore Mrs. Dreuxfield to her room, leaving the men to deal -with the matter. Unfortunately, at so late an hour, little could be done, so there was nothing left for it but to wait till dawn opened the telegraph office. Newall, finding himself useless in advising and doing, went home in company with the doctor. Cecil and the Major retired to bed, but not to sleep. Few eyes were closed at Dreuxfield Hall that night, and the air was charged with terror and suspicion. The diamond necklace was gone, but no one, least of all its owner, knew who had thieved it so dexterously.

THE NEXT MORNING DREUXFIELD wired for detectives and called in the local police. I (who tell the story) was deputed to look after the case, and on arriving at Malvern I was put in possession of the facts. From such statements I could not guess who was the thief, and proceeded to examine the servants. The result was unsatisfactory, and I tackled the gentry. Dreuxfield, his wife, and sister could tell me nothing, and altogether the loss of that necklace was as deep a mystery as ever I had to do with.

It rather added to my perplexity when I found that Major Onslow and his valet had that morning gone to London. He had explained that he knew a man who would elucidate any mystery better than a professional detective, and was going to fetch him down. Then I inquired after the Curate, and Miss Kate produced a hastily-scribbled note.

"He went to town this morning," she explained, not without embarrassment.

"Do you know on what business, Miss Dreuxfield?"

"Something connected with a relative," said she, glancing at the note.

I must say the conduct of the Curate appeared suspicious. Dreuxfield very unwillingly told me of the chloroform episode in the drawing-room. This did not tend to exculpate Newall, so I examined the position of the smoking-room relative to the strong-room. Both were on the ground-floor, and it was easy to get from one to the other. I suppose my suspicions showed themselves in my face, for Dreuxfield took me sharply to task.

"I know what you are thinking of," said he— "that Mr. Newall did not go to the smoking-room, but when I returned for the jewels hid himself in the strong-room passage. You are wrong. It is absolutely impossible that he should be the thief."

"Yet his clothes were scented with chloroform, and by that drug you were rendered senseless."

"Yes," admitted Dreuxfield reluctantly, "but that proves nothing."

"Nothing I Save that he must have had chloroform on him yesterday. Bather a curious drug for a person to carry. Then he went to London ibis morning. That looks suspicious."

"I suppose you'll say he took the necklace with him!"

"It's not impossible."

"I have known Newall for many years," said Dreuxfield earnestly, "and I assure you that he is incapable of such an act."

His sister, who had overheard our conversation, withered me with a glance.

"Mr. Newall is a gentleman and a clergyman," she declared indignantly. "I would as soon think of suspecting my brother as him. To-morrow he returns, and he will face the charge you have brought against him."

"I have brought no charge against him— yet," I answered, and so closed the discussion.

Notwithstanding all my efforts I could discover nothing likely to lead to the arrest of the thief. The servants all asserted their innocence, and supported one another strongly after the fashion of their kind. In my own heart I suspected the Curate, and waited with some impatience for his arrival. A personal interview would simplify matters. Bather to the dismay of Kate Dreuxfield, he did not return next day, thereby confirming my suspicions. The last train brought the Major, full of stories about the Curate, none of which redounded to the young man's credit.

"Do you know why I went to town, Cecil? " he asked Mr. Dreuxfield in my presence.

"To fetch some special detective of your own."

"That was merely an excuse to keep Kate quiet. No! I followed Newall to town."

"That is the Curate, Major! " said I.

"Yes, sir," he answered triumphantly, "that sneaking parson. I suspected he had something to do with the robbery, and I am right."

"Do you mean to say Newall stole the necklace? " asked Dreuxfield, looking very pale.

"Yes, I do! I have no positive proof, but strong suspicions."

"Those go for nothing."

"Wait a moment, Mr. Dreuxfield," I whispered. "Let Major Onslow tell his story."

"After the robbery," said the ivory-leg gentleman, "I thought the parson might have had something to do with it, as I neither liked nor trusted him. If my suspicions were correct, I fancied he would go to town next day, so at dawn I sent out to learn his movements. Sure enough Newall was going to town by the ten o'clock train, so without saying anything I followed him. Strange to say, he drove from Waterloo to my own lawyers. I waited till his interview was finished,

and then I saw my solicitor. He of course refused to reveal anything, but he hinted sufficient for me to know that Newall intended to pay him a large sum of money on that day. I then had no doubt that Newall had stolen the necklace, and was about to raise money on it."

"But I don't see—"

"Of course you don't," interrupted Onslow, cutting short Dreuxfield's remark, "you believe in the fellow. I don't. I know, and you know, that he hasn't a sixpence, and yet he traffics with lawyers over large sums of money. After that discovery I left the office and hung about all day—"

"Most respectable employment," sneered Dreuxfield.

"It was in your interest," reproved the Major with dignity. "In the afternoon I saw this wolf in sheep's clothing coming back. While he was with the senior partner a clerk left the office and took a hansom. I followed in another. He went to the bank and presented a cheque for three thousand pounds. I saw the cheque, it was signed by Newall. Now then," concluded Onslow triumphantly, "where did Newall get that money if not by pledging the necklace? "

Dreuxfield and I made no immediate comment. Things looked fishy for the Curate, and his actions fitted in neatly with the suspicion that he was the thief. Meantime I left Onslow to gloat over his perspicuity, and took Dreuxfield aside.

"Excuse me, sir," said I, "but I am about to say something rude."

"Say away," he answered, looking rather pale, "I won't be offended."

"I have examined all the servants, sir, and I am pretty certain that not one of them is clever enough to have carried out this robbery. Suspicions point towards Mr. Newall, yet for the moment let us give him the benefit of the doubt and see who else could have stolen the jewels. Now if—"

Seeing I hesitated, Dreuxfield anticipated my speech.

"You are thinking of Major Onslow! "

"Well, yes! I hear a good deal of club gossip, and, to tell the honest truth, Major Onslow does not bear a good character."

"I know all that," said Dreuxfield bitterly; "he is an old rogue who would sell his soul— if he has one— to gratify his vices. Yet I don't think he is the thief. He retired early to bed, and his valet took his ivory leg away. "Without that leg he could do nothing."

"Suppose his valet didn't take away his master's ivory leg? "

"Ah! you think the two of them are in it? "

"I can't say! Wait till I see the Curate. It seems to me that Major Onslow is suspiciously active in getting evidence against him. At present I should like to see the valet."

"Uncle," said Dreuxfield, returning to the old man, "can we see Jenkins? "

"He didn't come back with me," replied Onslow gruffly. "I gave him permission to see his relatives."

"When do you expect him back? "

"In a week! You don't think he stole the necklace, do you?" finished the Major defiantly.

"No," said I, shirking the answer, "but I have examined all the servants except your man. It is only fair that he should have his turn."

"Wait here for a week and you'll see him," replied the Major ungraciously, "or go to my London club. He calls there every morning for my letters and sends them on. I don't trust club servants."

"Oh, I shan't trouble so much about him," I said, so our party of three broke up.

It was too late that evening to wire, but in the morning I sent a telegram to a brother detective containing instructions to see Jenkins at the club. By noon I received a reply, with which I went in search of the Major. On the way Miss Dreuxfield stopped me.

"Mr. Newall is coming down this afternoon," she said, showing me a letter; "he will he here at four o'clock. Then your suspicions will be explained away."

"I hope so with all my heart. But I may mention, Miss Dreuxfield, that I brought no specific charge against Mr. Newall."

I spoke to the empty air, for by this time she was out of hearing. My hintings had offended her mortally, but no one could have held the Curate guiltless in the face of the evidence against him. Next I found the Major in the drawing-room, and opened fire at once.

"Tour servant is coming down by this afternoon's train, Major."

"Who sent for him?"

"I did! It is as well that I should hear what he has to say."

"He has nothing to say," growled the Major sulkily; "he put me to bed and took my ivory leg to his room. He wasn't near the strong-room, or even down-stairs."

"His assurance of that will be quite sufficient, so I am glad he is coming. Mr. Newall is also on his way."

"I hope he won't have the face to show here."

"Indeed, he is coming down for the purpose. Miss Dreuxfield has advised him of your accusations, and he desires to clear his character."

"He won't be able to. I'm certain he stole the necklace." I had my own opinion about the robbery, and held my tongue. If the Major was mixed up in the business with the valet, he had received due warning that justice was on his track. Contrary to my expectations, he was by no means startled. The man puzzled me.

At five o'clock the train arrived, and with it Jenkins. My brother detective was with him, and the three of us had a conversation. Then we went to Dreuxfield Hall to see how Mr. Newall was getting on. He had come down by the

same train, and had at once gone off to look after his character. It was about time, seeing the Major had done his best to spoil it.

When we arrived I left Jenkins and his escort outside in the entrance-hall, as I was anxious to hear Newall's defence before producing the valet as a witness. All the gentry concerned in the matter were assembled in the drawing-room— Dreuxfield and his wife near the door opening on to the conservatory, Onslow standing in the conservatory itself, Newall, with Kate clinging to his arm, facing the three. He was quite pale, and looked savage.

"I absolutely deny the accusations of Major Onslow," he was saying when I entered; "no one knows less about the matter than I do."

''What about the chloroform?" sneered Onslow, "and your hurried departure to town, and the cheque for three thousand? "

"All that I can explain except the chloroform. That is a mystery to me as to you. I did spill some medicine in the afternoon, and I fancied that was the odour to which Dreuxfield alluded. When he mentioned chloroform I was startled."

"I've no doubt of it."

"Because," added Newall, gazing defiantly at the Major, "I had that day received a letter from my wretched cousin Clive saying he had embezzled some money, and threatening to poison himself with chloroform unless I saved him."

"That was why you turned so pale!" said Kate breathlessly.

"Yes! and that was why I went to town next day. It had nothing to do with the loss of the diamonds. I drove to your lawyers and arranged to settle the matter by paying the money. Fortunately, two months ago I inherited five thousand pounds, on which I had hoped to have married."

"And shall marry," murmured Kate under her breath.

"I sold out some stock and got the money— paid it to my lawyer, who settled the matter for my wretched cousin. I was arranging for his departure to the colonies when I heard through Kate of Major Onslow's shameless accusations. I came down here to refute them, and I have done so."

"Not to my mind," growled Onslow.

"I think otherwise," said Dreuxfield, taking Newall by the hand. "My dear fellow, you are as innocent as I. Forgive me for having doubted you."

Mrs. Dreuxfield said words to the same effect, and Kate boldly kissed her lover before them all. It was a pleasant sight save to the Major, who swore loudly.

"This doesn't show who stole the necklace. If it wasn't Newall, who was it?"

"What about yourself, Major?" said I, coming forward. The four people turned round in astonishment, and the Major, purple with rage, started forward.

"What do you mean, sir?" he cried, with a few adjectives which I suppress. I went to the door and led in the respectable Jenkins— handcuffed.

"I mean this, Major, that your valet is about the biggest thief in London. He has been long wanted for several jobs, but he managed to evade the police. Thanks to your information, he was captured at your club and brought down to give evidence— against you."

"Against me! " said Onslow, growing grey. "I swear I had nothing to do with the theft of the necklace."

There was a dead silence, and all waited for the next remark. It came from Jenkins— from the respectable Jenkins, *alias* Cracky Bill.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said, bowing collectively, "I told the police I would give evidence against the Major in order to be brought down here. But it is a lie. My master is quite innocent, and," he added impudently, "so am I."

"That won't save you, my man," said I sternly; "your other pranks mean a lifer, so you may as well confess your share in this."

"Well, the Major's innocent, at all events," said the rogue.

"Thank you, my man," muttered Onslow thickly. "I'll— I'll—" here he swayed to and fro, then fell down in an apoplectic fit. There was a snap as he fell, and lo! a marvel. The butt of the ivory leg had caught in an interstice of the conservatory floor, and when he fell the leg smashed. Dreuxfield uttered a cry of astonishment, and pointed to the ivory stump. From it fell a rain of diamonds. The next moment Newall and Dreuxfield were picking up the jewels, and the women were loosening the neckcloth of the old man. I gripped Jenkins by the arm and indicated the scattered jewels.

"You lied! He is guilty! "

"Not a bit of it," said the scamp coolly; "don't you run your head against a stone, sir. Major Onslow hasn't been a bad master as masters go, and I'm not going to get him into trouble. He is quite innocent."

"Then how did the diamonds get into the ivory leg? "

"I put them there. It was this way. I wanted to steal those diamonds, and by means of a forged character I entered the Major's service. Then I watched for a chance to steal the jewels. I thought there would he no opportunity of getting out of the house during the first alarm if they were stolen, so I looked about for some safe place in which to hide them till I could take them to London at my leisure. As I cleaned the Major's ivory leg every night, it gave me an idea. I bored a hole half-way down the leg and dropped the diamonds in one by one. They just filled the hollow nicely."

"How did you steal them? "

"I heard Miss Dreuxfield say at breakfast that the master was going to show them to Mr. No wall, so I watched. All my plans were made, and I waited by the strong-room door with a chloroformed handkerchief. When he came along I used it, and stole the jewels. In my own room I separated them one from the other, and dropped them into the hollow of the ivory leg. Then I plugged up the

end with cotton wool and a round of ivory. The alarm was given, the Major called for his leg, and I took it to him. He went down to the hall with the diamonds safe in his ivory leg."

"Ah!" cried Newall at this moment, "you helped me off with my coat. How I understand the smell of chloroform."

"I sprinkled you with a little," replied Jenkins. "You see, parson, I wanted to get suspicion to fall on you. But for the smashing of the leg I wouldn't tell all this. But I've lost the diamonds and my liberty, so it doesn't matter."

The Major had by this time revived somewhat, and sat up to swear at his quondam servant.

"You villain!" he said, "oh, you villain!"

"And this," said Jenkins, as we marched him out, "this is gratitude."

Jenkins received the reward of his ingenuity, and passed the rest of his life in gaol for this and other offences. He always regretted not having pulled off the Dreuxfleld fetich. The Major took himself away from Malvern, and declined to have further dealings with the Dreuxfields. They were by no means sorry, and, indeed, had no time to be, for shortly afterwards Kate Dreuxfleld married Newall, to the delight of all. I can imagine the Major's language when he heard of the marriage. He wears a wooden leg now.

The twenty-four diamonds were at the last Drawingroom on the neck of their owner. I have no doubt that, sooner or later, another attempt will be made to steal them, but it is questionable whether any thief will be as ingenious as Cracky Bill, *alias* Jenkins. But then, it isn't every valet and thief who chances on a master with an ivory leg.

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12: By the Waters of Babylon

Stephen Vincent Benét

1898-1943

The Saturday Evening Post, 31 July 1937, as "The Place of the Gods"

THE NORTH and the west and the south are good hunting ground, but it is forbidden to go east. It is forbidden to go to any of the Dead Places except to search for metal and then he who touches the metal must be a priest or the son of a priest. Afterwards, both the man and the metal must be purified. These are the rules and the laws; they are well made. It is forbidden to cross the great river and look upon the place that was the Place of the Gods—this is most strictly forbidden. We do not even say its name though we know its name. It is there that spirits live, and demons—I t is there that there are the ashes of the Great Burning. These things are forbidden— they have been forbidden since the beginning of time.

My father is a priest; I am the son of a priest. I have been in the Dead Places near us, with my father— at first, I was afraid. When my father went into the house to search for the metal, I stood by the door and my heart felt small and weak. It was a dead man's house, a spirit house. It did not have the smell of man, though there were old bones in a corner. But it is not fitting that a priest's son should show fear. I looked at the bones in the shadow and kept my voice still.

Then my father came out with the metal— a good, strong piece. He looked at me with both eyes but I had not run away. He gave me the metal to hold— I took it and did not die. So he knew that I was truly his son and would be a priest in my time. That was when I was very young— nevertheless, my brothers would not have done it, though they are good hunters. After that, they gave me the good piece of meat and the warm corner by the fire. My father watched over me— he was glad that I should be a priest. But when I boasted or wept without a reason, he punished me more strictly than my brothers. That was right.

After a time, I myself was allowed to go into the dead houses and search for metal. So I learned the ways of those houses— and if I saw bones, I was no longer afraid. The bones are light and old— sometimes they will fall into dust if you touch them. But that is a great sin.

I was taught the chants and the spells— I was taught how to stop the running of blood from a wound and many secrets. A priest must know many secrets— that was what my father said. If the hunters think we do all things by chants and spells, they may believe so— it does not hurt them. I was taught how to read in the old books and how to make the old writings— that was hard and took a long time. My knowledge made me happy— it was like a fire in my heart. Most of all, I liked to hear of the Old Days and the stories of the gods. I asked

myself many questions that I could not answer, but it was good to ask them. At night, I would lie awake and listen to the wind—it seemed to me that it was the voice of the gods as they flew through the air.

We are not ignorant like the Forest People— our women spin wool on the wheel, our priests wear a white robe. We do not eat grubs from the tree, we have not forgotten the old writings, although they are hard to understand. Nevertheless, my knowledge and my lack of knowledge burned in me—I wished to know more. When I was a man at last, I came to my father and said, “It is time for me to go on my journey. Give me your leave.”

He looked at me for a long time, stroking his beard, then he said at last, “Yes. It is time.” That night, in the house of the priesthood, I asked for and received purification. My body hurt but my spirit was a cool stone. It was my father himself who questioned me about my dreams.

He bade me look into the smoke of the fire and see— I saw and told what I saw. It was what I have always seen— a river, and, beyond it, a great Dead Place and in it the gods walking. I have always thought about that. His eyes were stern when I told him— he was no longer my father but a priest. He said, “This is a strong dream.”

“It is mine,” I said, while the smoke waved and my head felt light. They were singing the Star song in the outer chamber and it was like the buzzing of bees in my head.

He asked me how the gods were dressed and I told him how they were dressed. We know how they were dressed from the book, but I saw them as if they were before me. When I had finished, he threw the sticks three times and studied them as they fell.

“This is a very strong dream,” he said. “It may eat you up.”

“I am not afraid,” I said and looked at him with both eyes. My voice sounded thin in my ears but that was because of the smoke.

He touched me on the breast and the forehead. He gave me the bow and the three arrows.

“Take them,” he said. “It is forbidden to travel east. It is forbidden to cross the river. It is forbidden to go to the Place of the Gods. All these things are forbidden.”

“All these things are forbidden,” I said, but it was my voice that spoke and not my spirit. He looked at me again.

“My son,” he said. “Once I had young dreams. If your dreams do not eat you up, you may be a great priest. If they eat you, you are still my son. Now go on your journey.”

I went fasting, as is the law. My body hurt but not my heart. When the dawn came, I was out of sight of the village. I prayed and purified myself, waiting for a sign. The sign was an eagle. It flew east.

Sometimes signs are sent by bad spirits. I waited again on the flat rock, fasting, taking no food. I was very still— I could feel the sky above me and the earth beneath. I waited till the sun was beginning to sink. Then three deer passed in the valley, going east— they did not wind me or see me. There was a white fawn with them— a very great sign.

I followed them, at a distance, waiting for what would happen. My heart was troubled about going east, yet I knew that I must go. My head hummed with my fasting— I did not even see the panther spring upon the white fawn. But, before I knew it, the bow was in my hand. I shouted and the panther lifted his head from the fawn. It is not easy to kill a panther with one arrow but the arrow went through his eye and into his brain. He died as he tried to spring— he rolled over, tearing at the ground. Then I knew I was meant to go east— I knew that was my journey. When the night came, I made my fire and roasted meat.

It is eight suns' journey to the east and a man passes by many Dead Places. The Forest People are afraid of them but I am not. Once I made my fire on the edge of a Dead Place at night and, next morning, in the dead house, I found a good knife, little rusted. That was small to what came afterward but it made my heart feel big. Always when I looked for game, it was in front of my arrow, and twice I passed hunting parties of the Forest People without their knowing. So I knew my magic was strong and my journey clean, in spite of the law.

Toward the setting of the eighth sun, I came to the banks of the great river. It was half-a-day's journey after I had left the god-road— we do not use the god-roads now for they are falling apart into great blocks of stone, and the forest is safer going. A long way off, I had seen the water through trees but the trees were thick. At last, I came out upon an open place at the top of a cliff. There was the great river below, like a giant in the sun. It is very long, very wide. It could eat all the streams we know and still be thirsty. Its name is Ou-dis-sun, the Sacred, the Long. No man of my tribe had seen it, not even my father, the priest. It was magic and I prayed.

Then I raised my eyes and looked south. It was there, the Place of the Gods.

How can I tell what it was like— you do not know. It was there, in the red light, and they were too big to be houses. It was there with the red light upon it, mighty and ruined. I knew that in another moment the gods would see me. I covered my eyes with my hands and crept back into the forest.

Surely, that was enough to do, and live. Surely it was enough to spend the night upon the cliff. The Forest People themselves do not come near. Yet, all through the night, I knew that I should have to cross the river and walk in the places of the gods, although the gods ate me up. My magic did not help me at all and yet there was a fire in my bowels, a fire in my mind. When the sun rose, I thought, "My journey has been clean. Now I will go home from my journey." But, even as I thought so, I knew I could not. If I went to the Place of the Gods, I

would surely die, but, if I did not go, I could never be at peace with my spirit again. It is better to lose one's life than one's spirit, if one is a priest and the son of a priest.

Nevertheless, as I made the raft, the tears ran out of my eyes. The Forest People could have killed me without fight, if they had come upon me then, but they did not come. When the raft was made, I said the sayings for the dead and painted myself for death. My heart was cold as a frog and my knees like water, but the burning in my mind would not let me have peace. As I pushed the raft from the shore, I began my death song— I had the right. It was a fine song.

"I am John, son of John," I sang. "My people are the Hill People. They are the men.

I go into the Dead Places but I am not slain.

I take the metal from the Dead Places but I am not blasted.

I travel upon the god-roads and am not afraid. E-yah! I have killed the panther, I have killed the fawn!

E-yah! I have come to the great river. No man has come there before.

It is forbidden to go east, but I have gone, forbidden to go on the great river, but I am there.

Open your hearts, you spirits, and hear my song. Now I go to the Place of the Gods, I shall not return.

My body is painted for death and my limbs weak, but my heart is big as I go to the Place of the Gods!"

All the same, when I came to the Place of the Gods, I was afraid, afraid. The current of the great river is very strong— it gripped my raft with its hands. That was magic, for the river itself is wide and calm. I could feel evil spirits about me, in the bright morning; I could feel their breath on my neck as I was swept down the stream. Never have I been so much alone— I tried to think of my knowledge, but it was a squirrel's heap of winter nuts. There was no strength in my knowledge any more and I felt small and naked as a new-hatched bird— alone upon the great river, the servant of the gods.

Yet, after a while, my eyes were opened and I saw. I saw both banks of the river— I saw that once there had been god-roads across it, though now they were broken and fallen like broken vines. Very great they were, and wonderful and broken— broken in the time of the Great Burning when the fire fell out of the sky. And always the current took me nearer to the Place of the Gods, and the huge ruins rose before my eyes.

I do not know the customs of rivers— we are the People of the Hills. I tried to guide my raft with the pole but it spun around. I thought the river meant to take me past the Place of the Gods and out into the Bitter Water of the legends. I grew angry then— my heart felt strong. I said aloud, "I am a priest and the son of a priest!" The gods heard me— they showed me how to paddle with the pole

on one side of the raft. The current changed itself— I drew near to the Place of the Gods.

When I was very near, my raft struck and turned over. I can swim in our lakes— I swam to the shore. There was a great spike of rusted metal sticking out into the river— I hauled myself up upon it and sat there, panting. I had saved my bow and two arrows and the knife I found in the Dead Place but that was all. My raft went whirling downstream toward the Bitter Water. I looked after it, and thought if it had trod me under, at least I would be safely dead. Nevertheless, when I had dried my bow-string and re-strung it, I walked forward to the Place of the Gods.

It felt like ground underfoot; it did not burn me. It is not true what some of the tales say, that the ground there burns forever, for I have been there. Here and there were the marks and stains of the Great Burning, on the ruins, that is true. But they were old marks and old stains. It is not true either, what some of our priests say, that it is an island covered with fogs and enchantments. It is not. It is a great Dead Place— greater than any Dead Place we know. Everywhere in it there are god-roads, though most are cracked and broken. Everywhere there are the ruins of the high towers of the gods.

How shall I tell what I saw? I went carefully, my strung bow in my hand, my skin ready for danger. There should have been the wailings of spirits and the shrieks of demons, but there were not. It was very silent and sunny where I had landed— the wind and the rain and the birds that drop seeds had done their work— the grass grew in the cracks of the broken stone. It is a fair island— no wonder the gods built there. If I had come there, a god, I also would have built.

How shall I tell what I saw? The towers are not all broken— here and there one still stands, like a great tree in a forest, and the birds nest high. But the towers themselves look blind, for the gods are gone. I saw a fish-hawk, catching fish in the river. I saw a little dance of white butterflies over a great heap of broken stones and columns. I went there and looked about me— there was a carved stone with cut-letters, broken in half. I can read letters but I could not understand these. They said UBTREAS. There was also the shattered image of a man or a god. It had been made of white stone and he wore his hair tied back like a woman's. His name was ASHING, as I read on the cracked half of a stone. I thought it wise to pray to ASHING, though I do not know that god.

How shall I tell what I saw? There was no smell of man left, on stone or metal. Nor were there many trees in that wilderness of stone. There are many pigeons, nesting and dropping in the towers— the gods must have loved them, or, perhaps, they used them for sacrifices. There are wild cats that roam the god-roads, green-eyed, unafraid of man. At night they wail like demons but they are not demons. The wild dogs are more dangerous, for they hunt in a pack, but

them I did not meet till later. Everywhere there are the carved stones, carved with magical numbers or words.

I went North— I did not try to hide myself. When a god or a demon saw me, then I would die, but meanwhile I was no longer afraid. My hunger for knowledge burned in me—there was so much that I could not understand. After awhile, I knew that my belly was hungry. I could have hunted for my meat, but I did not hunt. It is known that the gods did not hunt as we do— they got their food from enchanted boxes and jars. Sometimes these are still found in the Dead Places— once, when I was a child and foolish, I opened such a jar and tasted it and found the food sweet. But my father found out and punished me for it strictly, for, often, that food is death. Now, though, I had long gone past what was forbidden, and I entered the likeliest towers, looking for the food of the gods.

I found it at last in the ruins of a great temple in the mid-city. A mighty temple it must have been, for the roof was painted like the sky at night with its stars— that much I could see, though the colors were faint and dim. It went down into great caves and tunnels— perhaps they kept their slaves there. But when I started to climb down, I heard the squeaking of rats, so I did not go— rats are unclean, and there must have been many tribes of them, from the squeaking. But near there, I found rood, in the heart of a ruin, behind a door that still opened. I ate only the fruits from the jars— they had a very sweet taste. There was drink, too, in bottles of glass— the drink of the gods was strong and made my head swim. After I had eaten and drunk, I slept on the top of a stone, my bow at my side.

When I woke, the sun was low. Looking down from where I lay, I saw a dog sitting on his haunches. His tongue was hanging out of his mouth; he looked as if he were laughing. He was a big dog, with a gray-brown coat, as big as a wolf. I sprang up and shouted at him but he did not move— he just sat there as if he were laughing. I did not like that. When I reached for a stone to throw, he moved swiftly out of the way of the stone. He was not afraid of me; he looked at me as if I were meat. No doubt I could have killed him with an arrow, but I did not know if there were others. Moreover, night was falling.

