PAST MASTERS 222

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and more

PAST MASTERS 222

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

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1: The Second Bullet

Anna Katharine Green

1846-1935

In: *The Golden Slipper*, 1915

"YOU MUST see her."

"No. No."

"She's a most unhappy woman. Husband and child both taken from her in a moment; and now, all means of living as well, unless some happy thought of yours— some inspiration of your genius— shows us a way of re-establishing her claims to the policy voided by this cry of suicide."

But the small wise head of Violet Strange continued its slow shake of decided refusal.

"I'm sorry," she protested, "but it's quite out of my province. I'm too young to meddle with so serious a matter."

"Not when you can save a bereaved woman the only possible compensation left her by untoward fate?"

"Let the police try their hand at that."

"They have had no success with the case."

"Or you?"

"Nor I either."

"And you expect—"

"Yes, Miss Strange. I expect you to find the missing bullet which will settle the fact that murder and not suicide ended George Hammond's life. If you cannot, then a long litigation awaits this poor widow, ending, as such litigation usually does, in favour of the stronger party. There's the alternative. If you once saw her—"

"But that's what I'm not willing to do. If I once saw her I should yield to her importunities and attempt the seemingly impossible. My instincts bid me say no. Give me something easier."

"Easier things are not so remunerative. There's money in this affair, if the insurance company is forced to pay up. I can offer you—"

"What?"

There was eagerness in the tone despite her effort at nonchalance. The other smiled imperceptibly, and briefly named the sum.

It was larger than she had expected. This her visitor saw by the way her eyelids fell and the peculiar stillness which, for an instant, held her vivacity in check.

"And you think I can earn that?"

Her eyes were fixed on his in an eagerness as honest as it was unrestrained.

He could hardly conceal his amazement, her desire was so evident and the cause of it so difficult to understand. He knew she wanted money— that was her avowed reason for entering into this uncongenial work. But to want it so much! He glanced at her person; it was simply clad but very expensively— how expensively it was his business to know. Then he took in the room in which they sat. Simplicity again, but the simplicity of high art— the drawing-room of one rich enough to indulge in the final luxury of a highly cultivated taste, viz.: unostentatious elegance and the subjection of each carefully chosen ornament to the general effect.

What did this favoured child of fortune lack that she could be reached by such a plea, when her whole being revolted from the nature of the task he offered her? It was a question not new to him; but one he had never heard answered and was not likely to hear answered now. But the fact remained that the consent he had thought dependent upon sympathetic interest could be reached much more readily by the promise of large emolument,— and he owned to a feeling of secret disappointment even while he recognized the value of the discovery.

But his satisfaction in the latter, if satisfaction it were, was of very short duration. Almost immediately he observed a change in her. The sparkle which had shone in the eye whose depths he had never been able to penetrate, had dissipated itself in something like a tear and she spoke up in that vigorous tone no one but himself had ever heard, as she said:

"No. The sum is a good one and I could use it; but I will not waste my energy on a case I do not believe in. The man shot himself. He was a speculator, and probably had good reason for his act. Even his wife acknowledges that he has lately had more losses than gains."

"See her. She has something to tell you which never got into the papers."

"You say that? You know that?"

"On my honour, Miss Strange."

Violet pondered; then suddenly succumbed.

"Let her come, then. Prompt to the hour. I will receive her at three. Later I have a tea and two party calls to make."

Her visitor rose to leave. He had been able to subdue all evidence of his extreme gratification, and now took on a formal air. In dismissing a guest, Miss Strange was invariably the society belle and that only. This he had come to recognize.

The case (well known at the time) was, in the fewest possible words, as follows:

On a sultry night in September, a young couple living in one of the large apartment houses in the extreme upper portion of Manhattan were so annoyed by the incessant crying of a child in the adjoining suite, that they got up, he to

smoke, and she to sit in the window for a possible breath of cool air. They were congratulating themselves upon the wisdom they had shown in thus giving up all thought of sleep— for the child's crying had not ceased— when (it may have been two o'clock and it may have been a little later) there came from somewhere near, the sharp and somewhat peculiar detonation of a pistol-shot.

He thought it came from above; she, from the rear, and they were staring at each other in the helpless wonder of the moment, when they were struck by the silence. The baby had ceased to cry. All was as still in the adjoining apartment as in their own— too still— much too still. Their mutual stare turned to one of horror. "It came from there!" whispered the wife. "Some accident has occurred to Mr. or Mrs. Hammond— we ought to go—"

Her words— very tremulous ones— were broken by a shout from below. They were standing in their window and had evidently been seen by a passing policeman. "Anything wrong up there?" they heard him cry. Mr. Saunders immediately looked out. "Nothing wrong here," he called down. (They were but two stories from the pavement.) "But I'm not so sure about the rear apartment. We thought we heard a shot. Hadn't you better come up, officer? My wife is nervous about it. I'll meet you at the stair-head and show you the way."

The officer nodded and stepped in. The young couple hastily donned some wraps, and, by the time he appeared on their floor, they were ready to accompany him.

Meanwhile, no disturbance was apparent anywhere else in the house, until the policeman rang the bell of the Hammond apartment. Then, voices began to be heard, and doors to open above and below, but not the one before which the policeman stood.

Another ring, and this time an insistent one;— and still no response. The officer's hand was rising for the third time when there came a sound of fluttering from behind the panels against which he had laid his ear, and finally a choked voice uttering unintelligible words. Then a hand began to struggle with the lock, and the door, slowly opening, disclosed a woman clad in a hastily donned wrapper and giving every evidence of extreme fright.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, seeing only the compassionate faces of her neighbours. "You heard it, too! a pistol-shot from there— there— my husband's room. I have not dared to go— I— I— O, have mercy and see if anything is wrong! It is so still— so still, and only a moment ago the baby was crying. Mrs. Saunders, Mrs. Saunders, why is it so still?"

She had fallen into her neighbour's arms. The hand with which she had pointed out a certain door had sunk to her side and she appeared to be on the verge of collapse.

The officer eyed her sternly, while noting her appearance, which was that of a woman hastily risen from bed.

"Where were you?" he asked. "Not with your husband and child, or you would know what had happened there."

"I was sleeping down the hall," she managed to gasp out. "I'm not well— I— Oh, why do you all stand still and