I looked about me— not far away there was a great, broken god-road, leading North. The towers were high enough, but not so high, and while many of the dead-houses were wrecked, there were some that stood. I went toward this god-road, keeping to the heights of the ruins, while the dog followed. When I had reached the god-road, I saw that there were others behind him. If I had slept later, they would have come upon me asleep and torn out my throat. As it was, they were sure enough of me; they did not hurry. When I went into the dead house, they kept watch at the entrance— doubtless they thought they

would have a fine hunt. But a dog cannot open a door and I knew, from the books, that the gods did not like to live on the ground but on high.

I had just found a door I could open when the dogs decided to rush. Ha! They were surprised when I shut the door in their faces— it was a good door, of strong metal. I could hear their foolish baying beyond it but I did not stop to answer them. I was in darkness— I found stairs and climbed. There were many stairs, turning around till my head was dizzy. At the top was another door— I found the knob and opened it. I was in a long small chamber— on one side of it was a bronze door that could not be opened, for it had no handle. Perhaps there was a magic word to open it but I did not have the word. I turned to the door in the opposite side of the wall. The lock of it was broken and I opened it and went in.

Within, there was a place of great riches. The god who lived there must have been a powerful god. The first room was a small anteroom— I waited there for some time, telling the spirits of the place that I came in peace and not as a robber. When it seemed to me that they had had time to hear me, I went on. Ah, what riches! Few, even, of the windows had been broken— it was all as it had been. The great windows that looked over the city had not been broken at all though they were dusty and streaked with many years. There were coverings on the floors, the colors not greatly faded, and the chairs were soft and deep. There were pictures upon the walls, very strange, very wonderful—I remember one of a bunch of flowers in a jar— if you came close to it, you could see nothing but bits of color, but if you stood away from it, the flowers might have been picked yesterday. It made my heart feel strange to look at this picture— and to look at the figure of a bird, in some hard clay, on a table and see it so like our birds. Everywhere there were books and writings, many in tongues that I could not read. The god who lived there must have been a wise god and full of knowledge. I felt I had right there, as I sought knowledge also.

Nevertheless, it was strange. There was a washing-place but no water— perhaps the gods washed in air. There was a cooking-place but no wood, and though there was a machine to cook food, there was no place to put fire in it. Nor were there candles or lamps— there were things that looked like lamps but they had neither oil nor wick. All these things were magic, but I touched them and lived— the magic had gone out of them. Let me tell one thing to show. In the washing-place, a thing said “Hot” but it was not hot to the touch— another thing said “Cold” but it was not cold. This must have been a strong magic but the magic was gone. I do not understand— they had ways— I wish that I knew.

It was close and dry and dusty in their house of the gods. I have said the magic was gone but that is not true—it had gone from the magic things but it had not gone from the place. I felt the spirits about me, weighing upon me. Nor had I ever slept in a Dead Place before—and yet, tonight, I must sleep there.

When I thought of it, my tongue felt dry in my throat, in spite of my wish for knowledge. Almost I would have gone down again and faced the dogs, but I did not.

I had not gone through all the rooms when the darkness fell. When it fell, I went back to the big room looking over the city and made fire. There was a place to make fire and a box with wood in it, though I do not think they cooked there. I wrapped myself in a floor-covering and slept in front of the fire— I was very tired.

Now I tell what is very strong magic. I woke in the midst of the night. When I woke, the fire had gone out and I was cold. It seemed to me that all around me there were whisperings and voices. I closed my eyes to shut them out. Some will say that I slept again, but I do not think that I slept. I could feel the spirits drawing my spirit out of my body as a fish is drawn on a line.

Why should I lie about it? I am a priest and the son of a priest. If there are spirits, as they say, in the small Dead Places near us, what spirits must there not be in that great Place of the Gods? And would not they wish to speak? After such long years? I know that I felt myself drawn as a fish is drawn on a line. I had stepped out of my body— I could see my body asleep in front of the cold fire, but it was not I. I was drawn to look out upon the city of the gods.

It should have been dark, for it was night, but it was not dark. Everywhere there were lights— lines of light— circles and blurs of light— ten thousand torches would not have been the same. The sky itself was alight— you could barely see the stars for the glow in the sky. I thought to myself “This is strong magic” and trembled. There was a roaring in my ears like the rushing of rivers. Then my eyes grew used to the light and my ears to the sound. I knew that I was seeing the city as it had been when the gods were alive.

That was a sight indeed— yes, that was a sight: I could not have seen it in the body— my body would have died. Everywhere went the gods, on foot and in chariots— there were gods beyond number and counting and their chariots blocked the streets. They had turned night to day for their pleasure— they did not sleep with the sun. The noise of their coming and going was the noise of many waters. It was magic what they could do— it was magic what they did.

I looked out of another window— the great vines of their bridges were mended and the god-roads went East and West. Restless, restless, were the gods and always in motion! They burrowed tunnels under rivers— they flew in the air. With unbelievable tools they did giant works— no part of the earth was safe from them, for, if they wished for a thing, they summoned it from the other side of the world. And always, as they labored and rested, as they feasted and made love, there was a drum in their ears— the pulse of the giant city, beating and beating like a man’s heart.

Were they happy? What is happiness to the gods? They were great, they were mighty, they were wonderful and terrible. As I looked upon them and their magic, I felt like a child— but a little more, it seemed to me, and they would pull down the moon from the sky. I saw them with wisdom beyond wisdom and knowledge beyond knowledge. And yet not all they did was well done— even I could see that— and yet their wisdom could not but grow until all was peace.

Then I saw their fate come upon them and that was terrible past speech. It came upon them as they walked the streets of their city. I have been in the fights with the Forest People— I have seen men die. But this was not like that. When gods war with gods, they use weapons we do not know. It was fire falling out of the sky and a mist that poisoned. It was the time of the Great Burning and the Destruction. They ran about like ants in the streets of their city— poor gods, poor gods! Then the towers began to fall. A few escaped— yes, a few. The legends tell it. But, even after the city had become a Dead Place, for many years the poison was still in the ground. I saw it happen, I saw the last of them die. It was darkness over the broken city and I wept.

All this, I saw. I saw it as I have told it, though not in the body. When I woke in the morning, I was hungry, but I did not think first of my hunger for my heart was perplexed and confused. I knew the reason for the Dead Places but I did not see why it had happened. It seemed to me it should not have happened, with all the magic they had. I went through the house looking for an answer. There was so much in the house I could not understand— and yet I am a priest and the son of a priest. It was like being on one side of the great river, at night, with no light to show the way.

Then I saw the dead god. He was sitting in his chair, by the window, in a room I had not entered before and, for the first moment, I thought that he was alive. Then I saw the skin on the back of his hand— it was like dry leather. The room was shut, hot and dry— no doubt that had kept him as he was. At first I was afraid to approach him— then the fear left me. He was sitting looking out over the city— he was dressed in the clothes of the gods. His age was neither young nor old— I could not tell his age. But there was wisdom in his face and great sadness. You could see that he would have not run away. He had sat at his window, watching his city die— then he himself had died. But it is better to lose one's life than one's spirit— and you could see from the face that his spirit had not been lost. I knew, that, if I touched him, he would fall into dust— and yet, there was something unconquered in the face.

That is all of my story, for then I knew he was a man— I knew then that they had been men, neither gods nor demons. It is a great knowledge, hard to tell and believe. They were men— they went a dark road, but they were men. I had no fear after that— I had no fear going home, though twice I fought off the dogs and once I was hunted for two days by the Forest People. When I saw my father

again, I prayed and was purified. He touched my lips and my breast, he said, “You went away a boy. You come back a man and a priest.” I said, “Father, they were men! I have been in the Place of the Gods and seen it! Now slay me, if it is the law— but still I know they were men.”

He looked at me out of both eyes. He said, “The law is not always the same shape— you have done what you have done. I could not have done it my time, but you come after me. Tell!”

I told and he listened. After that, I wished to tell all the people but he showed me otherwise. He said, “Truth is a hard deer to hunt. If you eat too much truth at once, you may die of the truth. It was not idly that our fathers forbade the Dead Places.” He was right— it is better the truth should come little by little. I have learned that, being a priest. Perhaps, in the old days, they ate knowledge too fast.

Nevertheless, we make a beginning. It is not for the metal alone we go to the Dead Places now— there are the books and the writings. They are hard to learn. And the magic tools are broken— but we can look at them and wonder. At least, we make a beginning. And, when I am chief priest we shall go beyond the great river. We shall go to the Place of the Gods— the place newyork— not one man but a company. We shall look for the images of the gods and find the god ASHING and the others— the gods Licoln and Biltmore and Moses. But they were men who built the city, not gods or demons. They were men. I remember the dead man’s face. They were men who were here before us. We must build again.

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13: Big-Nose Charley and Madey-line

Charles W. Tyler

1887-1952

Detective Story Magazine, 15 Aug 1925

Big Nose Charley appeared in a long series of stories in "Detective Story" magazine between 1917 and 1935

"I BEG yuh puddin', mum," said "Big-nose Charley," holding out a fat gold-mesh bag, which he had just rescued from the sidewalk, "but don't this belong to youse?"

The lady uttered a little squeal. "Oh, dear! How terribly stupid- of me. Why, of course. Yes." She took the bag, and then turned on Charley a pair of large, luminous orbs that gleamed with gratitude. "Oh, you great, big, wonderful man! How can I ever repay you?"

"Oh, 'at's all right, leddy," said Charley, lifting his hat and making a bow. "Ut wa'n't nuthin' er tall. I wuz wery glad to be uh serwice to yuh. Warm, ain't ut?"

"But you might have kept it," cried the lady, beaming on Charley. "You might have run off with it. I think it is really marvelous. Why, you don't know how much money there is in there." She pinched the meaty portion of the goldmesh affair and shook her head. "I wish I might reward you. I would if I were not afraid of giving offense. One could see at a glance that you are a man of affluence. If you were of the lower classes the matter could be adjusted so simply. Really, I am quite embarrassed. At least you might tell me to whom I am so indebted."

Big-nose Charley shifted his weight from one foot to the other and fumbled his hat about, wondering if it was all right to put it back where it belonged. "Meh mon— I mean meh name is Hosey Barnum," said Charley at last.

"Really," purred the lady, ogling the gentleman. 'Posey Barnum. How quaint. And mine is Madey-line. Madey-line Bright. Shake hands, Mr. Farnum."

"Im pleased t' meetcha, Miss Wright," said Charley. "Lots of folks in Las Angulus this mornin'."

"Oh, and I just love crowds," Madeyline affirmed, clasping her hands and rolling her eyes. "I was never so happy as when caught in that seething crush of humanity at the corner of Sumner and Washington Streets, Bawston. Dear-r, old Bawston!"

"Do youse come from Bost'n?" said Charley, taking a little more interest in Madey-line. "'At's meh ol' stampin' groun', too. Oh, my, yea-ah."

"You-u come from Bawston?" exclaimed Madey-line. "Goodness, how thrilling! And I might have known from your knightly manner. You know'— lowering her voice—"Westerners are so crass. Don't you find them so, Mr. Farnum?"

Charley admitted that he did. He thought, however, that it was the way they talked.

"The sword of Bunker Hill!" cried Madey-line dramatically, pressing one hand against her bosom and looking at the top of the Biltmore Hotel. "Concud and Lexington! The old State House! The cradle of our l-libert-e! The home of swe-et freedom! My-y Bawston !"

Big-nose Charley eyed Madey-line a little doubtfully, while he began to edge off. He was not quite sure what sort of a grand dame this was. She was a swell looker all right, but she taiked as though she might be just a little bit sun kissed. People were beginning to notice them, and Charley had distinctly heard one withered old lady exclaim with deep disgust "Will ye look at the bean-eater! Hump! Bah! Will ye look at him!"

"I'm sor-reh, leddy," said Charley, sneaking his hat back on his head, "but I got t' be goin'."

"Oh, must you?" Madey-line seemed disappointed. "Dear me, I could just talk Bawston with you all-l day. It makes me quite homesick, really. Are you living in southern California now, might I arsk?"

"No'm," said Charley, shooting a glance up and down Hill Street; "I come for me healt', but ut don't agree with meh."

"Oh, dear," sighed Madey-line. "I'm so-o sorry. I'm so-o sorry it doesn't agree with you."

"Ats all right," Charley assured her, "I'Il be fine as soon I git off the main stem an' back to the sticks. I wuz thinkin' some of goin' to Bishop fishin'."

Madey-line's eyes took on a peculiar cast and she welcomed the opportunity to scrutinize Mr. Barnum closely while he was fidgeting and gazing up and - down the street, seemingly very ill at ease. The faint trace of a contemptuous smile flickered for one brief moment on her face, and then the Beacon Street mask was again drawn up over her features.

"What a picturesque manner of speech," gushed the lady as Charley's innocent gray orbs once more turned her way: "Bawstonians are always so-o entertainingly original."

"Yes, mum," agreed Charley.

The lady now pursed up her lips and waxed a trifle confidential, while she watched Charley with shrewd eyes that were shuttered by long lashes, "I'm so sorry you must hurry; I was just going to look at some gems."

"H'm!" said Charley.

"And think!' cried Madey-line. "How terrible, how humiliating, it would have been to have made extensive purchases, only to discover the loss of my money. Ah, my dear, kind Bawston friend, how much I owe you."

Big-nose Charley removed his hat again, as though preparing for a longer stay. His face lighted up, and he seemed to take a new interest in Madey-line. He fished tobacco and papers from his pocket ; then returned them.

"Oh, smoke! Do!" The lady, it seemed, wished to put Mr. Barnum at his ease. "I love gems, precious stones," she went on.

"Jums is meh hobby, too," said Charley.

"Oo-o!" cooed Madey-line. "Isn't that wonderful. To think that our tastes are in similar channels. May I hazard the guess that you are a connoisseur, then, of jewels?"

"No, mum," said Charley cautiously, "I never got enough f'r that."

"It is quite the thing among the élite, an interest in art treasures," declared the lady warmly. "Perhaps you would like to help me in making one or two selections. Oh, but I forgot; you were in a hurry."

"Well, I tet yuh," Charley said. "Ut wuz only a real estater that's goin' to sell a couple hotels I got in Hollywood. Ut can wait. Big deals ain't nothin' to me— just a li'le fun an' amusement. Yuh has quite intricked meh, mentioning jums. If yuh would like meh, ['d take pleasure in assistin' yuh to pick out some swell rocks— I mean di'mun's, or anythin'. I'd like to get meh a couple meself."

"Splendid!" cried Madey-line, patting her hands together, and dropping her gold-mesh bag again at the same time.

As Charley rescued it once more, the lady's eyes became luminous with some strange emotion. "Oh, I'm getting so stupid. I Really, I should not be out alone. Thank you, so-o much," she said as Charley returned the flimsy affair for the second time. "I'm quite overcome."

"Yes, mum," said Charley meekly.

"I know so little of the shops in Loce Abhng-hayl-ais," the lady rattled on. "One hardly knows which way to turn. Could you suggest a really reliable jewelry establishment?"

Charley didn't know. He was thinking rapidly. In the meantime, he looked as stupid as possible, which required no great amount of effort. At last he suggested they stroll around the corner; he thought he remembered a joint—a store where there was a rather impressive display of the jewelers' art. It made Charley's mouth water when he thought of the "di'muns" and things lying around on their little velvet-lined trays, and doing nobody any good at all.

As Madey-line Bright and Posey Barnum fell in and started off, Detective South and Inspector Morrison, who had been watching from a respectful distance, trailed along.

Inspector Morrison was from Boston himself. He had spent many hectic hours in the Hub trying to get the goods on Big-nose Charley. He had never been lucky enough to nail the lanky scalawag bang to rights. The inspector was in California for his health, and, being-related to Detective South, on his wife's side

of the family, he spent considerable of his time in the company of the Los Angeles dick.

A sailor's idea of a good time when on shore leave is frequently to get a boat and go rowing, and a mill worker often takes his vacation by putting on a white collar and hanging around where he can watch the gang come out at noon, and a carpenter out of employment likes to sit on a fence and watch some other carpenters build a house. And so with a copper off duty; he is never happy unless he can drop into the ward room occasionally and gossip with the boys for a few minutes.

Inspector Morrison, homesick for the force, was quite content when in the company of Detective South, on duty. It pleased him in particular to be prowling along on the trail of Big-nose Charley again. The officer even found himself possessed of a little bit of affection for the old rogue from Kerry Village. California was not half so bad with Charley popping up for a diversion now and then.

Detective South was jubilant. He was sure that within a very short time Big-nose Charley would be in the clutches of the law. Once the thief had been sentenced, Inspector Morrison could drop a line back to Pemberton Square and acquaint the Boston dicks with the fact that it had taken a Los Angeles copper to send the old crook over the road.

Detective South chuckled, his shoulders shaking, as Madey-line and Bignose Charley disappeared around a corner. "Pretty neat, eh, Morrison?" he said.

"I don't know," was the somewhat doubtful reply. "I never did think much of framing any one, even a crook."

"Well, you know the guy is guilty of a lot of jobs that you could never prove on him, don't you?" demanded the detective.

Inspector Morrison admitted that this was so.

"Nothing to it then," affirmed Detective South. "He should be in stir right now. All right, we'll make hay while the sun shines. Brains against brains. We'll dig a pit and just let the bird fall into it."

"You think you can do it?" asked the inspector. "You think this woman is smart enough to pull a convincing come-on."

"Aw-w, sure!" cried Detective South. "She's one of the best operatives in the business. Sam Nichols and I went over it two or three times. You see, Nichols was at headquarters once. Now he's running an agency on his own, I was telling him about Big-nose Charley, and he volunteered to let Madey-line help me out. That old stiff has been hanging around downtown; here a week now, his eyes on the jewelry stores. Fair enough; we'll give him all the jewelry stores he wants for one spell."

Madey-line. and Charley entered a doorway that was bounded on either side by broad show windows in which glittered all manner of costly jewels. A suave

and polished gentleman with a shiny bald head approached and hovered in front of the newcomers.

"Good mawn-n-ing," greeted the salesman.

Madey-line beamed her prettiest and cooed a refined salutation.

Big-nose Charley bowed, and said: "Howdy do, adm'r'l."

The salesman, when he had done smirking at Madey-line, cast a cool glance at Charley. He did not like smart Alecks, but Charley's expression was so vacant that the gentleman was almost sorry for him.

"I would like to look at some unset diamonds," said Madey-line, beaming on the salesman.

"Yes. Certainly, madam."

"This gentleman has kindly consented to assist me in making one or two selections," the lady took pains to point out. "He rescued my mesh bag a few moments ago, and it has developed that we are both from Bawston."

As the salesman placed a tray of unset stones on the top of the showcase, he looked at Charley as much as to say: "It is a wonder that you didn't run off with it." What he did say aloud was: "Ladies are prone to be very careless. You should be more careful; Los Angeles is full of crooks."

Big-nose Charley grinned foolishly. "Ain't ut the truth?" he said. "Oh, my, yea-ah."

Madey-line began picking up the stones, one at a time. She did not seem to care so very much fr the assortment. At length she asked: "Are these all you have?"

"Oh, no," the salesman hastened to assure her. "We have larger, more expensive stones." He departed in the direetion of the open safe a short distance to the rear.

Madey-line once more dropped her bag. 'Big-nose Charley stooped to pick it up. As he did so, Miss Bright deftly palmed three fairly sizable diamonds. An instant later she was once more all confusion and full of apologies concerning her utter stupidity. She received the gold-mesh affair from her companion, and then said gushingly: "Oh, dear, dear! I told you I needed a guardian. My fingers are all thumbs this morning."

The salesman returned with a tray of sparklers that almost made Big-nose Charley burst out sobbing. These seemed to inspire interest in Madeyline at once.

"Oo-o! The dar-r-lings! Stones set me crazy!" The lady turned to Charley. "Arent they s-simply gor-rgeous?"

"Them is swell rocks," Charley agreed.

The salesman scowled, turning a mean eye on the fashionably attired old reprobate across the counter. "Are you interested in diamonds?" he demanded ungraciously.

"I'm loony about 'em," Charley confessed.

Personally the salesman thought the other looked like an old nut, but he did not say so.

Big-nose Charley suddenly decided to roll another smoke. He fumbled in his side coat pockets for the makings, and as his hand came out of the pocket nearest Miss Bright the flap was left conveniently open. A moment later Madeyline craftily dropped therein three diamonds, which she had lifted from the tray. Then she glanced casually toward the door, and was gratified to note that Detective South and his friend, Mr. Morrison, were within signaling distance.

Madey-line, with a most gracious air, asked Mr. Barnum if there was anything that he would like to look at besides diamonds. Charley scratched his ear, which was a bad sign, and finally requested the salesman to show him a pair of binoculars. The gentleman called a brother in the trade, and some field glasses were produced.

Madey-line continued to examine the diamonds. Charley assisted her by looking at them through the glasses. He then examined the door, the ceiling, the salesman— anything that caught his eye.

The men behind the counter exchanged glances and rolled their eyes to high heaven in token of the fact that here was an old cuckoo for fair— and Madey-line took advantage of the opportunity to palm an eight-hundred-dollar diamond, which she almost at once dropped into Charley's pocket with the other three.

The diamond salesman scowled and began to cast suspicious eyes at both of the customers. Big-nose Charley took the cigarette, which ,he had rolled, but not lighted, from his mouth and dropped it into his pocket, while he licked his lips and 'began unscrewing first the lens, and then the eyepiece, and then screwing them back again, and trying all of the focusing adjustments. He inquired the price. They were eight power ; one hundred and ten dollars, and a bargain.

Madey-line picked up diamond after diamond, and at last glanced toward the door again. Charley felt for the makings once more. He removed some of the rice-paper leaves from the little orange-colored pack, and then suddenly seemed to change his mind. Always his hands were moving, and with a sort of cumbersome ease that was deceiving. He replaced the tobacco and tissues, and resumed his contemplation of the glasses.

Charley unscrewed the eyepiece again and looked down the hole as though trying to discover what made the pictures. He took out the lens and looked through the prism. Objects were visible, but the magnifying power was gone. A guy could have lots of fun with the things. He replaced the eyepiece and lens, after some fussing and fidgeting, and began a study of objects by gazing through

the wrong end. He paid particular attention to his lady friend, much to her annoyance. She scowled at him.

"H'm," said Charley at last, as the binocular salesman returned from an errand at the front of the store. "A hun'erd an' ten bucks. Ain't yuh got some cheaper uns, perfess'r?"

"Yes; six power," said the salesman snappily, handing Charley another pair. "Fifty-eight dollars. A bargain, I can tell you."

"Cheap at half the price," declared Charley, pulling out a roll of bills. "Put "em in a bag."

It was at this point that Madey-line apparently reached the conclusion that there was nothing here that suited her. Also, the diamond salesman, who had been looking over the sparklers on the two trays sharply, discovered that all was not placid on the Hudson. Some of the gems were missing, as sure as his name was Felix. He looked about him, his mouth open and ready to call for help.

Unseen by the salesmen or Charley, Madey-line flashed a signal to the waiting officers outside, Detective South and Inspector Morrison entered hurriedly. The salesman near the trays containing the unset stones spoke sharply to a gentleman who, it developed, was the junior partner. The personage who had sold Charley the binoculars walked swiftly around the counter and ordered the uniformed attendant to close the door and lock it,

Detective South flashed his badge. "What's the matter here?" he quickly demanded.

"These folks were looking at some diamonds," said the salesman who waited on Madey-line, "and I have just discovered that there are some stones missing."

"Well, that isn't so hard to answer," declared Detective South. He took Friend Barnum firmly by the arm, "This fellow here. is Big-nose Charley. He's a crook from Boston."

"You have deceived me," reproached Miss Bright, rolling her eyes at Charley. She then glanced appealing at the detective. "Why, he told me his name was Hosey Farnum."

"Barnum," corrected Charley.

"Hosey Barnum!" exclaimed Inspector Morrison. "Thats a good one, Ha-ha!"

"Why, how d' ye do, inspect'r," greeted. Charley, smiling at his old nemesis. "Ain't yuh gone back to Beantown yet?"

"That man is a thief?" cried the junior partner incredulously. "He doesn't look like one."

"Thieves never look the part," said Detective South "This swell-dressed old stone getter has served more time and stolen more stuff that any crook I ever heard of,"

The diamond salesman had been taking account'of stock. He now reported that there were five stones missing, with a total valuation of about two thousand dollars.

Madey-line uttered a panicky little squeal. "Oh, dear!" she panted. "Oh, dear me!"

"Who's the woman? Is she a crook, too?" demanded the junior partner,

Miss Bright came to her own defense and explained hastily how she had come to meet this Mr. Posey Farnum, She dropped part of her cloak of affectation, and Charley looked at her quizzically. Madey-line drew back and assumed a modest pose.

"That's your story," said the diamond salesman, "but you were the one who handled the stones. That bird was looking at binoculars."

"You'll arrest them both?" said the junior partner, raising his eyebrows. "They will have to be searched— unless they care to make a clean breast of it all right here."

Miss Bright and Detective South exchanged glances.

"Oh, the woman is all right," said the dick quickly.

"How do we know?" demanded the junior partner, who seemed to be of a prying disposition.

After Charley had rescued Madeyline's gold-mesh bag from the floor the last time, the lady had placed it on the counter. It rested there now under the nose of the junior partner. The gentleman glanced at it sharply. "Women are clever thieves," he said. He picked up the ornate purse and opened it suddenly, and the first thing he saw, nestling among some crumpled bills, was an unset diamond.

"There's one of them!" cried the salesman as his eyes lighted on the stone. "In the woman's bag."

"I told you!" exclaimed the junior partner,

Madey-line Bright's eyes popped wide open, her jaw sagged, and a startled cry came from her lips. "How did that get there?" she gasped.

"You tell us," said the salesman coldly.

The junior partner looked at the detectives. "A lady crook! I guess this big fellow was only a stall."

Detective South let go of Charley's arm and began rubbing his jaw. Here was a fine mess! Somebody had pulled a bone. He looked at Madey-line. The lady spoke, but there was no flowery Bostonese cloaking her words now. She would tell the cockeyed world that she was nobody's goat! If a blasted diamond got in her bag somebody put it there; she didn't!

Big-nose Charley eyed Madey-line sadly. "I didn't think ut uh yuh," he said. He took out his tobacco and a cigarette paper and began rolling a smoke for himself, shaking his head gloomily at the same time. "Yuh know, ol' Solomun, he

says: 'Whose hatred is covered by deceit, their wickudness will get showed up in front uh the whole bunch.' Oh, my, yea-ah. 'At's what th' ol' kink says."

"You big mutt, you put it there!" accused Madey-line. "If I was a man Fd haul off and knock your eye! You— you long-legged, funn'y-faced, queer old thing!"

"There's something wrong, I am sure," put in Detective South. "This lady is a private detective, one of Sam Nichols' best operatives. I suspected that this crook was going to hold up a jewelry store, and we were trying to get him in the act. Sam and I are old friends, and he offered to put Miss Bright here on the job for a day or two. He handles the protective end for you folks."

"I know," said the junior partner, "but even detectives get light fingered, and this woman might have thought it was a good chance to get one of the pretty stones for herself."

"I tell you I don't know how that diamond got in my purse!" Madey-line reaffirmed. "I— I am not a thief!"

Detective South turned to Big-nose Charley. "What did you put that diamond in the lady's purse for?" he shouted angrily. "Come on! Come on, now!"

"Why, of'is'r," said Charley, sticking the cigarette into his mouth, "yuh got meh all wron'; I never done nothin' of the kind." He turned to Mr. Morrison. "Will yuh kindly give meh a light, inspect'r?" he asked.

Inspector Morrison proffered his half-smoked cigar, a peculiar light in his eyes. Charley had not played his ace, and the Boston officer could not help feeling a glow of pride in this Boston-reared old scalawag. It wasn't going to be the cinch to send him up that Detective South had anticipated.

"And, furthermore," the junior member of the big jewelry firm was saying fretfully, "I don't like the idea of steering crooks in here without giving us some warning."

"I didn't steer him in!" cried Madey-line. :

"No; he steered you in," sneered the salesman, "and that was just as bad."

"Charley, you going to hand over those diamonds, or have we got to take you out back and frisk you ?" demanded Detective South.

"I ain't got no di'mun's," said Charley stoutly.

"You're a liar!" cried the dick, now thoroughly angry. "You have got them, and you planted that stone in this young lady's purse to throw suspicion on her. No more monkeying, you going to come across?"

Charley shook his head.

"You got a place where we can take this fool apart?" the detective asked the junior partner.

A moment later Detective South and Inspector Morrison were in a back room with Charley. At the end of half an hour the old scamp was allowed to resume his garments. No diamonds had been found on him.

Detective South was in a perspiration. He mopped his forehead and went out to talk with Madey-line. He was furious. Something was outrageous in Denmark. "I've telephoned for the matron," he told the lady. "You're next. We got to do it to satisfy these gentlemen."

"Oh, go as far as you like!" replied Madey-line in a shrill voice. "But Heaven help you when I get out of here. Sam and his favors! Bah! Rats! Fools!"

And there were no diamonds on Madey-line. The police matron was sure; she had been very careful.

Detective South began to feel dizzy. He looked helplessly at his friend, Inspector Morrison. "What in the name of Mike would you do in a case like that?" he cried.

The inspector shook his head. "We've been through it before," he said. "We've had Big-nose Charley with us a good while, and he shows us a new one every now and then."

"You sure you lost more than one diamond?" Detective South turned desperately to the salesman.

"Humph! Say, don't you suppose we know how many stones we had here?"

"Yes, I guess so." Detective South waxed mournful. A fine scheme to send Big-nose Charley to San Quentin was up the creek. Four diamonds had gone into thin air. He eyed Charley savagely. "For a plugged nickle, I'd give you a punch in the eye, on general principles !"

But Big-nose Charley was not listening. He was talking to Inspector Morrison, of Boston. "I'm awful glad to meet yuh, inspect'r," he said. "Yuh allus treated meh fine, an' the other boys at the club house up to Pemb'rt'n Square. Give 'em meh regards when yuh get back, won't yuh?"

"I'll tell them that I saw you, Charley," said the inspector, "and that you are just as good as ever."

"I like yuh, inspect'r," Charley went on, "an' I'm goin' t make yuh a lile present,"

Inspector Morrison laughed. "Yes?"

"I just bought a pair of swell binickl'rs," said Charley, picking up from the counter the glasses he had selected and paid for, "an' I'm goin' to give 'em to yuh— f'r ol' times sake, when you an' me wuz leggin' ut up an' down Tremont Street."

Charley handed the glasses to Inspector Morrison. The latter took them and turned them over and over wonderingly,

"You mean it, Charley?" he asked at last.

"S-sure. I j'st paid the guy fer 'ema minut' ago. Yuh may need 'em some time. I'm goin' to buy me another pair so's I can look. f'r you coppers." Bignose Charley turned to the salesman who had waited on him before. "Show meh some more uh them see-fars," he directed.

A few minutes later, Big-nose Charley had selected and paid for a pair of eight-power binoculars. One hundred and ten dollars, and he believed that the money was well spent.

"An' now," he said, addressing Detective South, "if yuh ain't got any more objections, I guess I'll be leavin'. I wuz goin' down to Wenice this arternoon, or some place."

Detective South waved his hand helplessly. "On your way. But you wait, there's another day coming."

Big-nose Charley removed his hat and now bowed low before Miss Madey-line Bright. "I wuz awful glad to meet yuh," he said politely, "an' I hope I sees, yuh in Beantown some time; I'll show yuh all aroun'. Goo'-by. Goo'by." He gave a little flippant wave and shambled out of the door.

What Charley did not pause to explain was the fact that he had suspected a frame-up when he caught a glimpse of Detective South and Inspector Morrison hovering in the background during his early conversation with Madey-line.

When this lady dropped her purse in the jewelry store, she little suspected that Mr. Hosey Barnum had already palmed a diamond and had it ready to plant on her when the opportunity was presented. It was Charley's idea of a joke. But an instant had been required to put it in the gold-mesh bag when he stooped to recover it. The rest had been simple, after leaving the flap of his coat pocket invitingly open, and he had practiced a bit of legerdemain with the gems that Madey-line accommodatingly planted on him.

Later that day, in the privacy of his room in an apartment on Western Avenue, Hollywood, Big-nose Charley removed from the interior of one barrel of the binoculars he had purchased, four diamonds, each wrapped carelessly in a bit of cigarette paper

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14: The Unseen Made Visible

Ernest Favenc

1845-1908

Evening News, 12 Dec 1896

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WHEN I FIRST KNEW George Redman he was an ordinary pleasure seeking man of the world, with an independent income, which afforded him the means and opportunity to indulge in occasional fads.

Photography was one of them for a time, but of course it was neglected when the novelty had worn off, and something else, "biking" probably, took its place.

For a week or two he dropped out of his usual haunts, and he was often seen in familiar intercourse with an aged man, who was reported to be either an anarchist or a lunatic.

Lunatic or not, he was a man with a striking face and wonderful eyes. The eyes of a visionary or an enthusiast, but certainly not of one deficient of reason.

Gradually Redman withdrew himself more and more from his old friends, and not having seen him for some time, I ventured to call at his rooms one night.

He was at home, and did not seem quite pleased at my coming. However, as we had always been close friends, I did not take any notice of it, and accepted his half-hearted invitation to stay.

His old friend was there, and was introduced to me as Mr. Whitleaf. For a time our conversation turned on subjects to which the old man paid little or no attention, but kept me under a steady fire from his eyes, which made me feel most uncomfortable.

His gaze did not seem so much concentrated on me as on something near me, giving me the uncanny feeling that he was looking at something that I could not see. I was relieved when he changed his gaze, and spoke a few words to Redman in a tongue strange to me.

Whatever he said, Redman seemed greatly relieved, and his manner towards me altered at once, he became quite cordial, and like his old self.

"Did I tell you I am going in for photography again?" he asked.

"No; you know I have not seen much of you lately."

"Well, it is a new phase of photography that I am studying,— or rather, what I hope will prove a new phase."

"Some further advance on the X-rays business?"

"Quite the opposite. The X-rays have developed a wondrous future, but what I hope to arrive at is something far different and far higher."

I noticed that Redman was beginning to get excited, and the old man interposed.

"I will tell your friend," he said, in a clear and singularly fascinating voice, "what is the goal we aim at.

"Listen! I have known for long that the air around us is full of invisible and impalpable beings. Beings I must call them, for want of a better word, but what they are cannot be explained by that word, for they are not— and yet they are.

"They exist— but yet have no existence; they are terrible in their power— and yet they have no power, for they, too, are swayed by an overmastering will. We are their slaves and their masters.

"In this room they are mustering in force, even as we sit here; I cannot see them, but I feel their presence, and know by sure tokens that those that have accompanied you into this room are not inimical to us, therefore I told Redman that we might speak before you.

"Listen again! You may search the universe with the most powerful telescope that the genius of man has invented; you can track down to the uttermost bounds of infinity almost, the last wandering sun; and the plate of the camera when exposed will give others, and still others, in illimitable spheres beyond those the human eyes can see.

"Why is this? Why should the wonderful power of the camera be able to do what the trained eyes of men cannot? Why can it see through the living flesh and record on its surface the bone it sees beneath?

"Because it has power beyond our feeble strength, because it can search out the stars hidden in immeasurable distance, and make them visible to us. And it, too, when we have found the right method to use it, will seize these unseen forms that surround us and reveal them in actual shape.

"They are around us now in countless numbers, but we move through them unknowingly and unwittingly; and yet they, too, are fraught with all the powers of good and evil that sway the human heart.

"That is the work we are engaged in now, and if we succeed, we bridge, at one step, the gulf between the known and the unknown, the seen and the unseen, that has existed since matter was formed from chaos."

In his excitement the old man had arisen from his chair, and with burning eyes and eager hands emphasised his speech, as though he actually saw the formless beings he spoke of hovering in the seemingly empty air.

"It is true, Cameron," said Redman, after a pause.

"I have been studying the matter closely, and am now assured of the existence of these invisible companions crowding the space that surrounds us. Why am I assured? Because we have attained a partial success. Dimly and indistinctly; constant experiments with the camera have given us some results.

"I will show you them tomorrow. Why should it not be? The bones of the body are no longer hidden from view. The stars shining in the immensity of space, so distant that a telescope fails to find them, reveal themselves on the plate.

"So will these invisible beings in time, and I tell you I dread the day of our triumph."

"Why so?"

"Why so? The Gorgon's head that turned the rash onlooker into stone will be as nothing to what the man is doomed to witness who first solves the dread secret.

"Do not suppose these forms will be human; they will be the embodiment of the good and evil passions of those that have passed before; what awful shape they will take I cannot guess— something so fearful that the first glance may blast the eyesight of the man who looks. But, on the other hand, they may be beneficent and blessed."

"But surely you are not reviving the old jugglery of ghost photographs?"

"Pshaw! We are searchers for the hidden secret, honest and straightforward, not shuffling charlatans, gulling a foolish public. But come to-morrow and see what we have done. Don't talk of this outside."

I rose and took my leave, for it was nearly midnight, and as I walked the almost deserted streets I seemed to be haunted and followed by a ghostly company of phantoms. Horrible, because I could not guess their shape; awful on account of their impalpability.

They thronged around me, and shed their unholy influences on my sleepless pillow for the remainder of the night. I had taken the first rash step into the forbidden, and was suffering the penalty.

The next morning I went to Redman, according to my promise. He took me to his gallery, which had been enlarged and improved since I saw it last, and in it we found old Whitleaf working amongst some chemicals.

"I promised to show you how far we had got," said Redman, opening a locked drawer. "Look at this."

It was a large photograph of the interior of an empty room that he had put into my hand, but at first I could see no more than that. He smiled slightly at my openly-shown disappointment, and, taking it from me, placed it on a frame, and bade me look through a splendid magnifying glass fixed above.

Then I saw.

I saw, and I did not see. The room stood out in bold perspective. It was empty, and it was not empty.

Shadows obscured the light from the windows where no shadows should have been. There were eyes, of that I am certain; such eyes— eyes that could kill with a glance if one only saw them plainly and clearly.

The room was full of beings without shape, without form, but stamping their invisible presence by a way that was felt and not seen.

As I looked, entranced, I prayed that I should not see them, for the mere thought of the possibility brought cold terror to my heart and the limpness of death to my limbs.

"Look not on what is forbidden," was the mandate I seemed to hear, as by an effort I turned away, shuddering, and caught my friend's arm.

"Oh, they are here!" I gasped, "the awful ones. Seek no further. Man must not see their shape."

"They are there," repeated the deep voice of Whitleaf. "Ay, and they are here."

I covered my eyes with my hands and tried to forget, while every nerve and fibre shrank with dumb terror.

"Look again," said Redman.

I could not refuse, though my whole being revolted at the ordeal. I looked.

He had changed the photograph, and now I gazed on the sea, calm, motionless, and lifeless. And as I looked there gradually grew on me a monstrous horror.

It was not in sea or sky, but it was there. A momentary resemblance of evil—evil made palpable, such evil as man could not conceive, could not execute.

The maniac homicide would have recoiled, shuddering, from the mere suggestion of it, and died, shrieking with terror at its presence.

And the awful thing was still not there in form and substance, only in its dreadful influence.

I withdrew my eyes and sat down on a chair.

"Can such things be about us?" I asked.

"Do you not know that they are?"

"But why seek to make them visible when the vision would bring madness?"

"There may be more beyond— there is more beyond," said Redman. "Look at this." He changed the picture.

I hesitated.

"Nay, it will restore your courage."

Once more I gazed through the glass. It was a bedroom, and on the bed lay a corpse composed for burial.

Slowly there stole over me a wonderful feeling of peace, of everlasting happiness.

I strained my gaze to find out what caused it; it seemed to me that if I once succeeded in seeing that benign presence I should sorrow no more, but joy eternal would be mine. All my former fear and horror vanished.

"They are gods in good and evil," I said as I looked up. "Will you ever rest till you see them?" I went on, forgetting all I had said before.

"Never!" said both men together.

I became now as infatuated with their prospects of success as my friends were, though I could do little to help them, and circumstances called me away for six months.

When I returned I hastened to see Redman, having learned from his letters that a discovery was shortly expected. I found Redman and Whitleaf waiting together, and learned that I had just arrived in time to witness the success or failure of a trial they were then making.

The plate was even then exposed in the gallery. Both men, I could see, were in a condition of strongly suppressed excitement, and when at last the time expired Whitleaf proceeded to the gallery alone, under some pre-arranged agreement.

Redman paced up and down, repeatedly looking at his watch.

"He must have seen by this time," he said at last, and as he spoke a cry thrilled through the house and pierced our ears— a cry for help, a cry of terror and horror, indescribable overpowering horror, so great that you felt your heart stand still, paralysed and aghast.

We rushed to the gallery.

Whitleaf lay on the floor, with stony eyes and bloodstained mouth. He was dead— dead, with wide-open eyes that spoke still in silent testimony of the death he had died— killed by the shock of seeing what man should never see.

With a shuddering hand Redman closed the eyes that had seen more than mortality is allowed. There was black blood on his lips and white beard, and seemingly it had welled from his mouth.

The plate had fallen from his failing grasp, and lay on the floor, broken, pulverised, and ground to powder— by whom?

Redman said little; he seemed stunned and bewildered at the terrible power that had shown itself.

There was a medical examination into the cause of Whitleaf's death, and the doctor certified it was caused by sudden stoppage of the heart's action.

I had a chance to go away again, and gladly accepted it. I was cured for a time of any desire to pry into such fearful mysteries as Redman's pursuit seemed to lead to.

As for him, blank disappointment had fallen on him. I know what his thoughts were: what use was it to make absolute this fresh discovery of science when the success of the experiment meant the death of the investigator?

And yet I could see he had an irresistible longing to look on the sight that had blasted Whitleaf's eyes for ever. I urged him to seek travel and change.

I did not see him again for more than six months, and then his mood had greatly altered for the better.

The gloomy effect of the catastrophe of Whitleaf's death had disappeared in a great measure, if not entirely; and, above all, he had fallen in love with a young girl who, both in mind and body, seemed in every way fitted for him, and worthy of the utmost affection.

Yet this fair young girl, who was devoted to my friend, was the means of plunging him back into the blackness of madness.

One day I met him with his fiancée and her mother, going to lunch at his rooms, and he invited me to accompany them. During the meal his prospective mother-in-law asked him if he continued his photographic pursuits.

He answered "No," and the old lady, prompted by the devil, proposed that he should take a likeness of her daughter, and to my surprise Redman consented.

The gallery had been locked up since the fatal day of Whitleaf's death, and Redman led the way there, and unlocked it. Dust lay thick everywhere, and the place was close and unpleasant, and I, for one, felt the evil impression of it.

Redman placed Miss Torrance in position, got his apparatus ready, and took her likeness in two or three different attitudes, then leaving the plates in the dark room to develop at another time, we left the room, I, glad indeed to get away from the place.

Next morning I went to call upon Redman, and to my surprise and grief found him sitting on a lounge, haggard, wild-eyed, desperate, and half-mad. He looked like a man after a long drinking bout, on the eve of delirium.

"Good Heavens, Redman! what's the matter?" I asked.

He turned his awful eyes on to me, and spoke— "I have seen them, and live."

With the words came back to me the old thrill of cold horror, and I looked at him without answering.

He spoke again with an effort— "I developed those portraits I took of Miss Torrance, and there was one," here his voice dropped, "that must have been on one of the plates that Whitleaf and I prepared. They were there!"

He stopped, and leaned back with the beads of perspiration standing on his forehead.

Presently he arose, and asked me to come with him to the gallery, "Not to see that," he added; "it is utterly destroyed."

We entered the gallery, and he brought me the negatives. I held them up to the light, and looked at them. They were all happily caught, one in particular in which she was seated leaning back with a smile on her face. So might a young mother have smiled at a child at her knee.

He selected that one.

"It was almost in the same position as this," he said; "and when I looked on it but for an instant, I saw the horror there. Seated in her lap it seemed to be—

that awful thing of loathsome evil! And she smiling down on it. It was but an instant I saw it, and then it was snatched from my hand, and ground into powder there. He pointed to a place where some fragments lay.

"Snatched from your hand?" I repeated in amaze.

"Yes; I know no more. When I came to myself I was on the floor of this place, with the moon shining through the glass overhead. Fancy, in one moment all my happiness cast to the winds.

"Can I marry that girl knowing that she sat there smiling and innocent, and in her lap a being of hell, a vile monster that could slay humanity with its basilisk glance if it were permitted?

"Oh! the raging torment I passed that night in— for that one glance has cut me off from my fellows for ever. Would that I had died like my poor friend!"

"What was it like?"

"Like? How describe what human language is not capable of describing? How describe what is so far removed from humanity, so utterly beyond and apart from it that no words of mine can make you apprehend it? One thing only I saw, that there were eyes in the monster-eyes that were darts of death.

"Ask me nothing more. This marriage once broken off, I shall leave this."

The marriage was broken off. Redman's strange, sudden, and unaccountable change of manner led to not unjust suspicions of insanity, and Miss Torrance never knew the frightful secret.

He, poor fellow, wandered through the world a haunted man.

I met him a year afterwards. He was worn down with grief, and I doubt not his brain was disordered.

Morbidly his imagination dwelt continuously on the unseen horrors by which mankind are surrounded, and unconsciously walking amongst.

He shuddered at the mention of photography, and kept himself almost entirely shut up.

At last a change took place. It seemed as though he had mustered up a despairing courage to meet and fight his unseen foes.

He resumed his photography, and avowed to me his intention of following his discovery to the bitter end— giving his life to it.

There was a large public gathering shortly coming on, and he told me that he would try his next experiments there. He asked me to call on him the day after the function had taken place.

It was in the morning that I went, and found the servants relieved to see me.

Redman was locked in his photographic gallery, and about half an hour before they had heard a loud fall in there, but no cry; and since then all their knockings and callings had received no attention.

Suspecting the worst, I hurried to the gallery door, and at once forced it open. Redman was, as I expected to find him, dead on the ground.

He had been writing at the table, when a heavy iron rod, one of the supports of the glass skylights, had fallen, with no apparent cause, on his head, killing him instantly.

The photograph was in minute splinters and powder on the floor; but the writing on the table was addressed to me, and I immediately took possession of it. It ran as follows:—

"I TOOK the photograph on the prepared plate, and developed it this morning. So strung were my nerves from the constant contemplation of this subject that I contemplated the negative without more than a momentary spasm of terror.

"Would you believe it, that the large crowd was scarce to be seen; blotted out and hidden by the unseen creatures, now made visible. I had not more than time to take in the details, when it was again snatched from my hand and crushed to atoms. This I anticipated.

"I had noticed the plate well in that brief glance I caught, and saw what I had seen before, that the eyes I told you of were directed against me from all quarters, and I gather from that that these beings are only secure in their invisibility, and fear their discovery.

"Are they the source of all evil, restrained and limited in their action by the occasional Presence among them of a Supreme Power, omnipotent and beneficent? It may be so, and they shrink from being observed.

"Would it end in their leaving for another planet world if they should become visible like men?

"I have seen them and live; and lest anything should happen to me, I will leave you, Rupert Cameron, directions to prepare the plate, so that my secret will not be lost.

"In the first place, you…."

HERE the bar had descended, and a splash of blood on the white paper was all that was left.

The terrible and fatal secret had not descended to me.

———————

15: The Voice in the Night

William Hope Hodgson

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IT WAS A DARK, starless night. We were becalmed in the Northern Pacific. Our exact position I do not know; for the sun had been hidden during the course of a weary, breathless week, by a thin haze which had seemed to float above us, about the height of our mastheads, at whiles descending and shrouding the surrounding sea.

With there being no wind, we had steadied the tiller, and I was the only man on deck. The crew, consisting of two men and a boy, were sleeping forward in their den, while Will— my friend, and the master of our little craft— was aft in his bunk on the port side of the little cabin.

Suddenly, from out of the surrounding darkness, there came a hail:

"Schooner, ahoy!"

The cry was so unexpected that I gave no immediate answer, because of my surprise.

It came again— a voice curiously throaty and inhuman, calling from somewhere upon the dark sea away on our port broadside:

"Schooner, ahoy!"

"Hullo!" I sung out, having gathered my wits somewhat. "What are you? What do you want?"

"You need not be afraid," answered the queer voice, having probably noticed some trace of confusion in my tone. "I am only an old— man."

The pause sounded odd, but it was only afterward that it came back to me with any significance.

"Why don't you come alongside, then?" I queried somewhat snappishly; for I liked not his hinting at my having been a trifle shaken.

"I— I— can't. It wouldn't be safe. I—" The voice broke off, and there was silence.

"What do you mean?" I asked, growing more and more astonished. "What's not safe? Where are you?"

I listened for a moment; but there came no answer. And then, a sudden indefinite suspicion, of I knew not what, coming to me, I stepped swiftly to the binnacle and took out the lighted lamp. At the same time, I knocked on the deck with my heel to waken Will. Then I was back at the side, throwing the yellow funnel of light out into the silent immensity beyond our rail. As I did so, I heard a slight muffled cry, and then the sound of a splash, as though someone had dipped oars abruptly. Yet I cannot say with certainty that I saw anything; save, it

seemed to me, that with the first flash of the light there had been something upon the waters, where now there was nothing.

"Hullo, there!" I called. "What foolery is this?"

But there came only the indistinct sounds of a boat being pulled away into the night.

Then I heard Will's voice from the direction of the after scuttle:

"What's up, George?"

"Come here, Will!" I said.

"What is it?" he asked, coming across the deck.

I told him the queer thing that had happened. He put several questions; then, after a moment's silence, he raised his hands to his lips and hailed:

"Boat, ahoy!"

From a long distance away there came back to us a faint reply, and my companion repeated his call. Presently, after a short period of silence, there grew on our hearing the muffled sound of oars, at which Will hailed again.

This time there was a reply: "Put away the light."

"I'm damned if I will," I muttered; but Will told me to do as the voice bade, and I shoved it down under the bulwarks.

"Come nearer," he said, and the oar strokes continued. Then, when apparently some half dozen fathoms distant, they again ceased.

"Come alongside!" exclaimed Will. "There's nothing to be frightened of aboard here."

"Promise that you will not show the light?"

"What's to do with you," I burst out, "that you're so infernally afraid of the light?"

"Because—" began the voice, and stopped short.

"Because what?" I asked quickly.

Will put his hand on my shoulder. "Shut up a minute, old man," he said, in a low voice. "Let me tackle him."

He leaned more over the rail.

"See here, mister," he said, "this is a pretty queer business, you coming upon us like this, right out in the middle of the blessed Pacific. How are we to know what sort of a hanky-panky trick you're up to? You say there's only one of you. How are we to know, unless we get a squint at you— eh? What's your objection to the light, anyway?"

As he finished, I heard the noise of the oars again, and then the voice came; but now from a greater distance, and sounding extremely hopeless and pathetic.

"I am sorry— sorry! I would not have troubled you, only I am hungry, and— so is she."

The voice died away, and the sound of the oars, dipping irregularly, was borne to us.

"Stop!" sang out Will. "I don't want to drive you away. Come back! We'll keep the light hidden, if you don't like it."

He turned to me:

"It's a damned queer rig, this; but I think there's nothing to be afraid of?"

There was a question in his tone, and I replied.

"No, I think the poor devil's been wrecked around here, and gone crazy."

The sound of the oars drew nearer.

"Shove that lamp back in the binnacle," said Will; then he leaned over the rail and listened. I replaced the lamp and came back to his side. The dipping of the oars ceased some dozen yards distant.

"Won't you come alongside now?" asked Will in an even voice. "I have had the lamp put back in the binnacle."

"I— I cannot," replied the voice. "I dare not come nearer. I dare not even pay you for the— the provisions."

"That's all right," said Will, and hesitated. "You're welcome to as much grub as you can take—" Again he hesitated.

"You are very good!" exclaimed the voice. "May God, Who understands everything, reward you—" It broke off huskily.

"The— the lady?" said Will abruptly. "Is she—"

"I have left her behind upon the island," came the voice.

"What island?" I cut in.

"I know not its name," returned the voice. "I would to God—" it began, and checked itself as suddenly.

"Could we not send a boat for her?" asked Will at this point.

"No!" said the voice, with extraordinary emphasis. "My God! No!" There was a moment's pause; then it added, in a tone which seemed a merited reproach:

"It was because of our want I ventured— because her agony tortured me."

"I am a forgetful brute!" exclaimed Will. "Just wait a minute, whoever you are, and I will bring you up something at once."

In a couple of minutes he was back again, and his arms were full of various edibles. He paused at the rail.

"Can't you come alongside for them?" he asked.

"No— I dare not," replied the voice, and it seemed to me that in its tones I detected a note of stifled craving— as though the owner hushed a mortal desire. It came to me then in a flash that the poor old creature out there in the darkness was suffering for actual need for that which Will held in his arms; and yet, because of some unintelligible dread, refraining from dashing to the side of our schooner and receiving it. And with the lightning-like conviction there came the knowledge that the Invisible was not mad, but sanely facing some intolerable horror.

"Damn it, Will!" I said, full of many feelings, over which predominated a vast sympathy. "Get a box. We must float off the stuff to him in it."

This we did, propelling it away from the vessel, out into the darkness, by means of a boat hook. In a minute a slight cry from the Invisible came to us, and we knew that he had secured the box.

A little later he called out a farewell to us, and so heartful a blessing, that I am sure we were the better for it. Then, without more ado, we heard the ply of oars across the darkness.

"Pretty soon off," remarked Will, with perhaps just a little sense of injury.

"Wait," I replied. "I think somehow he'll come back. He must have been badly needing that food."

"And the lady," said Will. For a moment he was silent; then he continued:

"It's the queerest thing ever I've tumbled across since I've been fishing."

"Yes," I said, and fell to pondering.

And so the time slipped away— an hour, another, and still Will stayed with me; for the queer adventure had knocked all desire for sleep out of him.

The third hour was three parts through when we heard again the sound of oars across the silent ocean.

"Listen!" said Will, a low note of excitement in his voice.

"He's coming, just as I thought," I muttered.

The dipping of the oars grew nearer, and I noted that the strokes were firmer and longer. The food had been needed.

They came to a stop a little distance off the broadside, and the queer voice came again to us through the darkness:

"Schooner, ahoy!"

"That you?" asked Will.

"Yes," replied the voice. "I left you suddenly, but— but there was great need."

"The lady?" questioned Will.

"The— lady is grateful now on earth. She will be more grateful soon in— in heaven."

Will began to make some reply, in a puzzled voice; but became confused, and broke off short. I said nothing. I was wondering at the curious pauses, and, apart from my wonder, I was full of a great sympathy.

The voice continued:

"We— she and I, have talked, as we shared the result of God's tenderness and yours—"

Will interposed; but without coherence.

"I beg of you not to— to belittle your deed of Christian charity this night," said the voice. "Be sure that it has not escaped His notice."

It stopped, and there was a full minute's silence. Then it came again:

"We have spoken together upon that which— which has befallen us. We had thought to go out, without telling anyone of the terror which has come into our— lives. She is with me in believing that tonight's happenings are under a special ruling, and that it is God's wish that we should tell to you all that we have suffered since— since—"

"Yes?" said Will softly.

"Since the sinking of the *Albatross*."

"Ah!" I exclaimed involuntarily. "She left Newcastle for 'Frisco some six months ago, and hasn't been heard of since."

"Yes" answered the voice. "But some few degrees to the North of the line, she was caught in a terrible storm, and dismasted. When the day came, it was found that she was leaking badly, and, presently, it falling to a calm, the sailors took to the boats, leaving— leaving a young lady— my fiancée— and myself upon the wreck.

"We were below, gathering together a few of our belongings, when they left. They were entirely callous, through fear, and when we came up upon the decks, we saw them only as small shapes afar off upon the horizon. Yet we did not despair, but set to work and constructed a small raft. Upon this we put such few matters as it would hold, including a quantity of water and some ship's biscuit. Then, the vessel being very deep in the water, we got ourselves onto the raft and pushed off.

"It was later, when I observed that we seemed to be in the way of some tide or current, which bore us from the ship at an angle; so that in the course of three hours, by my watch, her hull became invisible to our sight, her broken masts remaining in view for a somewhat longer period. Then, towards evening, it grew misty, and so through the night. The next day we were still encompassed by the mist, the weather remaining quiet.

"For four days we drifted through this strange haze, until, on the evening of the fourth day, there grew upon our ears the murmur of breakers at a distance. Gradually it became plainer, and, somewhat after midnight, it appeared to sound upon either hand at no very great space. The raft was raised upon a swell several times, and then we were in smooth water, and the noise of the breakers was behind.

"When the morning came, we found that we were in a sort of great lagoon; but of this we noticed little at the time; for close before us, through the enshrouding mist, loomed the hull of a large sailing vessel. With one accord, we fell upon our knees and thanked God, for we thought that here was an end to our perils. We had much to learn.

"The raft drew near to the ship, and we shouted on them to take us aboard; but none answered. Presently the raft touched against the side of the vessel, and seeing a rope hanging downward, I seized it and began to climb. Yet I had

much ado to make my way up, because of a kind of grey, lichenous fungus that had seized upon the rope, and which blotched the side of the ship lividly.

"I reached the rail and clambered over it, onto the deck. Here I saw that the decks were covered, in great patches, with grey masses, some of them rising into nodules several feet in height; but at the time I thought less of this matter than of the possibility of there being people aboard the ship. I shouted; but none answered. Then I went to the door below the poop deck. I opened it, and peered in. There was a great smell of staleness, so that I knew in a moment that nothing living was within, and with the knowledge, I shut the door quickly; for I felt suddenly lonely.

"I went back to the side where I had scrambled up. My— my sweetheart was still sitting quietly upon the raft. Seeing me look down, she called up to know whether there were any aboard of the ship. I replied that the vessel had the appearance of having been long deserted, but that if she would wait a little I would see whether there was anything in the shape of a ladder by which she could ascend to the deck. Then we would make a search through the vessel together. A little later, on the opposite side of the decks, I found a rope side ladder. This I carried across, and a minute afterwards she was beside me.

"Together we explored the cabins and apartments in the after part of the ship; but nowhere was there any sign of life. Here and there, within the cabins themselves, we came across odd patches of that queer fungus; but this, as my sweetheart said, could be cleansed away.

"In the end, having assured ourselves that the after portion of the vessel was empty, we picked our ways to the bows, between the ugly grey nodules of that strange growth; and here we made a further search, which told us that there was indeed none aboard but ourselves.

"This being now beyond any doubt, we returned to the stern of the ship and proceeded to make ourselves as comfortable as possible. Together we cleared out and cleaned two of the cabins; and after that I made examination whether there was anything eatable in the ship. This I soon found was so, and thanked God in my heart for His goodness. In addition to this I discovered the whereabouts of the fresh-water pump, and having fixed it, I found the water drinkable, though somewhat unpleasant to the taste.

"For several days we stayed aboard the ship, without attempting to get to the shore. We were busily engaged in making the place habitable. Yet even thus early we became aware that our lot was even less to be desired than might have been imagined; for though, as a first step, we scraped away the odd patches of growth that studded the floors and walls of the cabins and saloon, yet they returned almost to their original size within the space of twenty-four hours, which not only discouraged us but gave us a feeling of vague unease.

"Still we would nor admit ourselves beaten, so set to work afresh, and not only scraped away the fungus but soaked the places where it had been with carbolic, a can-full of which I had found in the pantry. Yet, by the end of the week the growth had returned in full strength, and, in addition, it had spread to other places, as though our touching it had allowed germs from it to travel elsewhere.

"On the seventh morning, my sweetheart woke to find a small patch of it growing on her pillow, close to her face. At that, she came to me, as soon as she could get her garments upon her. I was in the galley at the time lighting the fire for breakfast.

" 'Come here, John,' she said, and led me aft. When I saw the thing upon her pillow I shuddered, and then and there we agreed to go right out of the ship and see whether we could not fare to make ourselves more comfortable ashore.

"Hurriedly we gathered together our few belongings, and even among these I found that the fungus had been at work, for one of her shawls had a little lump of it growing near one edge. I threw the whole thing over the side without saying anything to her.

"The raft was still alongside, but it was too clumsy to guide, and I lowered down a small boat that hung across the stern, and in this we made our way to the shore. Yet, as we drew near to it, I became gradually aware that here the vile fungus, which had driven us from the ship, was growing riot. In places it rose into horrible, fantastic mounds, which seemed almost to quiver, as with a quiet life, when the wind blew across them. Here and there it took on the forms of vast fingers, and in others it just spread out flat and smooth and treacherous. Odd places, it appeared as grotesque stunted trees, seeming extraordinarily kinked and gnarled— the whole quaking vilely at times.

"At first, it seemed to us that there was no single portion of the surrounding shore which was not hidden beneath the masses of the hideous lichen; yet, in this, I found we were mistaken; for somewhat later, coasting along the shore at a little distance, we descried a smooth white patch of what appeared to be fine sand, and there we landed. It was not sand. What it was I do not know. All that I have observed is that upon it the fungus will not grow; while everywhere else, save where the sand-like earth wanders oddly, path-wise, amid the grey desolation of the lichen, there is nothing but that loathsome greyness.

"It is difficult to make you understand how cheered we were to find one place that was absolutely free from the growth, and here we deposited our belongings. Then we went back to the ship for such things as it seemed to us we should need. Among other matters, I managed to bring ashore with me one of the ship's sails, with which I constructed two small tents, which, though exceedingly rough-shaped, served the purposes for which they were intended. In these we lived and stored our various necessities, and thus for a matter of

some four weeks all went smoothly and without particular unhappiness. Indeed, I may say with much happiness— for— for we were together.

"It was on the thumb of her right hand that the growth first showed. It was only a small circular spot, much like a little grey mole. My God! how the fear leaped to my heart when she showed me the place. We cleansed it, between us, washing it with carbolic and water. In the morning of the following day she showed her hand to me again. The grey warty thing had returned. For a little while we looked at one another in silence. Then, still wordless, we started again to remove it. In the midst of the operation she spoke suddenly.

" 'What's that on the side of your face, dear?' Her voice was sharp with anxiety. I put my hand up to feel.

" 'There! Under the hair by your ear. A little to the front a bit.' My finger rested upon the place, and then I knew.

" 'Let us get your thumb done first,' I said. And she submitted, only because she was afraid to touch me until it was cleansed. I finished washing and disinfecting her thumb, and then she turned to my face. After it was finished we sat together and talked awhile of many things; for there had come into our lives sudden, very terrible thoughts. We were, all at once, afraid of something worse than death. We spoke of loading the boat with provisions and water and making our way out onto the sea; yet we were helpless, for many causes, and— and the growth had attacked us already. We decided to stay. God would do with us what was His will. We would wait.

"A month, two months, three months passed and the places grew somewhat, and there had come others. Yet we fought so strenuously with the fear that its headway was but slow, comparatively speaking.

"Occasionally we ventured off to the ship for such stores as we needed. There we found that the fungus grew persistently. One of the nodules on the main deck soon became as high as my head.

"We had now given up all thought or hope of leaving the island. We had realized that it would be unallowable to go among healthy humans, with the things from which we were suffering.

"With this determination and knowledge in our minds we knew that we should have to husband our food and water; for we did not know, at that time, but that we should possibly live for many years.

"This reminds me that I have told you that I am an old man. Judged by years this is not so. But— but—"

He broke off; then continued somewhat abruptly:

"As I was saying, we knew that we should have to use care in the matter of food. But we had no idea then how little food there was left of which to take care. It was a week later that I made the discovery that all the other bread tanks— which I had supposed full— were empty, and that (beyond odd tins of

vegetables and meat, and some other matters) we had nothing on which to depend, but the bread in the tank which I had already opened.

"After learning this I bestirred myself to do what I could, and set to work at fishing in the lagoon; but with no success. At this I was somewhat inclined to feel desperate until the thought came to me to try outside the lagoon, in the open sea.

"Here, at times, I caught odd fish, but so infrequently that they proved of but little help in keeping us from the hunger which threatened. It seemed to me that our deaths were likely to come by hunger, and not by the growth of the thing which had seized upon our bodies.

"We were in this state of mind when the fourth month wore out. Then I made a very horrible discovery. One morning, a little before midday, I came off from the ship with a portion of the biscuits which were left. In the mouth of her tent I saw my sweetheart sitting, eating something.

" 'What is it, my dear?' I called out as I leaped ashore. Yet, on hearing my voice, she seemed confused, and, turning, slyly threw something toward the edge of the little clearing. It fell short, and a vague suspicion having arisen within me, I walked across and picked it up. It was a piece of the grey fungus.

"As I went to her with it in my hand, she turned deadly pale; then a rose red.

"I felt strangely dazed and frightened.

" 'My dear! My dear!' I said, and could say no more. Yet at my words she broke down and cried bitterly. Gradually, as she calmed, I got from her the news that she had tried it the preceding day, and— and liked it. I got her to promise on her knees not to touch it again, however great our hunger. After she had promised, she told me that the desire for it had come suddenly, and that, until the moment of desire, she had experienced nothing toward it but the most extreme repulsion.

"Later in the day, feeling strangely restless and much shaken with the thing which I had discovered, I made my way along one of the twisted paths— formed by the white, sand-like substance— which led among the fungoid growth. I had, once before, ventured along there; but not to any great distance. This time, being involved in perplexing thought, I went much farther than hitherto.

"Suddenly I was called to myself by a queer hoarse sound on my left. Turning quickly I saw that there was movement among an extraordinarily shaped mass of fungus, close to my elbow. It was swaying uneasily, as though it possessed life of its own. Abruptly, as I stared, the thought came to me that the thing had a grotesque resemblance to the figure of a distorted human creature. Even as the fancy flashed into my brain, there was a slight, sickening noise of tearing, and I saw that one of the branchlike arms was detaching itself from the surrounding grey masses, and coming toward me. The head of the thing— a shapeless grey ball, inclined in my direction. I stood stupidly, and the vile arm brushed across

my face. I gave out a frightened cry, and ran back a few paces. There was a sweetish taste upon my lips where the thing had touched me. I licked them, and was immediately filled with an inhuman desire. I turned and seized a mass of the fungus. Then more, and— more. I was insatiable. In the midst of devouring, the remembrance of the morning's discovery swept into my mazed brain. It was sent by God. I dashed the fragment I held to the ground. Then, utterly wretched and feeling a dreadful guiltiness, I made my way back to the little encampment.

"I think she knew, by some marvelous intuition which love must have given, so soon as she set eyes on me. Her quiet sympathy made it easier for me, and I told her of my sudden weakness, yet omitted to mention the extraordinary thing which had gone before. I desired to spare her all unnecessary terror.

"But, for myself, I had added an intolerable knowledge, to breed an incessant terror in my brain; for I doubted not but that I had seen the end of one of these men who had come to the island in the ship in the lagoon; and in that monstrous ending I had seen our own.

"Thereafter we kept from the abominable food, though the desire for it had entered into our blood. Yet our drear punishment was upon us; for, day by day, with monstrous rapidity, the fungoid growth took hold of our poor bodies. Nothing we could do would check it materially, and so— and so— we who had been human became— Well, it matters less each day. Only— only we had been man and maid!

"And day by day the fight is more dreadful, to withstand the hunger-lust for the terrible lichen.

"A week ago we ate the last of the biscuit, and since that time I have caught three fish. I was out here fishing tonight when your schooner drifted upon me out of the mist. I hailed you. You know the rest, and may God, out of His great heart, bless you for your goodness to a— a couple of poor outcast souls."

There was the dip of an oar— another. Then the voice came again, and for the last time, sounding through the slight surrounding mist, ghostly and mournful.

"God bless you! Good-bye!"

"Good-bye," we shouted together hoarsely, our hearts full of many emotions.

I glanced about me. I became aware that the dawn was upon us.

The sun flung a stray beam across the hidden sea; pierced the mist dully, and lit up the receding boat with a gloomy fire. Indistinctly I saw something nodding between the oars. I thought of a sponge— a great, grey nodding sponge— The oars continued to ply. They were grey— as was the boat— and my eyes searched a moment vainly for the conjunction of hand and oar. My gaze flashed back to the— head. It nodded forward as the oars went backward for the stroke.

Then the oars were dipped, the boat shot out of the patch of light, and the— the *thing* went nodding into the mist.

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16: The Wicked Widow

Colonel Stoopnagle

F. Chase Taylor, 1897-1950

The Illustrated Detective Magazine May 1932

Chase Taylor (as Colonel Stoopnagle) and Budd Hulick were the American screwball comedy radio team "Stoopnagle and Budd" in the 1930s. They appeared in movies, and also had solo careers.

MRS. J. EUSTACE QUIZZENBERRY had always nursed an insane desire to become a wicked widow.

She was a stunning brunette, was Mrs. Quizzenberry, tall, statuesque, sort of, with deep, brown eyes and a fondness for deep-dish strawberry pie. Her husband, whose name was also Eustace, was an equally tall young man, full of the fire of life, with graying temples, thick, somewhat mannish eyebrows and four German police dogs named Winken, Blinken and Nod. As you know, graying temples on a man indicate that he is in his most fascinating years— years of mature conquest, years of his second childhood.

But somehow or other, Mrs. Quizzenberry (the wife) couldn't see Eustace for dust. To her he was simply a pain in the neck, a sort of drug on the market. She had designs on another. Her heart was turned from Eustace to another not so many weeks before, when she found Eustace in the arms of Pearl Button, the village siren. But enough of that.

MBS. J. EUSTACE QUIZZENBERRY began to think evil thoughts. Her husband had an insurance policy mounting to six or seven figures. His death would mean a considerable amount of ready, spendable, delightful cash for her— years of contentment with her lover on the sands of some south-sea isle, happiness, eternal sunshine, soft music, moonlight— in fact, all the things that women of her type dream of. So one day (a rainy Thursday, to be exact) she sat her pretty self down on her chaise longue to plot her husband's death.

It must be decent, it must be sweet. A hatchet in the back would be too cruel. A sock on the head with a blunt instrument would hurt him. A load of buckshot would tear the skin some.

No, it must be swift, painless and above all things, it must be unknown except to her very closest friends.

The body must be found, in order not to lead the police to believe that Eustace had disappeared to provide money for his wife's needs. What to do? And then a thought struck her— struck her with intense velocity. Stunned for a moment, she quickly recovered, got up, cast a furtive glance or two hither and thither and hied herself into the living room to the telephone.

"Hello, operator," she gasped, a sly smile encircling her crimson lips—lips that invited soft caresses, lips that parted slightly and showed her pearly white teeth, both of them. "Gimme Wickersham 2-9999.... Hello, is Colonel Stoopnagle there? No, I'll leave no name. Just say Mrs. J. E. Q. is calling. He'll understand." (And here is where I come into the story. For a moment, there, I was wondering how I was going to fix that....) My phone rang, for central got the number correctly. I moved my muscular body over to it, took down the receiver.

"Hello," I said, without a moment's hesitation.

"Hello, Colonel," said a still small voice. "I want you should help me find a way to do away with my husband. I know you've been fairly successful at that kind of thing in the past."

"Well," I answered, "itll cost you a pretty penny, madam, but I'll do it for you. By the way, who is this speaking?"

"It is I, Mrs. J. E. Q. I'm afraid some one might be eavesdropping, so I'll simply say that the last name is Quizzenberry. You must help me, Colonel, if it's only just because you and I went to college together."

Well, I was dumbfounded for two reasons. In the first place, I never went to college that I knew of, and in the second place, this doing away with strangers was a bit new to me. I was always used to doing away with Tower Studios people I knew. But, after all, experience is a great teacher, and I was out of work— had been for several years. So I packed my bag, with the help of Hodgkins, my Chinese valet, and was out in the sleigh and away before old Saint Nick could lay his fat finger alongside of his nose.

AS I reached the great red brick house known to the neighbors as the Quizzenberry mansion, I took several quick glances about the place. It was winter (otherwise I could never have got there with an ordinary sleigh), and winter, with its dainty Jack Frost, the little imp, had made her impression everywhere. Even the little chicadees seemed pleased with mother Winter's work, as they hopped about in the deep snow, throwing snowballs at the sparrows and vice versa.

A tremendous thump with my blackjack at the door brought a scuffle of feet. The massive structure swung outward and I entered. There stood Mrs. Quizzenberry! And what a sight she was! Her jet-black hair was falling in streams about her lovely, supple shoulders. Her flashing brown eyes were brilliant in the reflection of the great log fire, which by this time had gone completely out.

"Welcome, Colonel," she said, laying her white hand on my broad shoulder with a shrug. And I could tell by the glimmer in her good eye that she meant it and no mistake.

"Thanks, J. E. Q.," I answered, with somewhat of a knowing wink.

Laughter followed, of course, for Mrs. Quizzenberry, as I learned afterwards, was a woman of good humor. I followed her into the living room and we sat down on the divan to talk the matter over. Of course, I made no advances to her under the circumstances, but on not a few occasions I confess I felt like crushing her bodily to my chest and whispering 'I love you's' in her ear. I learned afterward, also, that this would have been a bad move on my part.

And as we sat there under the spell of the quiet winter's night, I kept feeling a funny little lump. At first I thought it must be one of those frogs in my throat which people so often say they have, and then again I guessed possibly it might be my heart, beating at my ribs 'gainst the use of nature, as Shakespeare once whispered to me.

Then suddenly that lump began to move.

I jumped up and under one of the pillows marked YALE I found what Mrs. Quizzenberry had been seeking for several weeks! Colonel Stoopnagle, her husband!

"Gad!" I thought.

"Gad say I, too," exclaimed Mrs. Quizzenberry.

"You two can 'Gad' all you like," interrupted her husband, "but how would you like to be under a YALE pillow while a detective was making love to your wife?"

"Even a HARVARD pillow would make me feel sort of cheap," I mustered up.

"Well, then, what to do?" queried Eustace, who by this time was able to see better, for the fog had lifted.

"Let's play lotto," put in Gerry Quizzenberry.

"I'm for logomachy, personally," said I.

So we tossed a coin, which stuck up in the chandelier and we never did know whether it was heads or tails. So we played rummy until the old grandfather clock on the stairs registered 4. It was really later than that, though, because some one forgot to wind the old relic, drat it!

"I'll tell you what let's do," I added, thoughtfully, having whispered knowingly to Gerry while her husband was out fixing his tie. "Let's play a new game, the three of us together. I just made it up. It's called MURDER."

"That sounds jolly to me," said Eustace.

"Jake with yours truly," put in Gerry, 'and how do you propose to play this little 'game' of yours?"

"Well," I said, "we take three straws. One of the straws is shorter than the other two. We will place them in my right hand and each draw one straw. The one who gets the shortest straw allows the other two to kill him or her, as the case may be."

"That sounds fair enough," averred Eustace Quizzenberry, still alive.

Well, I wish you could have seen the look Gerry gave me when she heard her husband say that! So we were ready for the game. I held the straws carefully in my right hand, having previously told Gerry which one not to draw. She drew a long one. And then a very odd thing happened. I turned to offer the short straw to Eustace and the old fox grabbed the long one. Was I in a predicament! Oh, boy!

"Well, Stoopnagle, laughed Quizzenberry, "I guess you're the one who is unlucky enough to be murdered!"

"Yes, I selected the short straw, Quizzy," I stated, "but remember, we said two out of three!"

So we drew straws again and again and each time Quizzy selected the short straw.

"Would you care to die with that suit on or would you prefer another?" I asked him.

"Oh, it doesn't matter much as long as I look neat and stiff," replied our hero.

His wife agreed and so we set about our pleasant task.

What transpired from then until the time of the funeral is nobody's business, except that we had to admit to each other that the job was pretty darned complete.

"AND what are your plans for the future Lemmy?" queried my hostess, after the last of the flowers had been removed from the house. "Oh, I don't know, Gerry," I answered.

"Well, how's about you and me hieing ourselves away to some desert isle for a couple of years, kiddo?"

I didn't like that "kiddo" business. It sounded too much like Gerry wasn't the sweet, carefree girl I knew her to be while we were doing away with Quizzy. If she had said: "Well, how's about you and me hieing ourselves to some desert isle for a couple of years, old thing?" I would have felt better about it all.

So I decided then and there to choke her and choke her good and plenty.

This I did. Not a sound out of her, there wasn't. She just took the whole thing like the true little sport she was.

"I most certainly hope I haven't killed you, Gerry, old skate," I whispered to her.

"I'm dead as a doornail, Lemmy," she cried, "and all on account of you choked me a trifle too much. There's only one thing left for you to do now. You must commit suicide. You must do away with yourself."

"I guess you're right, as usual," I replied and before you could say ROBINSON CRUSOE AND HIS MAN FRIDAY I had smothered myself to death between the pillow marked YALE and the pillow marked HARVARD.

You can see, then, that this story can go no farther, for dead men tell no tales.

Epilogue

MRS. J. EUSTACE QUIZZENBERRY looked at her watch. An hour had passed since she first looked at it an hour before. "Can I have been asleep an hour?" she said to herself. But there was no answer. Suddenly there were footsteps outside the door and her husband entered.

"Do you mean to tell me that you're not dead?" she blurted at him.

"I haven't said a word, my dear, as far as I know," he answered. "I have been playing golf this afternoon with that old wag, Colonel Stoopnagle."

Gerry Quizzenberry promptly fainted. And the rest is history.

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17: A London Love Story

J. M. Barrie

1860-1937

The Woman at Home, December 1894

1: Helen's Hat

HELEN AND I had a bet of a hat the other day, and she won. At that time I thought, from looking at them, that the price of ladies' hats could not run to more than five shillings but this is a complete mistake. The cost of ladies' hats varies according to what is not on them; that is to say, half-a-sovereign extra is charged for taking out the feather, and a guinea extra for taking out what a man would call a hat, and leaving only a bow of ribbon. As almost nothing is the fashion just now, hats are unusually dear this season.

To pay for a lady's hat, however, is, after all, a small matter. The difficulty is to go into a shop in cold blood and buy one. That was what I had to do according to the conditions of the bet, and I was allowed to take no one with me. Helen said that If I could not pick out a hat that would suit her it was plain that I did not really love her; and she coldly stared when I asked permission to take another man with me, not to help to purchase, but to stand by while I said sternly to the saleswoman, "I want a lady's hat."

There is a milliner's shop next my tobacconist's, and I thought I could slip into it as if by mistake. Just as I was about to do so, however, the tobacconist came to his door, and so I had to buy a box of Cabanas instead. I was very angry with the man, and have given him up ever since then.

My original intention had been to go into a milliner's shop and bribe them to tell me which was their best hat for a pretty girl, brown hair, dancing eyes, twenty inches round the waist; but Ravenscroft, who pretended to know about hats (though it is quite clear that he thinks the bigger they are the dearer), said that would not be safe. His advice was that I should do a round of milliners' windows on wet days so that my umbrella might hide me.

Woodhouse, however, who has sisters and hearkens to them, said that would be foolish, as they only exhibited a variety of hats in the second-rate shops. He urged me to walk boldly into a shop and insist on their giving me a hat.

Another friend, Hooper, said. "The hat itself is of little consequence; the great thing is that it should be dear. She will forgive you for buying an unbecoming hat, but never for buying a cheap one."

Then Trotter, who thinks himself clever, said, "How can you buy her a hat when you don't know her size?" This philosopher is thirty years old, and has not discovered yet that ladies' hats are worked with pins.

Several days passed, and I had all but bought the hat many times. It was strange and interesting to me to reflect at, say, 5 o'clock that if I had entered the Shop at half-past 4, the whole thing would be over now. Once I did go into a milliner's shop in Regent-street, but I left it without having bought the hat. This was because my courage failed me; and instead of asking for a hat I requested the boy who opened the door to direct me to Piccadilly Circus. If he had been a boy of average smartness he would have read between the lines and insisted on my taking a chair. I hurried into a side street after this escape, and presently came to Bond-street.

The place to buy ladies' hats, warranted dear, is Bond-street; but in no thoroughfare in London are there so many inquisitive, people. Bond-street can never expect to do a great trade so long as the jewellers and fish-sellers, and even the sandwich-board men, stare impertinently at wayfarers. I was simply driven from a milliner's door by a fish-seller, who kept looking after me as if he thought I was afraid to face him. Then there is a dressmaker's window in which a woman in black stood all day looking for me. I soon discovered that she knew I was honestly desirous of buying a lady's hat, but she would not let me. It was impossible to go into a hat shop with that woman ready to triumph over me.

A grocer's boy, too, passed me twice within ten minutes, lingering about in a most impertinently suspicious manner, which so incensed me that I followed him to his shop, and complained to his master. There was a curious look in the latter's eye, and I could not help feeling that he knew I wanted to buy a lady's hat.

With another person, dressed like a gentleman, I had quite a scene. I was just going into a shop to buy the hat when he looked fixedly at me. This confused me, and turned me from my purpose; but half-an-hour afterwards I was back at the shop door. Again he passed me, with a look that told me plainly I was discovered. I lost my temper, and, gripping my umbrella by the middle, demanded to know what he meant. He replied with affected surprise, but I saw through him, and said that I would stand there until a policeman came to my aid. He answered that as he wished to consult my convenience entirely, he would not go away. He be put his back to one window, and 1 put mine to another, and there we stood glaring at each other until 4 o'clock, when a mist came on, in which I walked softly away.

When I was a mile from the shop I saw the mist was my opportunity for buying the hat, and I at once hailed a hansom. I got out at the top of New Bond-street, however, as it struck me that there was a look of enlightenment on the cabby's face. To blind him I walked a little way down Oxford-street, and then turned back.

Soon I was at the shop I now knew so well from the outside, and, though my throat felt dry, I determined to buy that hat. I waited until two ladles had left (I had seen them through the window) and then entered with my teeth set.

"I want a lady's hat," I said, and I had a face on me that showed I was resolved to stand no laughing. The milliner had a twinkle in her eye, but my fierceness put it out, and I saw her hand shake as she brought out some hats. I bought the dearest one, gave the address to which it was to be sent, and then retreated, keeping my eyes on hers to the last moment. That woman was afraid of me— nearly as much afraid as I was of her.

Helen says it will do.

2: Helen's Secret

DROPPING IN on "Acrostic, London" (such is my friend's telegraphic address), nearly a month ago, I found him in despair. He is the puzzle editor of a weekly Journal for gentlewomen, and his readers have become so sharp that they can solve anything by return of post.

"Ask them," I said complacently, "why Helen kept a secret?"

Helen really has kept a secret, for a reason which— though this is unreasonable— makes me love her more than ever. What the secret is I don't know, and why she has kept it I refused to tell my friend; but he liked my suggestion, and he drew up the puzzle thus:

"Helen is young, charming, and a very woman. Claude is almost her lover. They see much of each other. Yet she has had a secret without revealing it to him. Competitors are invited to discover why Helen kept this secret."

During the first week over a hundred answers were received, all incorrect. My friend was elated, yet nervous lest I should be trifling with him. Somewhat elated myself (and growing prouder of Helen with every post), I then confided to him why Helen kept the secret, and the reason struck me as so obviously the only possible one, flint he gave the competitors this hint:

"Observe I have called Helen 'a very woman,' so that she is just like yourselves. Try, therefore, to imagine yourselves in her place with a secret. Only one thing could make you keep it from Claude. What Is that?"

Even then they could not guess. The competition is now closed, and no award will be made, though 476 answers were sent in. We have stumped womankind; and thanks to me, or rather to my Helen (not quite mine yet, but nearly so), "Acrostic, London," has saved his reputation. And yet the answer is so simple!

The general character of the solutions offered may be gathered by sampling. According to a number of competitors, Helen kept a secret because it

was discreditable to her. One letter says, "Her secret was probably of such a nature as this: she really needed a larger size than she let on."

The puzzle editor, who understands the language of young ladles better than I, translates that into English. It means that Helen is charged with deceiving me as to the size of her gloves. Competitors with a loftier view of their sex hold, on the other hand, that Helen kept the secret from Claude because it was something that would cause him pain.

"Being a very woman," writes "A Wild Briar Bush," "Helen would rather die than give the man she loves a moment's uneasiness."

I rather like that letter. It shows that "A Wild Briar Bush" has some understanding of the agony implied in keeping a secret. But it shows ignorance of Helen.

Some competitors have done their best to make me uncomfortable.

"I can easily understand," writes "The Other Jenny", "that Helen would keep a secret from Claude. Very likely he gave her a number of presents, which he bought himself. She pretended to think them the very things she had been wanting, while in reality she had several exactly like them upstairs. However, not to hurt his feelings, she didn't let on."

Equally unjust to Helen is "Alakaday," who writes, "There is one secret Helen would naturally keep from Claude, for is she not described as a 'very woman'? It is that she has loved before. Men are so unreasonable that every Helen has to pretend to every Claude that she has never known what love was until she met him. Helen has, therefore, kept her secret because she knows what men are."

Not content with this absurd solution, "Alakaday" adds, " P.S. But let Claude be comforted. Helen will tell him her secret yet: namely, after they are married."

"A Noble Woman Nobly Planned" writes "This week's competition is, Why did Helen keep a secret? The answer that once springs to the point of my pen is because she had given her promise to do so. Having once given her word. Helen, if truly a 'very woman,' would keep it although she was threatened with death at a cannon's mouth."

In contrast with that view is "Sweet Seventeen":

"How do you know she kept the secret? You can't really know for certain, and I don't believe she did."

"It will be found upon inquiry," writes "Baby Tucker." "that the reason why Helen kept the secret was because she did not know it was a secret."

Quite a number of letters were after the manner of "Harum-Scarum's," who said, "Dear Mr. Puzzle Editor, I never compete in the competitions, because I am not clever enough, but the new one has made me just miserable. I mean the one about 'Helen's Secret.' I don't care a bit why she kept the secret, but I should like awfully to know what the secret is. I keep wondering about it all day, and so I

venture to send you a stamped envelope, and will you kindly write the secret and post it to me?"

"Materfamilias" writes: "I think your competitions wholesome and exhilarating as a rule, but I must tell you that I object to the one about Helen's secret. You ask young girls to conceive themselves in Helen's position, that is to say, with 'almost a lover.' What is 'almost a lover' We recognised no such person in my young days, and I should be sorry to have my girls think they exist now and have privileges. P.S.: Is Helen a real person ? If so, is her surname Montgomery? I ask in confidence, and from no mere curiosity."

Only one male competitor entered. He is an historical Idiot, and gives us a list of cases in which women are well known to have kept a secret.

I don't know whether the reader now needs to be told why Helen kept a secret. It is because she has forgotten it.

3: Helen's Temper

ONE OF THE CHOICEST pleasures in life, I take it, is to be shut up in a hansom with the glass down, the outer world in a mist of rain, a cigar between my teeth, and my thoughts on Helen's temper.

To think of it! There was a time when I liked Helen, yet had never seen her face go on fire, had never heard the stamp of her little foot that seems to me to rhyme with ram. But those were the days when our intercourse was slight and stiff, and I could only say to her distantly, "I wonder how you can be so nice," to which she would answer coldly. "Do you think me especially nice?" to which my civil reply would be. "Oh, Helen!" and her frigid response to that, "I'm so glad you like me."

Gradually the wall of ice was broken down, but still I had never seen Helen In a rage. By this time we were, if not friends, yet acquaintances who could be almost cordial when we met and I would tell her. Indifferently, that her eyes became her, with a few commonplaces about her gown; while she, still reserved, would tap my shoulder and take me out of the crowd, where she could hold me by the watch-chain; and nowadays I leave the tag of my chain hanging loose for Helen to play with.

Nevertheless, there seemed no probability of our somewhat distant relations becoming closer, until one day when it suddenly struck me that I seemed to love Helen. It was thus. I was sitting on a couch beside an elderly lady, and instead of listening to her conversation I was wondering, dreamily, why Helen had always been so haughty to me and I so freezing to her, and whether the fault was hers or mine. And thus cogitating about Helen, I forgot that it was an elderly lady, whom I knew even less than I knew Helen, and my arm—

Thus love came to me, and I lengthened the tag of my watch-chain, and ceased to treat Helen with mere formal, politeness, and I was satisfied with her, although I had never seen her clench her teeth. Helen's temper was something she had kept from me, lest I should love her for it alone.

I remember reading once In a very clever book that women are difficult to understand, and Helen has convinced me that this is true: All of Helen I love, but her temper I love most; and this displeases her so that she storms at me until I love her more than ever, and she reads it in my delighted face and hits me on the chest, which again ravishes me, with the result that she sobs sufficiently to empty her heart, and I ought to promise never to revel in making her angry any more. But I cannot, for I am an Artist.

Had I never known Helen in a rage I could have continued to think her the girl for me. There would still have been to me the pensive Helen and the Helen who smiled, and I should never have thought it possible that with these could be combined Helen with a temper. It is as if I had grapes and cherries and bananas all growing on one tree. Helen pensive, as when she sits with her chin in her hand, has a baby face which I adore, though, curiously enough, I have never taken to children. I never see Helen pensive with- out feeling that she ought not to be left alone, and then if I am very near her, and there are other persons about, I find it wise to keep my hands in my pockets. I have a strange desire to fondle Helen's chin.

Helen laughing is quite a different girl. Then she has a pretty way with her shoulders, and her eyes gleam. But Helen in a rage! Then were it unworthy of one's privileges to remember Helen pensive or laughing Helen. Have you lived for years in a flat country and then seen the Alps in a storm? Truly this suggests the change that comes over Helen. Did you ever in summer-time light a nicely laid fire, just to see it go ablaze? If so you can imagine the temptation that makes me deliberately enrage Helen. I know well how to do it now. I begin mildly and craftily so as not to arouse her suspicions, and she answers, "I am sure I don't care," and then I say a little more, and she turns on me with, "You are insufferable," and then I light another match and she cries, "I hate you," and there never was such a little fury, and I am beside myself with delight. Such colouring I never see elsewhere, such flashes of lightning. Was there ever a maid like Helen?

She says it is a shame, and I think so too. Often I determine never to do it again, and then when I see her a madness comes over me, so that I not only do it but regret the lost opportunities when I might have done it and did not.

I am an Artist.

18: Which?

Erle Cox

1873-1950

Australasian (Melbourne) 20 Dec 1924

FROM HER RESTFUL harbour of shade, beneath the deep vine-screened verandah, Kitty Barry noticed that some creaking and probably uncouth vehicle had halted in the roadway before the house; but as vehicles of all sorts arrived at all hours of the day or night, it was not a matter that called for immediate investigation. Bearers of ill tidings, as a rule, stopped at that gate on hard-ridden horses, whose riders would be thundering on the door almost as soon as the clatter of hoofs was stilled. Things like that usually happened just as Dick was halfway through a meal of quarter-way through a night's rest.

Then she heard Dick laugh, and a moment later she was burrowing an opening with eager hands through the cool, deep screen of the trellised vine, and, although greatly wondering, Kitty also laughed. Out on the white dusty road stood a farm dray, surmounted by a hay-frame, on which, smiling broadly through a dense growth of whiskers, sat James Porteous, farmer, while, endeavouring to reach the ground over the hay-frame, and endeavouring very ungracefully, sprawled Richard Barry, B.S., M.D. Only those who have attempted the same performance can appreciate its manifold difficulties.

Now, since her husband had left Glen Cairn but three hours previously, in what, Kitty was confident, was "the nicest motor-car in the district," and returned in a vehicle that was almost as unbecoming as his unseemly contortions, it was safe to assume that be had encountered adventures. So Kitty continued to smile as she hurried to the gate.

Almost as soon as she reached the foot path, Dick, whose blindly kicking foot had missed the hub of the wheel it sought, reached the road, and Kitty, although really sympathetic, laughed again, in spite of the reproachful eyes her husband turned on her as he sat for a moment before regaining his feet. Then he stood up, dusted his knees, and turned to the man on the dray.

"Thanks, Porteous, I am much obliged to you for your assistance and sympathy," and he stressed the word with intention. "Yes, I'll take the bag." Then, with a glance over his shoulder, "Porteous, if you fell from your dray, would your wife laugh at you?"

Porteous showed a full set of big teeth through his whiskers, and raised a broad straw hat.

"I guess she just would, Doc, 'specially if I came out over the frame instead of under it, the way you tried. I'm glad you're better at doctorin' than you are at getting out of drays," he chuckled.

"Confound you! Why didn't you tell me then?"

"Well, Doc, I thought a kid 'ud have known better. Come up, Paddy!" He gave the rein a shake, and the dray moved on, and again Kitty laughed. Then she stepped from the path and took the bag from his hand as he came towards her.

"So sorry, old dear, but I couldn't help it," she smiled up at him. "But what happened?"

"Good mind not to tell," he growled, as they reached the verandah. "You're a heartless and callous minx, Mrs. Barry. That's what I think of you." He subsided into a chair, and she took his hat off and ran one hand lightly over his hair.

"I'm a piggy, Dick, for laughing, but you did look funny. What did happen, boy?" she asked, smiling down at him.

"Well," he said, mollified, "to put it briefly it was a cow."

"Um— is that a colloquial expression or a statement of fact?"

"The cow was a solid embodiment of fact," he grinned. "The silly fool was turning off the Ronga road into Pearson's lane just as I was turning out of it. I was going a good 25 an hour, too, and the brute lumbered fairly into me."

"Oh, Dick, you might have been killed," she cried.

He nodded. "Might have been worse. I went over the windscreen .and landed on a soft spot somehow. Glad the car's insured, too, Kit. Dislocated radiator, fractured windscreen, and a badly strained fore axle that I know of, and the good Lord only knows what happened to the engine. Phew!"

"And the cow?"

"Well it was 'verra awkward for the coo'. Yes, my dear, there will be the price of a lunatic Mrs. Bull to be added to the damages, and that's that."

She nodded. "If you wish, Dick; Sure you're not hurt at all?"

"The de'il looks after his own— not a scratch. Pretty lucky, though." He stood up. "Oh, Kit, while. I'm having my shower, ring up Debney and tell him I will want a car of sorts till our own is fixed up."

As he turned she stopped him. "Ronga races to-day, Dick; there won't be car to be had."

"Hang it! I forgot. Can't be helped. I don't suppose anything serious is likely to turn up. I'll have to get a trap or something to get round in. Ring anyway, there's a dear"

Twenty minutes later he was calmly resuming his raiment, feeling a much better and more comfortable man, when a whirr of the surgery door bell drew a muttered exclamation, from him that it were better not to record. Then, presently he beard first the maid's voice, and another, to which in due course was added that of Kitty, and he was too used to such incidents to have any doubt of its import. It was not so much the thought of his own hunger and the heat that worried him as the question that flashed through his mind. Where? If it were in the township, good. H it were miles out— no car and an urgent case-

"Sure to be down on the Camp Creek," he muttered to the figure in the mirror that wrestled with a contumacious collar. "Fifteen miles "

"Dick."

He turned swiftly as Kitty spoke. "Well, where is it?" he asked; "miles out, I suppose." Then he "Stopped. Never once in all the many crises that had arisen had Kitty lost her nerve, but now her face had blanched and the hand that rested on his arm shook.

"Dick— it's Marsh. He's almost incoherent. All I can make out is that he has made some awful mistake with prescriptions. You must come."

He was out of the room almost before she had finished speaking. In his. waiting-room, Marsh, the only chemist in Glen Cairn, bareheaded and coatless, stood leaning against the table. He was always an ineffectual little man, competent enough in his work, but weak. As Barry looked down on him now— short, stout, bald but for a few wisps of hair about his ears— he looked the incarnation of helpless abject fear. His face, usually ruddy, had turned the colour of putty, and the watery pale-grey eyes held an expression of almost animal appeal. Beneath his thin, straggly beard Dick could see his throat working, and the thick, pudgy fingers were twining together involuntarily. With an effort Dick checked the outburst of anger that was on his lips. He saw Marsh was on the verge of collapse, and a harsh word would probably send him over completely. So holding himself in hand, he said quietly, though his heart was thumping, "Well, Marsh, what has happened?"

Marsh opened his lips once or twice, but no sound came. Then— "Oh God! Doctor —I don't know which of them got it. Oh, God! Oh, God!"

Barry dropped an encouraging hand on his shoulder. "Tell me from the beginning just what you have done? It may not be as bad as you think," and inwardly he prayed that it might not be.

"I didn't take down the strychnine bottle; I'll swear it. It was in the poison cupboard."

Dick cut him short. Strychnine! The word caught his breath.

"Stop, Marsh! How it happened will keep. What did you do?" He longed to shake the words out of the cowering figure.

The short, helpless fingers clutched at his sleeve. "I— I— I was making up the mixture for Mr. Bernard, and another, your last one, for young Mr. Dalton, and I put half an ounce of strychnine into one of them— I don't' know which. I can't think ."

"Try, man! Try!" and Barry's fingers crushed more savagely than he knew on the shrinking shoulder.

"I've tried, I've tried, doctor," he whimpered. "My head's dizzy. I can't think— which bottle. Both four ounce— I— one was just there "

Barry released his hold and strode to the window, staring over the garden with unseeing eyes.

"Dalton and Bernard, the one on the river twelve miles away, and the other at Yeringle, nine miles on the opposite side of Glen Cairn. Dalton an only son and Bernard his best pal. Mary Bernard had been Kitty's bridesmaid. Thank God! The choice lay between two men, and not between a man and a woman."

Then he swung round swiftly. "How long ago?" he demanded.

"It was just before 11. Mrs. Bernard and old Mr. Dalton called almost together. I can't think! God! Doctor, I can't think!"

Barry glanced at the watch on his wrist, It was 10 minutes past 1, and his lips closed tightly, as he turned to a cabinet in the corner and made a swift selection from its contents.

"How did they come?" He jerked the words over his shoulder.

"Mrs. Bernard was in her car, and Mr. Dalton was driving his bays. I saw them both go, and one of them had it. I—"

Barry waited to hear no more. In the passage Kitty met him, and he barely knew she forced him to put on his coat. A moment later he was striding down the street, and behind trotted Marsh, bleating and panting. Barry had no plan, all he hoped for was to be able to commandeer some kind of conveyance—anything that could move swiftly. On the corner, in front of the bank, stood Senior-Constable Clay, and there, thank God, just round the corner stood Hector Bryce's touring car— empty. Dick placed his bag on the seat and ran to the crank, and the car trembled to the purr of the engine. He swung the door open, and with a foot on the running board turned to Clay.

"Tell Mr. Bryce," he shouted "that I've taken his car. Mine's smashed. Tell him it's life or death."

On the footpath Marsh stood flapping his hands. Be reminded Barry rather of a seal. "Oh, doctor, what will I do? What will I do?" he bleated.

"You do! Pray!" he answered grimly, and as he spoke the car bounded forward, just as Bryce came from the bank in time to see it disappear in a swirl of dust in the direction of Yeringle.

"Bryce looked at the constable. "What the—?"

"Well, Mr. Bryce, as far as I can make out," Clay grinned, "the doctor has pinched your car. Hope you don't want me to follow him, for I should say he's going all of 40 'an hour."

Bryce gazed at the cloud of dust with an injured air, but he knew Dick too well not to know that nothing but vital necessity would have urged him to such an action.

"Said it was life or death," said the constable.

"Gad!" answered Hector thoughtfully. "At that pace it is more likely to be death than anything else—his own. Glad I'm not with him, and I hope he hasn't far to go."

Meanwhile, Barry, bent over the wheel, and praying that his path would keep clear of traffic, was flying down the long, white road towards Yeringle. Jeff Bernard was nearest. If Jeff were right, then he had to face the 20 miles back to the river to Dalton's, and by that time— what? It would, be after 3 o'clock before he could reach Dalton's; four hours since old man Dalton had left with the mixture. Then a sudden thought shot through. Fool! Fool! Why had he not thought of sending a messenger with a warning ahead to Dalton.

"No good!" he murmured. "Not another car in the town. Horseman useless." He groaned aloud. "I'd be there before he could. If he only knew which!"

The Providence that seemed to have deserted him, stood by him he flashed past a timber team on the road, missing it by inches, and pursued by curses of the drivers as their horses tangled themselves up in the traces.

Nearly half-post one! He slowed slightly as he swung off the main road and on to the dust of an unmetalled track. No shock-absorber ever invented could ease those terrific jolts as he drove the car over the broken surface of the bush Jane. Then suddenly, just as half a mile away the white roof of Bernard's house showed through the trees, something happened. He felt the car slack and halt, miss, and then come to a dead stop. In a moment he was out, and working feverishly, to discover the trouble, losing priceless minutes, and, although he did not know it, swearing aloud at the car, and all that belonged to it. its maker, and

Then an idea flashed to his mind. With shaking hand he unscrewed the plug of the petrol tank, and with a hastily stripped twig he sounded its depths. Then with a stamp of his foot he flung the twig aside— dry. There was nothing for it now but his own strength, and without wasting another moment he seized his bag and, scrambling through the fence, sped off across the timbered paddocks towards the house.

As he ran he thought that if Jeff were safe, then he could take Jeff's car to get back to Dalton's. That was all. If Jeff were safe? Yes; if Jeff were safe, then was young Dalton a dead man. How he ran, or how he covered the distance between the car and the house. he never knew, but half way up the drive he came on Bernard's maid with little Jeff.

"Was Mr. Bernard all right?" he demanded, seizing the girl's wrist

The girl, half frightened at the strange excitement of the panting, perspiring man, told him that Bernard was not only well but out of bed and on a sofa in his own room.

"Mrs. Bernard— where is she?"

"Gone over to Mrs. Grant's to tennis. He made her go."

"His medicine, has he taken it since she came back from Glen Cairn?" He shot the question at her. "Tell me, quickly."

In his voice the girl sensed the impending tragedy, and paled as she, answered. "Yes. Mrs. Bernard— she left it with me. She told me to give it to him at half-past one, and I—"

But Barry had turned, and was flying as fast as his trembling knees would let him to the house. The fly door was open, and he made his way through, the girl close at his heels. Then Dick, sick at heart for what the moment bore, turned into Jeff's den. In a second his eye took in every detail. Bernard, lying on the couch under the open window, the empty glass on the table beside him, on which his hand still rested, and beside it the bottle with just one dose missing.

"Hullo! Hullo, Dicky!" was the cheerful greeting.

But Harry made no answer for the second. He grasped the bottle, and, moistening his finger with the contents, touched it with his tongue, and as he did so his heart seemed to stand still.

"Jeff, old man," be said quietly, and he wondered how he could speak so quietly, "did you take that dose?

"You bet I did— just as you came in, and it's as beastly as ever. You do give a fellow some awful muck, Dick."

But Barry was busy with his bag. Glancing round, he picked up a vase of flowers, and flung the contents into the fireplace. Then from a stoppered flask be half filled the vase and stepped to the couch.

"Jeff," he wondered that his voice was so quiet, "take this, old chap, now— quickly."

Bernard, looked up perplexed. "Hang it all, I've just taken one beastly dose. What the dickens is the matter?"

"Damn it, Jeff," and Barry's voice rose slightly. "Do as I tell you. Down with it."

Bernard, wondering, raised the vase to his lips. Perhaps the set, tense expression on Barry's face gave him an inkling of trouble, and without another word he obeyed.

"Don't know what's the matter with you, Dick; you look like grim death," he said, handing back the vase.

Barry bent over him without speaking, and in his heart there was a great pity for the man, and a great rage against the fate that was his. Then as he looked every vestige of colour fled from Jeff's face, and into the eyes came a look of fear. He raised his hand to his throat.

"Dick! What's happened? Poison!"

"Still a moment, Jeff—"

Bernard struggled to his feet. "The window! Don't stop me!" He flung Dick's arm aside and groped blindly for the window, and as he did a terrific spasm

wrenched his frame. Barry turned his eyes away, and under his breath heaped curses on Marsh. Then very tenderly he eased the limps, quivering form back on to the couch. Twice more the awful convulsions came, and then with pitiful eyes turned up to Dick's, Bernard gasped, "What is it, Dick old man? You must tell me."

There was no use keeping it back. He had to know.

"It was that old idiot Marsh. He made a mistake in your mixture. There is strychnine in it. That was an emetic I gave you. It's the only chance."

Jeff struggled again as another spasm tore his body, only to collapse panting on the couch.

Then in gasps he spoke.

"You dashed old ghoul! Mollie was away. I thought I'd give myself a holiday. She always stood and watched me take your rotten medicine. I didn't drink it at all. I slung the dashed stuff out of the window when I heard you coming— and you— you come and make me swallow a damp— earthquake."

Barry drew a long breath and laughed. It was more a cackle than a laugh, and there was very little of humour in it as he said, "Your guardian angel's had a busy day. It just serves you right, Jeff. If this doesn't make a George Washington out of you it should."

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19: Pâkía

Louis Becke and Walter Jeffery

1855-1913 and 1861-1922

The Albury Banner and Wodonga Express (NSW): 8 Dec 1899

Collected in: *The Tapu of Banderah*, 1901

LATE ONE EVENING, when the native village was wrapped in slumber, Temana and I brought our sleeping-mats down to the boat-shed, and spread them upon the white, clinking sand. For here, out upon the open beach, we could feel a breath of the cooling sea-breeze, denied to the village houses by reason of the thick belt of palms which encompassed them on three sides. And then we were away from Malepa's baby, which was a good thing in itself.

Temana, tall, smooth-limbed, and brown-skinned, was an excellent savage, and mine own good friend. He and his wife Malepa lived with me as a sort of foster-father and mother, though their united ages did not reach mine by a year or two.

When Malepa's first baby was born, she and her youthful husband apologised sincerely for the offence against my comfort, and with many tears prepared to leave my service. But although I was agreeable to let Malepa and her little bundle of red-skinned wrinkles go, I could not part with Temana, so I bade her stay. She promised not to let the baby cry o' nights. Poor soul. She tried her best; but every night— or rather towards daylight— that terrible infant would raise its fearsome voice, and wail like a foghorn in mortal agony.

We lit our pipes and lay back watching a moon of silvered steel poised 'midships in a cloudless sky. Before us, unbroken in its wide expanse, save for two miniature islets near the eastern horn of the encircling reef, the glassy surface of the sleeping lagoon was beginning to quiver and throb to the muffled call of the outer ocean; for the tide was about to turn, and soon the brimming waters would sink inch by inch, and foot by foot from the hard, white sand, and with strange swirlings and bubblings and mighty eddyings go tearing through the narrow passage at eight knots an hour.

Presently we heard a footfall upon the path which led to the boat-shed, and then an old man, naked but for his *titi*, or waist-girdle of grass, came out into the moonlight, and greeted us in a quavering, cracked voice.

"*Aue!* white man, my dear friend. So thou and Temana sit here in the moonlight!"

"Even so, Pâkía, most excellent and good old man. Sit ye here beside us. Nay, not there, but here on mine own mat. So. Hast thy pipe with thee?"

The ancient chuckled, and his wrinkled old face beamed as he untwisted a black and stumpy clay from his perforated and pendulous ear-lobe, which hung

full down upon his shoulder, and, turning it upside down, tapped the palm of his left hand with it.

"See!" he said, with another wheezing, half-whispered, half-strangled laugh, "see and hear the emptiness thereof! Nothing has been in its belly since cockcrow. And until now have I hungered for a smoke. Twice did I think to come to thee to-day and ask thee for *kaitalafu* (credit) for five sticks of tobacco, but I said to my pipe, 'Nay, let us wait till night time.' For see, friend of my heart, there are ever greedy eyes which watch the coming and going of a poor old man; and had I gotten the good God-given tobacco from thee by daylight, friends would arise all around me as I passed through the village to my house. And then, lo, the five sticks would become but one!"

"Pâkía," I said in English, as I gave him a piece of tobacco and my knife, "you are a philosopher."

He stopped suddenly, and placing one hand on my knee, looked wistfully into my face, as an inquiring child looks into the eyes of its mother.

"Tell me, what is that?"

I tried to find a synonym. "It means that you are a *tagata poto*— a wise man."

The old, brown, bald head nodded, and the dark, merry eyes danced.

"Aye, aye. Old I may be, and useless, but I have lived— I have lived. And though when I am dead my children and grandchildren will make a *tagi* over me, I shall laugh, for I know that of one hundred tears, ninety and nine will be for the tobacco and the biscuit and the rice that with me will vanish!"

He filled and lit his pipe, and then, raising one skinny, tattooed arm, pointed to the moon.

"Hast such a moon as that in *papalagi* land?"

"Sometimes."

"Aye, sometimes. But not always. No, not always. I know, I know. See, my friend; let us talk. I am full of talk to-night. You are a good man, and I, old Pâkía, have seen many things. Aye, many things and many lands. Aye, I, who am now old and toothless, and without oil in my knees and my elbows, can talk to you in two tongues besides my own.... Temana!"

"*Oi*, good father Pâkía."

"Go away. The white man and I would talk."

I placed my hand on the bald head of the ancient "Temana shall go to the house and bring us a bottle of grog. We will drink, and then you shall talk. I am one who would learn."

The old man took my hand and patted it "Yes, let us talk to-night And let us drink grog. Grog is good to drink, sometimes. Sometimes it is bad to drink. It is bad to drink when the swift blood of youth is in our veins and a hot word calls to a sharp knife. Ah! I have seen it! Listen! Dost hear the rush of the lagoon waters

through the passage? That is the quick, hot blood of youth, when it is stirred by grog and passion, and the soft touch of a woman's bosom. I know it. I know it. But let Temana bring the bottle. I am not afraid to drink grog with *thee*, Ah, thou art not like some white men. Thou can'st drink, and give some to a poor old man, and if prying eyes and babbling tongues make mischief, and the missionary sends thee a *tusi* (letter), and says 'This drinking of grog by Pâkía is wrong,' thou sendest him a letter, saying, 'True, O teacher of the Gospel. This drinking of grog is very wrong. Wherefore do I send thee three dollars for the school, and ask thy mercy for old Pâkía, who was my guest.'"

I slapped the ancient on his withered old back.

"To-night ye shall drink as much grog as ye like, Pâkía. The missionary is a good man, and will not heed foolish talk."

Pâkía shook his head. "Mareko is a Samoan. He thinketh much of himself because he hath been to Sini (Sydney) and stood before many white gentlemen and ladies, and told them about these islands. He is a vain fool, though a great man here in Nukufetau, but in Livapoola (Liverpool) he would be but as a pig. Livapoola is a very beautiful place, full of beautiful women. Ah! you laugh.... I am bent and old now, and my bones rattle under my skin like pebbles in a gourd. Then I was young and strong. Listen! I was a boat-steerer for three years on a London whaleship. I have fought in the wars of Chile and Peru. I can tell you many things, and you will understand.... I have seen many lands."

Temana returned with a bottle of brandy, a gourd of water, and three cups.

"Drink this, Pâkía, *taka ta-ina* (dear crony) And talk. Your talk is good to hear. And I can understand."

He drank the liquor neat, and then washed it down with a cupful of water.

"*Tapa!* Ah, the good, sweet grog! And see, above us is the round moon, and here be we three. We three— two young and strong, one whose blood is getting cold. Ah, I will talk, and this boy, Temana, will learn that Pâkía is no boasting old liar, but a true man." Then, suddenly dropping the Nukufetau dialect in which he had hitherto spoken, he said quietly in English—

"I told you I could speak other languages beside my own. It is true, for I can talk English and Spanish." Then he went back into native: "But I am not a vain old man. These people here are fools. They think that because on Sundays they dress like white men and go to church five times in one day, and can read and write in Samoan, that they are as clever as white men. Bah! they are fools, fools! Where are the strong men of my youth? Where are the thousand and two hundred people who, when my father was a boy, lived upon the shores of this lagoon? They are gone, gone!"

"True, Pâkía. They are gone."

"Aye, they are perished like the dead leaves. And once when I said in the hearing of the *kaupule* (head men) that in the days of the *po-uri* (heathen times)

we were a great people and better off than we are now, I was beaten by my own grand-daughter, and fined ten dollars for speaking of such things, and made to work on the road for two months. But it is true— it is true. Where are the people now? They are dead, perished; there are now but three hundred left of the thousand and two hundred who lived in my father's time. And of those that are left, what are they? They are weak and eaten up with strange diseases. The men cannot hunt and fish as men hunted and fished in my father's time.

"*Tah!* they are women, and the women are men, for now the man must work for the woman, so that she can buy hats and boots and calicoes, and dress like a white woman. Give me more grog, for these things fill my belly with bitterness, and the grog is sweet. Ah! I shall tell you many things to-night."

"Tell me of them, old man. See, the moon is warm to our skins. And as we drink, we shall eat. Temana here shall bring us food. And we shall talk till the sun shines over the tops of the trees on Motu Luga. I would learn of the old times before this island became *lotu* (Christianised)."

"*Oi.* I will tell you. I am now but as an old, upturned canoe that is used for a sitting-place for children who play on the beach at night. And I am called a fool and a bad man, because I sometimes speak of the days that are dead. Temana, is Malepa thy wife virtuous?"

"*Se kau iloà*" ("I do not know"), replied Temana, with a solemn face.

"Ah, you cannot tell! Who can tell nowadays? But you will know when some day she is fined five dollars. In my time if a man doubted his wife, the club fell swiftly, or the spear was sped, and she was dead. And, because of this custom, wives in those days were careful. Now, they care not, and are fined five dollars many times. And the husband hath to pay the fine!" He laughed in his noiseless way, and then puffed at his pipe. "And if he cannot pay, then he and his wife, and the man who hath wronged him, work together on the roads, and eat and drink together as friends, and are not ashamed. And at night-time they sing hymns together!"

"People must be punished when wrong is done, Pâkía," I said lamely.

"Bah! what is five dollars to a woman? Is it a high fence set with spears over which she cannot climb? If a man hath fifty dollars, does not his wife know it, and tell her lover (if she hath one) that he may meet her ten times! Give me more water in this grog, good white man with the brown skin like mine own!"

The old fellow smoked his pipe in silence for a few minutes; then again he pointed to the moon, nodded and smiled.

"*Tah!* What a moon! Would that I were young again! See, in the days of my youth, on such a night as this, all the young men and women would be standing on the outer reef fishing for *malau*, which do but take a bait in the moonlight. *Now*, because to-morrow is the Sabbath day, no man must launch a canoe nor

take a rod in his hand, lest he stay out beyond the hour of midnight, and his soul go to hell to burn in red fire for ever and ever. Bah!"

"Never mind these things, Pâkía. Tell me instead how came ye to serve in the wars of Chile and Peru, or of thy voyages in the *folau manu* (whaleship)."

His eyes sparkled. "Ah, those were the days! Twice in one whaleship did I sail among the ice mountains of the far south, where the wind cuts like a knife and the sea is black to look at *Tāpa!* the cold, the cold, the cold which burneth the skin like iron at white heat! But I was strong; and we killed many whales. I, Pâkía, in one voyage struck thirteen! I was in the mate's boat.... Look at this now!" He held up his withered arm and peered at me. "It was a strong arm then; now it is but good to carry food to my mouth, or to hold a stick when I walk." The last words he uttered wistfully, and then sighed.

"The mate of that ship was a good man. He taught me many things. Once, when we had left the cold seas and were among the islands of Tonga, he struck me in his rage because I threw the harpoon at a great sperm whale, and missed. That night I slipped over the side, and swam five miles to the land. Dost know the place called Lifuka? 'Twas there I landed. I lay in a thicket till daylight, then I arose and went into a house and asked for food. They gave me a yam and a piece of bonito, and as I ate men sprang on me from behind and tied me up hand and foot. Then I was carried back to the ship, and the captain gave those pigs of Tongans fifty dollars' worth of presents for bringing me back."

"He thought well of thee, Pâkía, to pay so much."

He nodded.

"Aye, for I was a good man, and worth much to him. And I was not flogged, for the mate was my friend always. All the voyage I was a lucky man, till we came to a place called Amboyna. Here the mate became sick and died, so I ran away. This time I was not caught, and when the ship was gone, I was given work by an Englishman. He was a rich merchant— not a poor trader like thee. He had a great house, many servants, and many native wives. Thou hast but two servants, and no wife. Why have ye no wife? It is not proper!"

I expressed my deep sense of the insignificance of my domestic arrangements, and gave him another nip of brandy.

"But, like him, thou hast a big heart. May you live long and become a *mau koloa* (rich man). Ah! the grog, the good grog. I am young again to-night... And so for two years I lived at Amboyna. Then my master went to Peretania— to Livapoola— and took me with him. I was his servant, and he trusted me and made much of me.

"Ah, Livapoola is a fine place. I was six months there, and wherever my master went I went with him. By and by he married, and we went to live at a place by the sea, in a fair white house of stone, with rich lands encompassing it. It was a foreign place, and we crossed the sea to go there. There were many

women servants there, and one of them, named Lissi, began to smile at, and then to talk to me. I gave her many presents, for every week my master put a gold piece in my hand. One day I asked him to give me this girl for my wife. He laughed, and said I was foolish; that she was playing with me. I told her this. She swore to me that when I had fifty gold pieces she would be my wife, but that I must tell no one.... Ah! how a woman can fool a man! I was fooled. And every gold piece I got I gave to her to keep for me.

"I have said that there were many servants. There was one young man, named Harry, whose work it was to take my master about in his *puha tia tia* (carriage). Sometimes I would see him talking to the girl, and then looking at me. Then I began to watch; but she was too cunning. Always had she one word for me. Be patient; when we have the fifty gold pieces all shall be well. We shall go away from here, and get married.'

"One night, as I lay upon the grass, smoking my pipe, I heard voices, the voices of the man Harry and Lissi. They were speaking of me. They spoke loudly, and I heard all that was said. 'He is but a simple fool,' she said, with a laugh; 'but in another month I shall have the last of his money, and then thou and I shall go away quietly. Faugh! the tattooed beast!' and I heard her laugh again, and the man laughed with her, but bade her be careful lest I should suspect."

"She was a bad woman, Pâkía," I began, when he interrupted me with a quick gesture.

"I crept back into the house and got a knife, and waited. The night was dark, but I could see. Presently they came along a narrow path which led to the house. Then I sprang out, and drove my knife twice into the man's chest. I had not time to kill the woman, for at the third blow the knife broke off at the hilt, and she fled in the darkness. I wanted to kill her because she had fooled me and taken my money— forty-six gold pieces.

"There was a great wood which ran from my master's house down to the sea. I ran hard, very hard, till I came to the water. I could see ships in the harbour, quite near. I swam to one, and tried to creep on deck and hide, but heard the sailors talking. Presently I saw a vessel— a schooner— come sailing slowly past. There was a boat towing astern. I swam softly over, and got into the boat, and laid down till it was near the dawn. There was but little wind then, and the ship was not moving fast, so I got into the water again, and held on to the side of the boat, and began to cry out in a loud voice for help. As soon as they heard me the ship was brought to the wind, and I got back into the boat. I was taken on board and given food and coffee, and told the captain that I had fallen overboard from another ship, and had been swimming for many hours. Only the captain could speak a little English— all the others were Italians. It was an Italian ship.

"I was a long time on that ship. We went first to Rio, then down to the cold seas of the south, and then to Callao. But the captain never gave me any money, so I ran away. Why should a man work for naught? By and by an American whaleship came to Callao, and I went on board. I was put in the captain's boat. We sailed about a long time, but saw no whales, so when the ship came to Juan Fernandez I and a white sailor named Bob ran away, and hid in the woods till the ship was gone. Then we came out and went to the Governor, who set us to work to cut timber for the whaleships. Hast been to this island?"

"No," I replied; " 'tis a fair land, I have heard."

"Aye, a fair, fair land, with green woods and sweet waters; and the note of the blue pigeon soundeth from dawn till dark, and the wild goats leap from crag to crag."

"Didst stay there long, Pâkía?"

He rubbed his scanty white beard meditatively. "A year— two years— I cannot tell. Time goes on and on, and the young do not count the days. But there came a ship which wanted men, and I sailed away to Niu Silani. (New Zealand) That, too, is a fair land, and the men of the country have brown skins like us, and I soon learnt their tongue, which is akin to ours. I was a long time in that ship, for we kept about the coast, and the Maoris filled her with logs of *kauri* wood, to take to Sydney. It was a good ship, for although we were paid no money every man had as much rum as he could drink and as much tobacco as he could smoke, and a young Maori girl for wife, who lived on board. Once the Maoris tried to take the ship as she lay at anchor, but we shot ten or more. Then we went to Sydney, where I was put in prison for many weeks."

"Why was that?"

"I do not know. It was, I think, because of something the captain had done when he was in Sydney before; he had taken away two men and a woman who were prisoners of the Governor had seen them on board at Juan Fernandez; they went ashore there to live. But the Governor of Sydney was good to me. I was brought before him; he asked me many questions about these islands, and gave me some silver money. Then the next day I was put on board a ship, which took me to Tahiti. But see, dear friend, I cannot talk more to-night, though my tongue is loose and my belly warm with the good grog. But it is strong, very strong, and I fear to drink more, lest I disgust thee and lose thy friendship."

"Nay, old man. Have no fear of that. And see, sleep here with us till the dawn. Temana shall bring thee a covering-mat."

"Ah-h-h! Thou art good to old Pâkía. I shall stay till the dawn. It is good to have such a friend. To-morrow, if I weary thee not, I shall tell thee of how I returned to Chile and fought with the English ship-captain in the war, and of the woman he loved, and of the great fire which burnt two thousand women in a church."

"*Tah!*" said Temana incredulously; "two thousand?"

"Aye!" he snapped angrily, "dost think I be drunk, boy? Go and watch thy wife. How should an ignorant hog like thee know of such things?"

"'Sh, 'sh, old man. Be not so quick to anger. Temana meant no harm. Here is thy covering-mat. Lie down and sleep."

He smiled good-naturedly at us, and then, pulling the mat over him to shield his aged frame from the heavy morning dew, was soon asleep.

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20: The Secret of the Growing Gold

Bram Stoker

1847-1912

Black & White, 23 Jan 1892

WHEN Margaret Delandre went to live at Brent's Rock the whole neighbourhood awoke to the pleasure of an entirely new scandal. Scandals in connection with either the Delandre family or the Brents of Brent's Rock, were not few; and if the secret history of the county had been written in full both names would have been found well represented. It is true that the status of each was so different that they might have belonged to different continents— or to different worlds for the matter of that— for hitherto their orbits had never crossed. The Brents were accorded by the whole section of the country a unique social dominance, and had ever held themselves as high above the yeoman class to which Margaret Delandre belonged, as a blue-blooded Spanish hidalgo out-tops his peasant tenantry.

The Delandres had an ancient record and were proud of it in their way as the Brents were of theirs. But the family had never risen above yeomanry; and although they had been once well-to-do in the good old times of foreign wars and protection, their fortunes had withered under the scorching of the free trade sun and the 'piping times of peace.' They had, as the elder members used to assert, 'stuck to the land', with the result that they had taken root in it, body and soul. In fact, they, having chosen the life of vegetables, had flourished as vegetation does— blossomed and thrived in the good season and suffered in the bad. Their holding, Dander's Croft, seemed to have been worked out, and to be typical of the family which had inhabited it. The latter had declined generation after generation, sending out now and again some abortive shoot of unsatisfied energy in the shape of a soldier or sailor, who had worked his way to the minor grades of the services and had there stopped, cut short either from unheeding gallantry in action or from that destroying cause to men without breeding or youthful care— the recognition of a position above them which they feel unfitted to fill. So, little by little, the family dropped lower and lower, the men brooding and dissatisfied, and drinking themselves into the grave, the women drudging at home, or marrying beneath them— or worse. In process of time all disappeared, leaving only two in the Croft, Wykham Delandre and his sister Margaret. The man and woman seemed to have inherited in masculine and feminine form respectively the evil tendency of their race, sharing in common the principles, though manifesting them in different ways, of sullen passion, voluptuousness and recklessness.

The history of the Brents had been something similar, but showing the causes of decadence in their aristocratic and not their plebeian forms. They, too,

had sent their shoots to the wars; but their positions had been different and they had often attained honour— for without flaw they were gallant, and brave deeds were done by them before the selfish dissipation which marked them had sapped their vigour.

The present head of the family— if family it could now be called when one remained of the direct line— was Geoffrey Brent. He was almost a type of worn out race, manifesting in some ways its most brilliant qualities, and in others its utter degradation. He might be fairly compared with some of those antique Italian nobles whom the painters have preserved to us with their courage, their unscrupulousness, their refinement of lust and cruelty— the voluptuary actual with the fiend potential. He was certainly handsome, with that dark, aquiline, commanding beauty which women so generally recognise as dominant. With men he was distant and cold; but such a bearing never deters womankind. The inscrutable laws of sex have so arranged that even a timid woman is not afraid of a fierce and haughty man. And so it was that there was hardly a woman of any kind or degree, who lived within view of Brent's Rock, who did not cherish some form of secret admiration for the handsome wastrel. The category was a wide one, for Brent's Rock rose up steeply from the midst of a level region and for a circuit of a hundred miles it lay on the horizon, with its high old towers and steep roofs cutting the level edge of wood and hamlet, and far-scattered mansions.

So long as Geoffrey Brent confined his dissipations to London and Paris and Vienna— anywhere out of sight and sound of his home— opinion was silent. It is easy to listen to far off echoes unmoved, and we can treat them with disbelief, or scorn, or disdain, or whatever attitude of coldness may suit our purpose. But when the scandal came close home it was another matter; and the feelings of independence and integrity which is in people of every community which is not utterly spoiled, asserted itself and demanded that condemnation should be expressed. Still there was a certain reticence in all, and no more notice was taken of the existing facts than was absolutely necessary. Margaret Delandre bore herself so fearlessly and so openly— she accepted her position as the justified companion of Geoffrey Brent so naturally that people came to believe that she was secretly married to him, and therefore thought it wiser to hold their tongues lest time should justify her and also make her an active enemy.

The one person who, by his interference, could have settled all doubts was debarred by circumstances from interfering in the matter. Wykham Delandre had quarrelled with his sister— or perhaps it was that she had quarrelled with him— and they were on terms not merely of armed neutrality but of bitter hatred. The quarrel had been antecedent to Margaret going to Brent's Rock. She and Wykham had almost come to blows. There had certainly been threats on one side and on the other; and in the end Wykham, overcome with passion, had

ordered his sister to leave his house. She had risen straightway, and, without waiting to pack up even her own personal belongings, had walked out of the house. On the threshold she had paused for a moment to hurl a bitter threat at Wykham that he would rue in shame and despair to the last hour of his life his act of that day. Some weeks had since passed; and it was understood in the neighbourhood that Margaret had gone to London, when she suddenly appeared driving out with Geoffrey Brent, and the entire neighbourhood knew before nightfall that she had taken up her abode at the Rock. It was no subject of surprise that Brent had come back unexpectedly, for such was his usual custom. Even his own servants never knew when to expect him, for there was a private door, of which he alone had the key, by which he sometimes entered without anyone in the house being aware of his coming. This was his usual method of appearing after a long absence.

Wykham Delandre was furious at the news. He vowed vengeance— and to keep his mind level with his passion drank deeper than ever. He tried several times to see his sister, but she contemptuously refused to meet him. He tried to have an interview with Brent and was refused by him also. Then he tried to stop him in the road, but without avail, for Geoffrey was not a man to be stopped against his will. Several actual encounters took place between the two men, and many more were threatened and avoided. At last Wykham Delandre settled down to a morose, vengeful acceptance of the situation.

Neither Margaret nor Geoffrey was of a pacific temperament, and it was not long before there began to be quarrels between them. One thing would lead to another, and wine flowed freely at Brent's Rock. Now and again the quarrels would assume a bitter aspect, and threats would be exchanged in uncompromising language that fairly awed the listening servants. But such quarrels generally ended where domestic altercations do, in reconciliation, and in a mutual respect for the fighting qualities proportionate to their manifestation. Fighting for its own sake is found by a certain class of persons, all the world over, to be a matter of absorbing interest, and there is no reason to believe that domestic conditions minimise its potency. Geoffrey and Margaret made occasional absences from Brent's Rock, and on each of these occasions Wykham Delandre also absented himself; but as he generally heard of the absence too late to be of any service, he returned home each time in a more bitter and discontented frame of mind than before.

At last there came a time when the absence from Brent's Rock became longer than before. Only a few days earlier there had been a quarrel, exceeding in bitterness anything which had gone before; but this, too, had been made up, and a trip on the Continent had been mentioned before the servants. After a few days Wykham Delandre also went away, and it was some weeks before he returned. It was noticed that he was full of some new importance— satisfaction,

exaltation— they hardly knew how to call it. He went straightway to Brent's Rock, and demanded to see Geoffrey Brent, and on being told that he had not yet returned, said, with a grim decision which the servants noted:

'I shall come again. My news is solid— it can wait!' and turned away. Week after week went by, and month after month; and then there came a rumour, certified later on, that an accident had occurred in the Zermatt valley. Whilst crossing a dangerous pass the carriage containing an English lady and the driver had fallen over a precipice, the gentleman of the party, Mr. Geoffrey Brent, having been fortunately saved as he had been walking up the hill to ease the horses. He gave information, and search was made. The broken rail, the excoriated roadway, the marks where the horses had struggled on the decline before finally pitching over into the torrent— all told the sad tale. It was a wet season, and there had been much snow in the winter, so that the river was swollen beyond its usual volume, and the eddies of the stream were packed with ice. All search was made, and finally the wreck of the carriage and the body of one horse were found in an eddy of the river. Later on the body of the driver was found on the sandy, torrent-swept waste near Täsch; but the body of the lady, like that of the other horse, had quite disappeared, and was— what was left of it by that time— whirling amongst the eddies of the Rhone on its way down to the Lake of Geneva.

Wykham Delandre made all the enquiries possible, but could not find any trace of the missing woman. He found, however, in the books of the various hotels the name of 'Mr. and Mrs. Geoffrey Brent'. And he had a stone erected at Zermatt to his sister's memory, under her married name, and a tablet put up in the church at Bretten, the parish in which both Brent's Rock and Dander's Croft were situated.

There was a lapse of nearly a year, after the excitement of the matter had worn away, and the whole neighbourhood had gone on its accustomed way. Brent was still absent, and Delandre more drunken, more morose, and more revengeful than before.

Then there was a new excitement. Brent's Rock was being made ready for a new mistress. It was officially announced by Geoffrey himself in a letter to the Vicar, that he had been married some months before to an Italian lady, and that they were then on their way home. Then a small army of workmen invaded the house; and hammer and plane sounded, and a general air of size and paint pervaded the atmosphere. One wing of the old house, the south, was entirely re-done; and then the great body of the workmen departed, leaving only materials for the doing of the old hall when Geoffrey Brent should have returned, for he had directed that the decoration was only to be done under his own eyes. He had brought with him accurate drawings of a hall in the house of his bride's father, for he wished to reproduce for her the place to which she had

been accustomed. As the moulding had all to be re-done, some scaffolding poles and boards were brought in and laid on one side of the great hall, and also a great wooden tank or box for mixing the lime, which was laid in bags beside it.

When the new mistress of Brent's Rock arrived the bells of the church rang out, and there was a general jubilation. She was a beautiful creature, full of the poetry and fire and passion of the South; and the few English words which she had learned were spoken in such a sweet and pretty broken way that she won the hearts of the people almost as much by the music of her voice as by the melting beauty of her dark eyes.

Geoffrey Brent seemed more happy than he had ever before appeared; but there was a dark, anxious look on his face that was new to those who knew him of old, and he started at times as though at some noise that was unheard by others.

And so months passed and the whisper grew that at last Brent's Rock was to have an heir. Geoffrey was very tender to his wife, and the new bond between them seemed to soften him. He took more interest in his tenants and their needs than he had ever done; and works of charity on his part as well as on his sweet young wife's were not lacking. He seemed to have set all his hopes on the child that was coming, and as he looked deeper into the future the dark shadow that had come over his face seemed to die gradually away.

All the time Wykham Delandre nursed his revenge. Deep in his heart had grown up a purpose of vengeance which only waited an opportunity to crystallise and take a definite shape. His vague idea was somehow centred in the wife of Brent, for he knew that he could strike him best through those he loved, and the coming time seemed to hold in its womb the opportunity for which he longed. One night he sat alone in the living-room of his house. It had once been a handsome room in its way, but time and neglect had done their work and it was now little better than a ruin, without dignity or picturesqueness of any kind. He had been drinking heavily for some time and was more than half stupefied. He thought he heard a noise as of someone at the door and looked up. Then he called half savagely to come in; but there was no response. With a muttered blasphemy he renewed his potations. Presently he forgot all around him, sank into a daze, but suddenly awoke to see standing before him someone or something like a battered, ghostly edition of his sister. For a few moments there came upon him a sort of fear. The woman before him, with distorted features and burning eyes seemed hardly human, and the only thing that seemed a reality of his sister, as she had been, was her wealth of golden hair, and this was now streaked with grey. She eyed her brother with a long, cold stare; and he, too, as he looked and began to realise the actuality of her presence, found the hatred of her which he had had, once again surging up in his heart. All the

brooding passion of the past year seemed to find a voice at once as he asked her:

'Why are you here? You're dead and buried.'

'I am here, Wykham Delandre, for no love of you, but because I hate another even more than I do you!' A great passion blazed in her eyes.

'Him?' he asked, in so fierce a whisper that even the woman was for an instant startled till she regained her calm.

'Yes, him!' she answered. 'But make no mistake, my revenge is my own; and I merely use you to help me to it.' Wykham asked suddenly:

'Did he marry you?'

The woman's distorted face broadened out in a ghastly attempt at a smile. It was a hideous mockery, for the broken features and seamed scars took strange shapes and strange colours, and queer lines of white showed out as the straining muscles pressed on the old cicatrices.

'So you would like to know! It would please your pride to feel that your sister was truly married! Well, you shall not know. That was my revenge on you, and I do not mean to change it by a hair's breadth. I have come here tonight simply to let you know that I am alive, so that if any violence be done me where I am going there may be a witness.'

'Where are you going?' demanded her brother.

'That is my affair! and I have not the least intention of letting you know!' Wykham stood up, but the drink was on him and he reeled and fell. As he lay on the floor he announced his intention of following his sister; and with an outburst of splenetic humour told her that he would follow her through the darkness by the light of her hair, and of her beauty. At this she turned on him, and said that there were others beside him that would rue her hair and her beauty too. 'As he will,' she hissed; 'for the hair remains though the beauty be gone. When he withdrew the lynch-pin and sent us over the precipice into the torrent, he had little thought of my beauty. Perhaps his beauty would be scarred like mine were he whirled, as I was, among the rocks of the Visp, and frozen on the ice pack in the drift of the river. But let him beware! His time is coming!' and with a fierce gesture she flung open the door and passed out into the night.

LATER on that night, Mrs. Brent, who was but half-asleep, became suddenly awake and spoke to her husband:

'Geoffrey, was not that the click of a lock somewhere below our window?'

But Geoffrey— though she thought that he, too, had started at the noise— seemed sound asleep, and breathed heavily. Again Mrs. Brent dozed; but this time awoke to the fact that her husband had arisen and was partially dressed. He was deadly pale, and when the light of the lamp which he had in his hand fell on his face, she was frightened at the look in his eyes.

'What is it, Geoffrey? What dost thou?' she asked.

'Hush! little one,' he answered, in a strange, hoarse voice. 'Go to sleep. I am restless, and wish to finish some work I left undone.'

'Bring it here, my husband,' she said; 'I am lonely and I fear when thou art away.'

For reply he merely kissed her and went out, closing the door behind him. She lay awake for awhile, and then nature asserted itself, and she slept.

Suddenly she started broad awake with the memory in her ears of a smothered cry from somewhere not far off. She jumped up and ran to the door and listened, but there was no sound. She grew alarmed for her husband, and called out: 'Geoffrey! Geoffrey!'

After a few moments the door of the great hall opened, and Geoffrey appeared at it, but without his lamp.

'Hush!' he said, in a sort of whisper, and his voice was harsh and stern. 'Hush! Get to bed! I am working, and must not be disturbed. Go to sleep, and do not wake the house!'

With a chill in her heart— for the harshness of her husband's voice was new to her— she crept back to bed and lay there trembling, too frightened to cry, and listened to every sound. There was a long pause of silence, and then the sound of some iron implement striking muffled blows! Then there came a clang of a heavy stone falling, followed by a muffled curse. Then a dragging sound, and then more noise of stone on stone. She lay all the while in an agony of fear, and her heart beat dreadfully. She heard a curious sort of scraping sound; and then there was silence. Presently the door opened gently, and Geoffrey appeared. His wife pretended to be asleep; but through her eyelashes she saw him wash from his hands something white that looked like lime.

In the morning he made no allusion to the previous night, and she was afraid to ask any question.

From that day there seemed some shadow over Geoffrey Brent. He neither ate nor slept as he had been accustomed, and his former habit of turning suddenly as though someone were speaking from behind him revived. The old hall seemed to have some kind of fascination for him. He used to go there many times in the day, but grew impatient if anyone, even his wife, entered it. When the builder's foreman came to inquire about continuing his work Geoffrey was out driving; the man went into the hall, and when Geoffrey returned the servant told him of his arrival and where he was. With a frightful oath he pushed the servant aside and hurried up to the old hall. The workman met him almost at the door; and as Geoffrey burst into the room he ran against him. The man apologised:

'Beg pardon, sir, but I was just going out to make some enquiries. I directed twelve sacks of lime to be sent here, but I see there are only ten.'

'Damn the ten sacks and the twelve too!' was the ungracious and incomprehensible rejoinder.

The workman looked surprised, and tried to turn the conversation.

'I see, sir, there is a little matter which our people must have done; but the governor will of course see it set right at his own cost.'

'What do you mean?'

'That 'ere 'arth-stone, sir: Some idiot must have put a scaffold pole on it and cracked it right down the middle, and it's thick enough you'd think to stand hanythink.' Geoffrey was silent for quite a minute, and then said in a constrained voice and with much gentler manner:

'Tell your people that I am not going on with the work in the hall at present. I want to leave it as it is for a while longer.'

'All right sir. I'll send up a few of our chaps to take away these poles and lime bags and tidy the place up a bit.'

'No! No!' said Geoffrey, 'leave them where they are. I shall send and tell you when you are to get on with the work.' So the foreman went away, and his comment to his master was:

'I'd send in the bill, sir, for the work already done. 'Pears to me that money's a little shaky in that quarter.'

Once or twice Delandre tried to stop Brent on the road, and, at last, finding that he could not attain his object rode after the carriage, calling out:

'What has become of my sister, your wife?' Geoffrey lashed his horses into a gallop, and the other, seeing from his white face and from his wife's collapse almost into a faint that his object was attained, rode away with a scowl and a laugh.

That night when Geoffrey went into the hall he passed over to the great fireplace, and all at once started back with a smothered cry. Then with an effort he pulled himself together and went away, returning with a light. He bent down over the broken hearth-stone to see if the moonlight falling through the storied window had in any way deceived him. Then with a groan of anguish he sank to his knees.

There, sure enough, through the crack in the broken stone were protruding a multitude of threads of golden hair just tinged with grey!

He was disturbed by a noise at the door, and looking round, saw his wife standing in the doorway. In the desperation of the moment he took action to prevent discovery, and lighting a match at the lamp, stooped down and burned away the hair that rose through the broken stone. Then rising nonchalantly as he could, he pretended surprise at seeing his wife beside him.

For the next week he lived in an agony; for, whether by accident or design, he could not find himself alone in the hall for any length of time. At each visit the hair had grown afresh through the crack, and he had to watch it carefully

lest his terrible secret should be discovered. He tried to find a receptacle for the body of the murdered woman outside the house, but someone always interrupted him; and once, when he was coming out of the private doorway, he was met by his wife, who began to question him about it, and manifested surprise that she should not have before noticed the key which he now reluctantly showed her. Geoffrey dearly and passionately loved his wife, so that any possibility of her discovering his dread secrets, or even of doubting him, filled him with anguish; and after a couple of days had passed, he could not help coming to the conclusion that, at least, she suspected something.

That very evening she came into the hall after her drive and found him there sitting moodily by the deserted fireplace. She spoke to him directly.

'Geoffrey, I have been spoken to by that fellow Delandre, and he says horrible things. He tells to me that a week ago his sister returned to his house, the wreck and ruin of her former self, with only her golden hair as of old, and announced some fell intention. He asked me where she is— and oh, Geoffrey, she is dead, she is dead! So how can she have returned? Oh! I am in dread, and I know not where to turn!'

For answer, Geoffrey burst into a torrent of blasphemy which made her shudder. He cursed Delandre and his sister and all their kind, and in especial he hurled curse after curse on her golden hair.

'Oh, hush! hush!' she said, and was then silent, for she feared her husband when she saw the evil effect of his humour. Geoffrey in the torrent of his anger stood up and moved away from the hearth; but suddenly stopped as he saw a new look of terror in his wife's eyes. He followed their glance, and then he too, shuddered— for there on the broken hearth-stone lay a golden streak as the point of the hair rose though the crack.

'Look, look!' she shrieked. 'Is it some ghost of the dead! Come away— come away!' and seizing her husband by the wrist with the frenzy of madness, she pulled him from the room.

That night she was in a raging fever. The doctor of the district attended her at once, and special aid was telegraphed for to London. Geoffrey was in despair, and in his anguish at the danger of his young wife almost forgot his own crime and its consequences. In the evening the doctor had to leave to attend to others; but he left Geoffrey in charge of his wife. His last words were:

'Remember, you must humour her till I come in the morning, or till some other doctor has her case in hand. What you have to dread is another attack of emotion. See that she is kept warm. Nothing more can be done.'

Late in the evening, when the rest of the household had retired, Geoffrey's wife got up from her bed and called to her husband.

'Come!' she said. 'Come to the old hall! I know where the gold comes from! I want to see it grow!'

Geoffrey would fain have stopped her, but he feared for her life or reason on the one hand, and lest in a paroxysm she should shriek out her terrible suspicion, and seeing that it was useless to try to prevent her, wrapped a warm rug around her and went with her to the old hall. When they entered, she turned and shut the door and locked it.

'We want no strangers amongst us three tonight!' she whispered with a wan smile.

'We three! nay we are but two,' said Geoffrey with a shudder; he feared to say more.

'Sit here,' said his wife as she put out the light. 'Sit here by the hearth and watch the gold growing. The silver moonlight is jealous! See, it steals along the floor towards the gold— our gold!' Geoffrey looked with growing horror, and saw that during the hours that had passed the golden hair had protruded further through the broken hearth-stone. He tried to hide it by placing his feet over the broken place; and his wife, drawing her chair beside him, leant over and laid her head on his shoulder.

'Now do not stir, dear,' she said; 'let us sit still and watch. We shall find the secret of the growing gold!' He passed his arm round her and sat silent; and as the moonlight stole along the floor she sank to sleep.

He feared to wake her; and so sat silent and miserable as the hours stole away.

Before his horror-struck eyes the golden-hair from the broken stone grew and grew; and as it increased, so his heart got colder and colder, till at last he had not power to stir, and sat with eyes full of terror watching his doom.

IN THE morning when the London doctor came, neither Geoffrey nor his wife could be found. Search was made in all the rooms, but without avail. As a last resource the great door of the old hall was broken open, and those who entered saw a grim and sorry sight.

There by the deserted hearth Geoffrey Brent and his young wife sat cold and white and dead. Her face was peaceful, and her eyes were closed in sleep; but his face was a sight that made all who saw it shudder, for there was on it a look of unutterable horror. The eyes were open and stared glassily at his feet, which were twined with tresses of golden hair, streaked with grey, which came through the broken hearth-stone.

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21: Picket-Wire

J. M. Walsh

1897-1952

Sydney Mail 25 Jan 1922

TOWARDS the close of the sixteenth century— in 1591, let us say— one Diego de Ramirez, a Spaniard of New Spain, lost his ship, his life, and most of his crew off the mouth of a jungle-masked river of East New Guinea. Some of the survivors, escaping from the wreck, took to the hill-country, were captured, killed, and in all probability eaten by the headhunting cannibals of the interior. Others, more fortunate, salved a boat, embarked on her, and after many adventures by devious ways reached the Spice Islands, and ultimately Manila. There they told their story, and the imaginative Governor of that day, a bit of a navigator himself and rather more of a poet, marked the river on the chart at least three degrees out of reckoning and called it *'El Rio de las Aninias Perdidas*,' which may be translated as 'The River of Lost Souls.'

Two centuries later a wandering Frenchman. Captain Alphonse D'Urville, or perhaps La Perouse himself— which, history does not record— landed at the mouth of the self-same river, heard the legend— now six generations old— of the helmeted and corseleted while men who had been wrecked there, and in a moment of unconscious prophecy renamed it '*Purgatoire*.'

'Purgatoire' it remained until the English and Australian adventurers, questing for gold or new trading stations, found the name come unhandily to their tongues and corrupted it to 'Picket-Wire.' All of which is in the nature of a prologue.

ALL day long the launch had spluttered its heavy way across a glassy sea under the fierce rays of the tropic sun, while the half-caste Malay owner tended his engines with almost maternal cure, and Jack Anthony perspired with the heat, and ever and anon cursed the night's befuddlement which had landed him in his present plight. One drink too many was bad enough, but one word too many, with blows to follow, was infinitely worse.

When Macey Crane, in the wild exhilaration of his cups had called Jack Anthony the unprintable epithet which no man may hear and not resent, the rest, had followed inevitably. Anthony had crossed the room in two strides, swift for all their drunken unsteadiness, and his right fist, sure and powerful drunk or sober, had lifted Crane clean off his feet and flung him head-on against the carved leg of the heavy oaken table.

There was a moment's surprised silence, with the stricken man lying very white and still. Then someone had cried that there was blood on. Macey Crane's face, and his head was split open. Tense-featured men, now horribly and

ludicrously sober, had declared him dying, if not already dead, and Farmelon, the medical student, a close friend of Crane's, had straightened up from his inspection of the body, had pointed dramatically at Jack Anthony, and had said, with vibrant accusation trembling through his clogged speech, 'You've murdered him, Anthony!'

The room was in an uproar in an instant, Macey Crane's friends flying at: the throats of Anthony's supporters. Someone had caught Jack by the arm, had hustled him into the street, outside, and walked with him under the stars.

Slowly, as the haze cleared from his mind, he saw that his companion was Eric Steele, and with recognition came realisation of what he had done.

'You've got to clear out,' Steele had advised. 'Get while the going's good!'

'Where?' Anthony had asked dazedly.

'Anywhere but home. You'll have the police on your track before midnight.'

'But where am I to go?'

Steele shrugged his shoulders. 'Anywhere you like, as long as it's out of the road. You can't stay in Sydney.'

They had spent further profitless minutes in futile discussion of alcohol-informed plans until Steele had recollected a copra boat in harbour and a skipper who was under an obligation to him.

'The very thing,' he had said. 'Bundle you off to the islands.'

DESPITE Jack Anthony's truncated protest he had half led, half dragged him on to a Circular Quay tram, had conducted him to the ferry, and from thence at some nameless spot across the harbour had transferred to a motor-launch.

Thereafter events became confused. Anthony had a hazy recollection of being pushed up an improvised gangway, of someone— Steele, apparently— thrusting money into his hands, and there the vision blurred entirely.

When he came to himself it was broad daylight, and the Heads were already dwindling away astern. He was on board a copra schooner bound for Samarai and beyond, in charge of a captain who asked no questions and received no confidences. He had had some thoughts of stopping over at Samarai, but the sight of the big wireless mast and the sound of the messages that nightly trickled into space reminded him that the arm of the law was long, and he was still within its reach. He had wandered on and on, a fugitive from justice, troubled by an unquiet conscience, finding nowhere, rest for the soles of his feet.

At the trading station at Marianne Head he had met with the half-caste Malay, Kerut, and in desperation thrown in his lot with him. Kerut wanted an assistant, was prepared to take one of his own breed: he hailed Anthony with joy, and looked on him as gift from the gods. And it did not matter to Anthony that he was crossing the colour line in thus consorting with a man of another

race and shade. He sought security and if possible, forget fullness, and life with Kerut at Picket-Wire held out hope of both. His last act before leaving Marianne Head had been to write a letter that he had not found courage to write before. There was a girl in Sydney, a good-as-gold girl who sooner or later must know the truth: so he sent her a full confession and left the future in God's hands. She would be heartbroken, no doubt; but what else could a man do?

From which it will be seen that Jack Anthony was lamentably lacking of the stuff of which heroes are made.

Meanwhile the launch slipped on to Picket-Wire, and Kerut— literally 'Wrinkles,' though one may translate it freely as the. 'Very Old' or 'Very Wise One'— tended his engines as carefully as a mother tends her babe. The boilers had oil-burning gadgets attached, but with petrol unobtainable and even bad paraffin at a premium -he Malay put his trust in wood fuel, which could be had for the cutting almost anywhere along the jungle-clad coast.

They came to the river, in the early evening, when the night mists were, already rising over the forest and ; settling dankly on the face of the waters. It was an uninviting place, rendered doubly so by the presence of the ragged curtain of miasmatic vapour.

The old Spaniard who had named it had rightly called it the River of Lost, Souls: on stormy nights, when the gale, tore through the palms and the shivering branches of the casuarinas whispered and sobbed, one needed but little imagination to hear the wailing of the ghostly visitants themselves.

A jerry-built wharf that, had somehow stood the strain of years of rough weather jutted out into the. stream. It had been built originally for light-draught schooners that were to load there; but no schooners ever came, and all Kerut's trade had to be carried in the motor-launch over miles of seas down to Marianne Head.

Despite it all, the Malay drove a thriving business: he knew to a tomahawk and a glass bead the value of the rubber and copra in the hinterland, and his prices always left him with a considerable margin of profit. It was to handle his rapidly increasing business that he had secured Jack Anthony, and though the wage offered was a miserable pittance the young man had more to worry over than mere money matters.

THE damp, depressing chill of the place struck him to the marrow as he climbed on to the wharf, and filled him with a foreboding of evil that he found very hard to shake off. But the sight of chocolate coloured figures bright with scarlet lava-lavas, and a small bungalow nestling amongst the trees, recalled him to his saner self, and when finally tiffin was ready and a native house-boy waiting on the pair of them he forgot his forebodings and became his own man

once again. The house-boys were real; so was Kerut, too, for that matter: and only the river and the jungle were grim, ghostly, and horrible.

Jack Anthony knew nothing of the history of the place— those things they omit from the geographies— but some uncharted sense told him that dead men haunted the neighbourhood, even as a dead man haunted his life. And when one comes In think of it, Anthony is an uncommon English name, though Antonio is found frequently enough in Spain.

Kerut, wise in his own way— he had been to a mission school in Singapore, and because of that and the dash of white blood in him combined the superficial intelligence of the West with the calm introspection of the East— watched his young supercargo curiously, and wondered vaguely what it was that made the man afraid of the night and see him shivering when shadows fell across his path.

Jack Anthony threw himself into his work with the fierce energy of a man who finds a soporific in exertion. As the days lengthened into weeks, and the weeks into months, he developed some kind of a feeling of security, and the killing of Macey Crane in retrospect took on the aspect of an accident. It was inevitable, something that had been preordained from the beginning of lime. The fatalism of the East, the disposition to accept things as they come, the Mussulman-Arab-Malay habit of saying:, 'It is written,' began to grow on him. Even the picture of the girl, that good-as-gold girl, was becoming blurred, and the pain in his heart was a dull gnawing now, rather than the ripping and tearing of sharp claws, as it had been at the beginning.

CAME the slack season, when the heavens opened and the rain poured down in torrents. It rained all day and most of the night for weeks at a time; the river flooded over its banks, and at nights white shapes that might have been the wraiths of dead Spaniards, but that everyone knew were curtains of mist blown raggedly to pieces by the wind, danced and twisted by the waterside. On such occasions the native boys, superstitious to a man, sat and chattered in their huts in the compound, made much magic and prayed alternately to the bad god Baigona and the good god Tsidibe. And because, of this praying, or perhaps in spite of it, the weather eventually cleared up, the fever mists were whirled away seawards, and work began again.

Carter arrived when Kerut was in the interior. Long before the magistrate's launch had been sighted the house-boy spoke to Anthony.

'One fella phut-phut boat belong Guv'ment he come,' said the boy. 'Phut-phut boat?' The phrase was new to Jack Anthony: he did not. quite grasp its precise implication. The native nodded with that queer sidelong movement of the head which is the affirmative sign in parts of New Guinea. He proceeded to amplify his original statement, using a phrase of the vernacular which can only be translated as 'the-boat-that-burns-smells.'

The white man took little notice of the boy's description: the most disconcerting thing to his mind was that it was a Government craft, with a patrol officer or possibly a resident magistrate on board. His first thought was of flight: his second, and better, that there was nowhere to fly to, and that he might, after all, manage to bluff it out if only he kept cool. The police couldn't possibly have tracked him down; the officer probably was only out on his rounds.

But the ghost of Macey Crane was close behind him, and already he felt a heavy hand on his shoulder when Carter stepped ashore. The R.M. was rather on the small side— his Kiwai sergeant beat, him by practically a foot— but he carried himself with all the air of a man born to command. For the fraction of a second the eyes of the two whites met, and Carter's steady brown orbs stared disconcertingly into Anthony's wavering black ones. Then the younger man's eyes dropped.

'What are you doing here?' the R.M. demanded, and the other fancied there was something closely approaching accusation in the question.

'I'm in charge,' said Anthony, and he glanced side long at Carter. 'Where's Kerut, then?'

'In the interior.' Anthony told him. The R.M. ran a cool and calculating eye over the other, marked the shaking hands and the shifty gaze, and said, 'You're in for a dose of fever, m'lad. You're shivering all over.'

'Fever?' There was the echo of relief in the question.

'Yes,' said Carter; then, 'What's your name, by the way?'

'Jack— Jack Smith.'

The R.M.'s brows drew, together in thought.

'Smith,' he repeated; 'Yes, that's it. They told me about you down at Marianne Head. How d'you like the job?'

'It's not bad,'' Anthony told him. Somehow ; his confidence was beginning to return; the pressure of the phantom hand on his shoulder seemed lighter.

'Come inside and have a peg,' he suggested. He wanted something that would steady his nerves, and he was vastly relieved when the other accepted his invitation.

'No. I can't stop the night,' said Carter an hour later. 'I've inspected the plantation, and everything's in order. No trouble with the labour? None — that's good. Well, I must be going. Remember me to Kerut. Decent fellow, though he has a touch of the tar-brush about him. And— a word in your ear. Take care of that fever.'

TACK ANTHONY watched the launch out of sight with mingled feelings of thankfulness and relief. He had been pretty thoroughly scared, and once or twice he had noticed Carter watching' him narrowly. He seemed to have come

all right out of the ordeal, though he couldn't say whether or not Carter had his suspicions.

Carter, on the, other, hand, was trying unsuccessfully to reconcile the various impressions he had received that afternoon.

'Fever!' he said, and laughed harshly. 'That's not fever. I wonder what the deuce he's been up to? He's got the fear of arrest on him, anyway— a child could see that. Then the way he took that peg. He would have fainted if he hadn't had it. Been making a goat of himself down south, I suppose. He wouldn't be hiding up here if there wasn't something of that sort wrong with him. Peculiar how all these lads take up the name of Smith. It's so darned obvious. However, it isn't my affair, and l can't do anything one way or the other till Port Moresby sends up a 'chit' and tells me to' go after him. I rather hope for his sake that he hasn't made a mess of things. He seems a decent lad at bottom, and I'll bet a month's pay that he's suffered a dozen, times over for whatever he's done. He looks it.'

The old Spaniard who called the place the River of Lost' Souls was wise, but the Frenchman who rechristened it 'Purgatoire' was even wiser. Carter went on his rounds, still thinking.

Jack Anthony, alias Smith, was uppermost in his mind when he returned to Marianne Head and met— But that, after all, is the story.

In the course of time Kerut returned from the hinterland, and found a very sick assistant where he had left a hale and hearty man. He arrived just in time to prevent Larumie, the house-boy, from exorcising Anthony in New Guinea fashion to drive out the devil-devil, the native felt sure resided in the young man's frame. Kerut, after listening to Anthony's ravings, decided that the devil that possessed his assistant was one of another sort— that which is known in. civilised circles sometimes as fear of arrest, and sometimes as remorse.

Anthony babbled of a white-faced man who lay very quiet and still— a white-faced man with just a trickle of blood upon his forehead. In the throes of delirium his acquired fatalism of the East had been cast aside; in the small hours of the night, while the wind sobbed through the casuarinas and the house-boys stopped their ears with their fingers to shut out the cries of the man possessed by devils. Jack Anthony raved of a dead man and a living woman.

Kerut, half-Mussulman, half-Christian, crossed himself and muttered saving verses from the Koran. But youth's grip on life is ever tenacious, and it takes more than malarial fever brought on by a bad scare to kill a man of Anthony's type. He came out of his illness very white and shaken, with the almost certain knowledge that he had unintentionally shared his secret with another.

'What did-I say?'-he asked point-blank, and awaited the other's reply with that queer lip-smile with which a nervous man faces a situation full of explosive possibilities.

Despite the light olive of his skin Kerut was a gentleman— that type of gentleman that they breed equally well in Malaysia or Park Lane— and the answer he made was the only one possible in the circumstances.

'I have forgotten,' he said, 'it was no affair of mine.'

But he had not forgotten— there are some things no man forgets— and he knew at last why Anthony shivered when the night shadows fell across his path, and perhaps he guessed after a fashion of his own of that phantom hand that now and then touched the young man lightly on the shoulder. At least he knew of those fires of remorse in which writhed Anthony's soul.

Picket-Wire— Purgatoire— Purgatory! Throughout the days that followed Jack Anthony retained a vivid memory of Carter's eyes as they scrutinised him: at times he walked in the jungle with a dead man by his side.

THE bungalow door stood wide open, an infallible sign of visitors. A strange launch— Carter's launch— was tied to the jetty, and babble of voices, mumbling lost in the clatter of plates, words half-caught, sentences broken and disjointed, drifted out to Anthony as he mounted the steps of the verandah. Carter, come back to arrest him, he thought, and hesitated a moment at the door. Then, tensely, he steeled himself to face the inevitable. Arrest didn't matter, after all; anything was better than this soul-lulling, mind-deadening suspense.

'Here's the man himself,' he heard Carter say; then came the scraping of a chair as the magistrate rose to his feet. The R.M.'s form blocked the doorway, so that he could not see into the room.

'I suppose you've come for me,' said Anthony wearily. 'I won't give any trouble.'

'Don't be a fool,' said Carter, shortly. 'I don't want you. Somebody else does, though— someone from the south.'

He noticed with amazement, saw as in a dream, that Carter was smiling, that his eyes were twinkling.

'Someone from the south?' he gasped.

And as Carter nodded affirmation from the room behind there came the sound of two voices, Kerut's and the voice of— somebody else!

'Jack!'

The R.M. stepped aside, and a girl— the-good-as-gold girl he had left way down in Sydney— rushed from the room and threw her arms about Jack Anthony's neck.

'Mary!' There was dazed astonishment in the young man's voice. 'Mary, is it really you?'

'It's really me, Jack.' Grammar was forgotten in the excitement of the meeting. 'It's really, truly me, your own Mary, come up here for you.' Laughter and sobbing intermixed sounded in the girl's voice.

Carter touched Kerut on the arm.

'Come on,' he said. 'We're not wanted here— and won't be for the next hour or so.'

They stole quietly from the room, and neither the man nor the girl noticed them going, so completely were they wrapped up in each other.

'But,' said Jack at length, 'you know why I ran away and what I did?'

'I only know that you ran away.' She smiled through her tears. 'You did nothing else.'

'I killed Macey Crane.'

'Macey Crane's walking about Sydney to-day as well as ever, and a trifle more sober than usual.'

'You mean—'

'I mean that he was only stunned. They found that out after you and Eric Steele left: they would have found it out at once if you all hadn't been so—' She left, the sentence uncompleted: but the man in understanding nodded his head ashamedy.

'Then why didn't they come after me?'

'Nobody but Eric Steele knew where you were, and he didn't learn the truth until next morning, after you had sailed. He didn't know anything about me; no one ever told me anything until I got your letter. Then I sought out Eric Steele, told him who I was, and that I had a right to know what had happened. He told me where you'd gone, and— oh, the foolishness of the man!— he had never thought of cabling you that— that things weren't as you thought. It was too late then to cable you; so I decided to come after you myself. I hadn't much money, but I made it do, and people were kind to me. I spent months and months inquiring for you, fruitlessly, until chance brought, me to Mr. Carter. And then— But, my own boy, you can guess the rest. You won't ever run away from me again, will you?' she asked, with tears in her eyes.

'I'm like you,' said Jack Anthony ruefully: 'I haven't much money. This is the first job I've ever held down.'

'Keep on holding it down, Jack, dear. We won't need very much up here.'

'But,' he protested, 'you can't live up here.'

'I can, and I'm going to. Jack, don't you understand that with a woman it isn't the place where she is that matters so much; as long as she has the right man she's happy. Mr. Carter's here; he's a magistrate, and—'

'He can marry us right away!' Jack cried, exultingly.

The girl did not make reply, but he knew when she kissed him, for in such a fashion are unspoken messages conveyed from heart to heart, that that was the thought which had been in her mind all along.

IF DEIGO DE RAMIREZ'S ghostly sailors still stalk abroad at night, when the southeast wind tears sobbingly through the trees on the bank of the River of Lost Souls; if the shade of the old Frenchman who rechristened it 'Purgatoire' ever revisits the scene of his exploits; if the English and Australian adventurers who corrupted that name to 'Picket-Wire' know aught of what transpired in Kerut's house that afternoon, they all must know that three separate sets of *voyageurs* were each guilty of a misnomer. As 'Picket-Wire' one may still find it marked on the map: but to two people at least it is 'Heart's-Ease,' for there a man found peace of mind and soul and a woman's heart was filled with happiness.

22: Novel of the Iron Maid

Arthur Machen

1863-1947

St James's Gazette, 13 Sep 1890

I THINK the most extraordinary event which I can recall took place about five years ago. I was then still feeling my way; I had declared for business, and attended regularly at my office; but I had not succeeded in establishing a really profitable connection, and consequently I had a good deal of leisure time on my hands. I have never thought fit to trouble you with the details of my private life; they would be entirely devoid of interest. I must briefly say, however, that I had a numerous circle of acquaintance, and was never at a loss as to how to spend my evenings. I was so fortunate as to have friends in most of the ranks of the social order; there is nothing so unfortunate, to my mind, as a specialised circle, wherein a certain round of ideas is continually traversed and retraversed. I have always tried to find out new types and persons whose brains contained something fresh to me; one may chance to gain information even from the conversation of city men on an omnibus. Amongst my acquaintance I knew a young doctor, who lived in a far outlying suburb, and I used often to brave the intolerably slow railway journey to have the pleasure of listening to his talk. One night we conversed so eagerly together over our pipes and whisky that the clock passed unnoticed; and when I glanced up, I realised with a shock that I had just five minutes in which to catch the last train. I made a dash for my hat and stick, jumped out of the house and down the steps, and tore at full speed up the street. It was no good, however; there was a shriek of the engine-whistle, and I stood there at the station door and saw far on the long, dark line of the embankment a red light shine and vanish, and a porter came down and shut the door with a bang.

'How far to London?' I asked him.

'A good nine miles to Waterloo Bridge.' And with that he went off.

Before me was the long suburban street, its dreary distance marked by rows of twinkling lamps, and the air was poisoned by the faint, sickly smell of burning bricks; it was not a cheerful prospect by any means, and I had to walk through nine miles of such streets, deserted as those of Pompeii. I knew pretty well what direction to take, so I set out wearily, looking at the stretch of lamps vanishing in perspective; and as I walked, street after street branched off to right and left, some far-reaching, to distances that seemed endless, communicating with other systems of thoroughfare, and some mere protoplasmic streets, ing in orderly fashion with serried two-storied houses, and ending suddenly in waste, and pits, and rubbish-heaps, and fields whence the magic had departed. I have spoken of systems of thoroughfare, and I assure you that walking alone through these

silent places I felt fantasy growing on me, and some glamour of the infinite. There was here, I felt, an immensity as in the outer void of the universe; I passed from unknown to unknown, my way marked by lamps like stars, and on either hand was an unknown world where myriads of men dwelt and slept, street leading into street, as it seemed to world's end. At first the road by which I was travelling was lined with houses of unutterable monotony, a wall of grey brick pierced by two stories of windows, drawn close to the very pavement; but by degrees I noticed an improvement, there were gardens, and these grew larger; the suburban builder began to allow himself a wider scope; and for a certain distance each flight of steps was guarded by twin lions of plaster, and scents of flowers prevailed over the fume of heated bricks. The road began to climb a hill, and looking up a side street I saw the half moon rise over plane-trees, and there on the other side was as if a white cloud had fallen, and the air around it was sweetened as with incense; it was a may-tree in full bloom. I pressed on stubbornly, listening for the wheels and the clatter of some belated hansom; but into that land of men who go to the city in the morning and return in the evening the hansom rarely enters, and I had resigned myself once more to the walk, when I suddenly became aware that someone was advancing to meet me along the sidewalk.

The man was strolling rather aimlessly; and though the time and the place would have allowed an unconventional style of dress, he was vested in the ordinary frockcoat, black tie, and silk hat of civilisation. We met each other under the lamp, and, as often happens in this great town, two casual passengers brought face to face found each in the other an acquaintance.

'Mr Mathias, I think?' I said.

'Quite so. And you are Frank Burton. You know you are a man with a Christian name, so I won't apologise for my familiarity. But may I ask where you are going?'

I explained the situation to him, saying I had traversed a region as unknown to me as the darkest recesses of Africa. 'I think I have only about five miles further,' I concluded.

'Nonsense! you must come home with me. My house is close by; in fact, I was just taking my evening walk when we met. Come along; I dare say you will find a makeshift bed easier than a five-mile walk.'

I let him take my arm and lead me along, though I was a good deal surprised at so much geniality from a man who was, after all, a mere casual club acquaintance. I suppose I had not spoken to Mr Mathias half a dozen times; he was a man who would sit silent in an armchair for hours, neither reading nor smoking, but now and again moistening his lips with his tongue and smiling queerly to himself. I confess he had never attracted me, and on the whole I should have preferred to continue my walk.

But he took my arm and led me up a side street, and stopped at a door in a high wall. We passed through the still, moonlit garden, beneath the black shadow of an old cedar, and into an old red-brick house with many gables. I was tired enough, and I sighed with relief as I let myself fall into a great leather armchair. You know the infernal grit with which they strew the sidewalk in those suburban districts; it makes walking a penance, and I felt my four-mile tramp had made me more weary than ten miles on an honest country road. I looked about the room with some curiosity; there was a shaded lamp, which threw a circle of brilliant light on a heap of papers lying on an old brass-bound secretaire of the last century, but the room was all vague and shadowy, and I could only see that it was long and low, and that it was filled with indistinct objects which might be furniture. Mr Mathias sat down in a second armchair, and looked about him with that odd smile of his. He was a queer-looking man, clean shaven, and white to the lips. I should think his age was something between fifty and sixty.

'Now I have got you here,' he began, 'I must inflict my hobby on you. You knew I was a collector? Oh yes, I have devoted many years to collecting curiosities, which I think are really curious. But we must have a better light.'

He advanced into the middle of the room, and lit a lamp which hung from the ceiling; and as the bright light flashed round the wick, from every corner and space there seemed to start a horror. Great wooden frames, with complicated apparatus of ropes and pulleys, stood against the wall; a wheel of strange shape had a place beside a thing that looked like a gigantic gridiron; little tables glittered with bright steel instruments carelessly put down as if ready for use; a screw and vice loomed out, casting ugly shadows, and in another nook was a saw with cruel jagged teeth.

'Yes,' said Mr Mathias, 'they are, as you suggest, instruments of torture— of torture and death. Some— many, I may say— have been used; a few are reproductions after ancient examples. Those knives were used for flaying; that frame is a rack, and a very fine specimen. Look at this; it comes from Venice. You see that sort of collar, something like a big horseshoe? Well, the patient, let us call him, sat down quite comfortably, and the horseshoe was neatly fitted round his neck. Then the two ends were joined with a silken band, and the executioner began to turn a handle connected with the band. The horseshoe contracted very gradually as the band tightened, and the turning continued till the man was strangled. It all took place quietly, in one of those queer garrets under the leads. But these things are all European; the Orientals are, of course, much more ingenious. These are the Chinese contrivances; you have heard of the "Heavy Death"? It is my hobby, this sort of thing. Do you know, I often sit here, hour after hour, and meditate over the collection. I fancy I see the faces of the men who have suffered, faces lean with agony, and wet with sweats of death

growing distinct out of the gloom, and I hear the echoes of their cries for mercy. But I must show you my latest acquisition. Come into the next room'

I followed Mr Mathias out. The weariness of the walk, the late hour, and the strangeness of it all made me feel like a man in a dream; nothing would have surprised me very much. The second room was as the first, crowded with ghastly instruments; but beneath the lamp was a wooden platform, and a figure stood on it. It was a large statue of a naked woman, fashioned in green bronze, the arms were stretched out, and there was a smile on the lips; it might well have been intended for a Venus, and yet I there was about the thing an evil and a deadly look.

Mr Mathias looked at it complacently. 'Quite a work of art, isn't it?' he said. 'It's made of bronze, as you see, but it has long had the name of the Iron Maid. I got it from Germany, and it was only unpacked this afternoon; indeed, I have not yet had time to open the letter of advice. You see that very small knob between the breasts? Well, the victim was bound to the Maid, the knob was pressed, and the arms slowly tightened round the neck. You can imagine the result.'

As Mr Mathias talked, he patted the figure affectionately. I had turned away, for I sickened at the sight of the man and his loathsome treasure. There was a slight click, of which I took no notice; it was not much louder than the tick of a clock; and then I heard a sudden whirr, the noise of machinery in motion, and I faced round. I have never forgotten the hideous agony on Mathias's face as those relentless arms tightened about his neck; there was a wild struggle as of a beast in the toils, and then a shriek that ended in a choking groan. The whirring noise had suddenly changed into a heavy droning. I tore with all my might at the bronze arms, and strove to wrench them apart, but I could do nothing. The head had slowly bent down, and the green lips were on the lips of Mathias.

OF COURSE, I had to attend at the inquest. The letter which had accompanied the figure was found unopened on the study table. The German firm of dealers cautioned their client to be most careful in touching the Iron Maid, as the machinery had put in thorough working order.

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23: The Dining-Room Fireplace

R. H. Malden

1879-1951

In: *The Nine Ghosts*, 1943

ANYONE who knows the neighbourhood of Dublin will remember the good-sized country-houses in which it abounds. Most of them date from the eighteenth century, when Irish landowners were prosperous and labour was cheap. Some of them incorporate bits of older buildings which may have begun life as castles of the Pale. Most of them are now in a state of dilapidation which is not unpicturesque, though it would be out of place in England.

Perhaps I ought to have used the past tense. I do not know how many of them have survived the establishment of Eire— or whatever that part of Ireland chooses to call itself nowadays— and I do not feel tempted to go and see.

I am writing of things as they were during the closing years of the reign of Queen Victoria.

It was during a visit to one of them in the autumn of the year 1899 that the experience, I can hardly dignify it by the name of adventure, which I am about to relate befell me.

It belonged to a family named Moore who had inhabited it for several generations. The present owner was a young man, unmarried and in the army. Naturally he could not spend much of his time there and was glad to let it when he could. It had been taken for one summer by some cousins of mine who lived in Dublin, and it was on their invitation that I was there.

I need not try your patience by attempting to describe it in detail. There was nothing very noteworthy about it except an almost ruinous tower at the north-west angle. This was obviously much older than the rest of the house, and we young people thought it ought to contain a ghost. We could not, however, hear of any story to that effect. We explored it pretty thoroughly, but found nothing more exciting than a very large quantity of dust and a few bats. We went there once late on a moonlight evening, but even then could not pretend that we saw or heard anything unusual.

The south side of the house consisted of three large rooms: a drawing-room at the western end, then a dining-room opening out of it and lastly a billiard-room which was also used as a gun-room. Probably, in fact, it had been built as a gun-room and the billiard-table had been added afterwards. It had a door leading into the garden, but there was no access to it from the house except from the dining-room.

The dining-room was hung with portraits of bygone Moores, who had no doubt played their several parts adequately in their generation. But none of them had reached fame and the pictures were of no outstanding artistic merit.

The collection as a whole looked well enough, but was not likely to be of much interest, except to members of the family.

One picture there was, however, which did arouse our curiosity. It represented a man of about thirty. There was no name or date upon the frame, but the dress was that of the closing years of the eighteenth century. The most remarkable thing about it was the attitude which the sitter had chosen to adopt. He was astride of a chair with his arms folded and resting on the top rail. His back was towards the spectator, so that his features would have been invisible if he had not been looking over his left shoulder. His face, so far as it could be seen, did not resemble a Moore. The upper part suggested considerable intellectual power; the lower part was not pleasant. The whole effect was formidable and bespoke a man who would be a very dangerous enemy.

The execution was not particularly good; in fact the technique suggested an amateur. But it was impossible not to feel that the artist had caught the likeness of his original well; and difficult not to regret that he had done so. We wondered why such a curious picture, which did not look like a family portrait, should be displayed so conspicuously. It looked as if there must be a story of some sort about it.

A few days later Captain Moore called. He was stationed at the Curragh, and having some business to transact in Dublin very civilly looked in to ask after his tenants' comfort. We ventured to put a question about the curious portrait.

'Yes,' he said, 'it's a fantastic thing, isn't it? Clever in a way though, and I should think a good likeness. But I don't know who it is any more than you do. It isn't one of the family— you'd guess that, I hope, by looking at it. All I know about it is that my great-grandfather— the old boy over there (here he pointed to a portrait of the same period which hung exactly opposite on the other side of the room)— stuck it up about the time of the Union. I rather think he painted it himself. Anyhow he was so keen about it that he left directions in his will that it was never to be moved. So there it's been ever since. I expect there is a story, if I knew what it was. I believe my great-grandfather had been pretty wild in his young days. A lot of his generation were dazzled by the French Revolution, y'know. I dare say it looked better at a distance than at close quarters. But while he was still pretty young— about the turn of the century, I think— he turned over a new leaf, Model Country Gentleman, Magistrate, Churchwarden, all that sort of thing, y'know, and I believe a really good man into the bargain. Very charitable and so on. Not very hospitable though, by all accounts. In fact during the last years of his life when he was a widower he would hardly see anybody, and I believe was nicknamed The Hermit. I remember once when I was a little chap, about six, I think, I was playing in the dining-room on a winter afternoon. I think the nursery chimney was being swept; anyhow I had been sent downstairs for some reason. It was getting dark— and something gave me a terrible fright.

The funny thing was that I couldn't say what it was and I don't know now. But I think it was something to do with that picture. I ran screaming into the drawing-room where my mother was and though I couldn't tell her what was the matter, I am sure that she thought it was that. When I had been comforted my father came in (he had been out shooting, I think) and she began to talk to him very earnestly. I wasn't meant to hear and don't suppose I should have understood much if I had, but I do recollect that she said something to the effect that it couldn't go on and that it wasn't as if this were the first time. And he said that he couldn't do— whatever it was she wanted him to do. I suppose now she was asking him to have the picture moved, or perhaps to get rid of it outright and he was reminding her of the clause in his grandfather's will. Of course ninety-nine women out of a hundred would see no reason why the wishes of someone who had been dead for more than fifty years should be allowed to interfere with their own. Anyhow, that was the nearest approach to a quarrel which my father and mother ever had, that I can remember. And the picture stopped in its place, as you see.

'I once asked him about it. He looked very grave and was silent for a minute or two, as if he were making up his mind about something. Then he said, "I'll tell you what I know about it some day, but not just now. You must wait until you are older," and I had to be content with that.

'Both he and my mother died soon afterwards, and I went to live with an uncle on her side (my father had been an only son), and the house was shut up for several years. So I never heard the story, whatever it may be. I expect old Barton at the lodge knows something about it. He's been on the place all his life, and his father and grandfather before him. But I'm pretty sure he wouldn't tell anybody if he did know.'

After Captain Moore had gone I went and examined the picture more closely than I had ever done before. I came to the conclusion that it was a cleverer thing, and a more repulsive subject, than I had thought at first. One thing perplexed me very much. I tried to put myself into the position of the sitter and found that I could not twist my head round as far as his. His chin was almost on his left shoulder. Why had he chosen to be painted in such an unnatural and indeed, as it seemed, impossible attitude? And how had he contrived to sit for it?

I don't think the expression Rubber-neck (which I believe to be American for Sightseer) had been coined then. Or if it had it hadn't crossed the Atlantic. But I can think of no one to whom it would be more appropriate.

A day or two afterwards I happened to see Barton in his garden and thought I would try whether there was anything to be got out of him. Like all his kind his conversational powers were remarkable and he was never unwilling to exercise them. Eventually, I got him on to the pictures in the house, and I thought that he

seemed to feel that he was being drawn towards thin ice. How would the like of him know anything about them, or photygrafts either? Sure, I must ask the young master about them, and wasn't he in the house only last week?

I recognized that Captain Moore's estimate of him as a source of information on this point had been accurate. A few nights afterwards when we were all in the drawing-room after dinner I had occasion to go to the billiard-room to fetch a book which I had left there. Dinner had been cleared away, so I took a candle to light me through the deserted dining-room. Just as I was passing the fireplace I was conscious of so strong a draught that my candle guttered and was nearly blown out. I supposed it was a down-draught, due to the large size of the chimney and to the fact that there was no fire in the grate, and rather wondered that we had never noticed it before. It was not a windy night, so that if there were a strong draught now one would suppose that it was a permanent feature of the room, and that whoever sat on that side of the table would want a screen behind his chair. But hitherto no one had made any complaint.

On my way back I was surprised to find the draught equally strong in the opposite direction. It was now sucking inwards towards the fireplace. I held my candle high, shielding it with the other hand, and looked round to see if there were an open window. But the windows were all securely shuttered, and the doors at each end of the room were shut. I could not account for any draught, much less for one which apparently changed its direction, almost as if it were due to the slow breathing of some gigantic creature crouching in the fireplace. While I stood there the inward draught suddenly ceased. After a moment's stillness there came an outward puff— really strong enough to be called a gust— which blew my candle out. This was too much. I groped my way to the end of the room as quickly as I could without stopping to light a match. Once out of the room I felt rather ashamed of myself for having been so easily scared. I suppose that was why I did not feel inclined to say anything about what had happened. Probably I said to myself there was really more wind outside than I had imagined, and of course a rambling old house was likely to be full of unaccountable draughts. Most likely this one depended upon the wind being exactly in one quarter, which was why we had not noticed it before, and more to the same effect, But I did not find this cogent reasoning convincing.

When I went to bed I looked out and everything seemed to be perfectly still. This, I was bound to admit, was as I had expected. Three nights later I had a curious dream. I dreamed that I was in the dining-room, and that the figure over the mantelpiece had come down from his frame. He was seated astride of a chair as he was painted, almost in the fireplace. His back was turned to the room, but instead of having his head upon his shoulder, it was turned away so that nothing could be seen of his features. He appeared to be speaking with great earnestness to an invisible personage who must have been stationed a

few feet up the chimney. I could not catch what he was saying, for he spoke very rapidly. But his tones were those of a person in deep distress.

When he had finished speaking there came a rumbling, moaning noise in the chimney, such as is made by the wind on stormy nights. This presently began to shape itself into words. At first they were not at all distinct, but gradually they became clearer, though they seemed to be in a language unknown to me. I wondered whether it could be Irish. The voice spoke very deliberately with a cold malignity of tone which made me feel very thankful that I could not follow what it was saying. There was something indescribably evil about it. It was the most unpleasant sound to which I have ever listened, asleep or awake. If fear can make the hair stand on end I must have resembled a clothes-brush.

At this point I woke, and it was more in obedience to some automatic instinct than to any reasoned courage that I decided to visit the dining-room. I do not know what, if anything, I expected to see. As I opened the door there was a grating sound, as if a chair were being hastily dragged across the uncarpeted part of the floor. But I told myself that that was caused by rats. The house abounded in them and everyone knows that they can make extraordinary noises. I suspect that they are at the bottom of a great many ghost stories.

I advanced to the fireplace, but beyond the fact that the hearthrug was curiously bundled up into a heap— a circumstance which did not for some reason strike me at the moment, though I wondered about it afterwards— there was nothing in the least unusual to be seen. My candle burned quite steadily as I held it high and looked round the silent empty room. I stared up at the odd, forbidding picture above the mantelpiece, but there did not seem to be anything to be got out of him. Upon the whole I was glad of that, for he did not look like the sort of person I should have chosen for a midnight *tête-à-tête*.

'Well,' I said aloud, addressing the portrait, 'I wish I knew rather more about you. But as you aren't in a position to explain yourself, I shall go back to bed.'

I did so; and slept soundly for the rest of the night.

Next morning I did not mention my dream to anyone else. Perhaps I was a little ashamed of it. Also the walls of Irish houses have even acuter ears than those elsewhere and I did not wish to be responsible for an outbreak of hysteria among the servants.

It so happened that I had no occasion to be in the dining-room alone after dark during the next day or two. Perhaps I was at pains not to be. No one commented upon the curious draught which I had noticed. Indeed I do not think it was perceptible in the daytime. My dreams, when I had any, were, as usual, entirely commonplace.

One evening, when my visit was nearly at an end, one of my cousins and I were sitting talking in the billiard-room after the rest of the family had gone to bed. Our conversation turned on ghosts and apparitions of various kinds; a

subject in which we both took a keen if sceptical interest. Dreams and their value (this was before the days of psychoanalysis) and the possibility of their coming true were also discussed and it was past midnight when we got up to go to bed. We then found that there were no bedroom candles for us. Presumably they had been left in the dining-room or in the hall beyond it. The oil lamp by which we were sitting was too big and heavy to take with us. As it was past the middle of September and the day had been wet we had had fires in the sitting-rooms. The dining-room fire had been burning brightly when we finished dinner, so that it was probable that there would still be enough of it left to prevent our passage through the room from offering any insurmountable obstacles. So we put the lamp out and prepared to go.

As soon as we opened the door we saw that our surmise had been correct. There was a sufficient glow in the fireplace to light us down the room. But we had hardly taken a step before we were startled by a rapid thudding sound, such as might be produced by a big dog beating his tail upon the floor. There was a dog about the place, but at night he had his own quarters in the stable-yard. Even if he had not been put to bed then properly— as might very well be the case in a household of Irish servants— he had certainly not been in the dining-room during dinner and could hardly have got there since.

The thudding ceased as suddenly as it had begun. But next moment we were even more startled by seeing the fire beginning to disappear. I remembered a story which I had once read— by H. G. Wells, I think. In it the lights in a haunted room go out one by one and as the occupant rushes to the fire to rekindle them that too dies away into absolute blackness.

But we soon saw that our fire was not going out like that. It was being obscured by some large dark object which was rising from the ground between ourselves and it. It was as if the hearthrug were slowly humping itself into the form of an animal of some kind. It rose and rose without a sound. Soon it was larger than any dog and its movement had somehow an uncanny suggestion of deliberate and malign purpose. Its bulk and outline, so far as we could make them out, suggested a bear more than anything else. But the head was not shaped like that of a bear. There was something more than half-human about the outline which made it peculiarly horrible. There seemed to be a nose not in the least like the snout of any animal. Presently no vestige of the fire was to be seen. Then it suddenly reappeared. The creature, whatever it was, had gone up the chimney.

We felt that the longer we waited there the less we should like it, so as soon as the coast was clear we ran down the room as hard as we could go, keeping as close as possible to the side away from the fireplace.

There was plenty of firelight in the drawing-room and we soon laid hands on our candles and made our way upstairs. Our bedrooms opened into each other

and we left the door standing wide. I do not think either of us slept well, but there was nothing to disturb us except the owls, who (we both thought) were noisier than usual.

Next day we told our story to the rest of the family and I added what I had to say about the mysterious draught and my dream. Of course there was only one thing to be done. The whole thing must be laid before Captain Moore as soon as possible.

Meanwhile the doors of the dining-room must be kept locked and meals served in another room, which a house-agent would probably have called The Breakfast Parlour. I was obliged to return to England on the following day, so it was some weeks before I heard the sequel.

In response to an urgent if guarded letter Captain Moore came over from the Curragh as soon as he could get a few days' leave. He soon knew all that there was to tell. His first step was to pay a visit to the lodge, but unfortunately the day before his arrival Barton had had a stroke from which he never recovered. He seemed to recognize his master and to be glad to see him. But he was in no state to be questioned. He died that night. Next day his daughter, who lived with him, told us that after Captain Moore's visit her father seemed to have something on his mind. Just after midnight he sat up and made an effort to say something. The only words she could make out sounded like 'trouble' and 'back of the picture.' Immediately afterwards he fell back on his pillow and expired.

This was something to go upon. The queer portrait must be meant. A step-ladder was procured and Captain Moore and my cousins set to work. It took them longer than they had expected, as the picture was not hung in the usual way. A number of long screws had been driven through the frame, which was very solid, into the panelling of the wall behind. At last they were all got out; not without difficulty, though they did not seem to be particularly rusty. The immediate result was disappointing. There was nothing to be seen either on the back of the picture or the surface of the wall.

Then somebody noticed what looked like a fine crack running across the top of one panel just below the raised frame containing it. Closer examination showed that the wood had been cut through on all four sides with a very sharp knife. A little picking at the top and out it came, disclosing a cavity, obviously the work of an amateur mason, in the thickness of the wall. In it reposed a small book, about nine inches long by five broad. At the top of the title-page were the two words **THE CLUB** and underneath was a list of twelve names; presumably those of the members. Several of them belonged to families still represented in the neighbourhood. The last was Robert Moore, Captain Moore's great-grandfather.

By this time lunch was ready, so further research was postponed.

When the party returned reinvigorated to their task they discovered, as was not unexpected, that what they had found was an informal minute-book.

It was apparently the custom of the Club to dine once each month with one of the members and discuss topics of general interest. The first dinner was held on 14 July 1778. There were notes as to the amount of wine consumed, which need not be recorded here. One would imagine that the members of the Club must have acted on the principle which was adopted subsequently by Mr. Jorrocks— 'Where I dines I sleeps and where I sleeps I breakfasts.'

There were also notes of the discussions. These were more interesting. At first they were principally political. The recent revolt of the American colonies appeared more than once, and though no formal vote was ever taken, it was obvious that opinion was divided as to the character of George Washington. Some members regarded him as a high-minded patriot; others as a sordid tobacco-planter who did not want to make any contribution to the cost of the campaigns to which he and his like owed their security and prosperity.

The revolution in France also aroused much interest. General opinion seemed to have been more favourable to it than most people— at any rate in England— would have approved. But the members of the Club were probably all young enough to feel it their duty as well as their pleasure to ventilate opinions which would have shocked their elders could they have heard them.

As time went on the tone of the meetings became less innocent. A certain amount of profanity began to appear, and once or twice some rather vague entries suggested some dabbling in black magic. At one dinner, held in the year 1797, there was a note— 'The President's Health was drunk in bumpers with [probably acclamation,' but the fact that the writer had changed his mind more than once as to the proper spelling of the word, added to two considerable blots, had made it indecipherable]. On the next page was a plan of the table with the name of each member against his place. There were six on each side; no one at top or bottom. The top was, however, marked with a X. From this time onwards there were frequent references to The President, but curiously his name was never given. The minutes were usually initialled J.B. James Butler was the first name in the original list, so was presumably that of the senior member. It was not, however, clear whether he was to be identified with the President. Near the end of the book was an entry in a different hand. It ran:

'The Club is dissolved. Lord have mercy upon us.'

It was signed Robt. Moore and dated 23 September, 1799. My odd experiences had culminated on 23 September, 1899. There was nothing else in the cavity in the wall except two small scraps of paper. They had obviously been part of a larger sheet which had been torn up. What had become of the rest it was impossible to say. On one appeared the words *like a bear*, on the other *clean broak*. That was all.

Despite his ancestor's wishes Captain Moore felt justified in destroying the portrait. It was soon hacked to pieces and the bonfire which it made in the garden consumed the minute-book of the Club as well. The panel was replaced and another picture hung over it. As far as I know there were no further disturbances. Perhaps a century is a kind of statute of limitations in such matters. We do not understand them sufficiently to be able to speak positively about them.

It seems pretty clear that at its last meeting the Club somehow got more than it had bargained for. But it is impossible to reconstruct exactly what had happened. Who was the President, and was the last meeting the first at which he was actually present? Was the queer portrait, which was presumably Robert Moore's work, intended to operate as a warning, like the public executions which were then in vogue?

Some years afterwards I happened to find myself sitting next to an Irish clergyman at a public dinner. He was incumbent of a parish near Dublin, he told me. As the evening wore on, and the tide of speech-making flowed strongly, our talk, in the intervals, turned on superstitions.

'It's queer,' he said, 'the way they lay hold of people for no reason that anyone can see. Now there is one grave in my churchyard that the people won't go near. And when we turn in sheep to keep the grass down the farmer always sends a boy to see that they don't graze by it. It's a nuisance, because we always have to scythe that bit— and the sexton doesn't like doing it either. It's an ugly, pompous thing to a member of a family that used to be well known there, I believe, though there's not been any of them about these fifty years. But why there should be anything unlucky or wrong about it I don't know. I'm not sure that the people do. Anyhow, if they do you won't get it out of them.'

'I wonder,' I said, 'whether the occupant is named James Butler and whether he died on 23 September, 1799?'

'Why, yes,' he said. 'But how in the world do you know anything about it?'

'Oh, I used to have relations with whom I sometimes stayed in that neighbourhood.'

I thought that was as much as I need tell him.

End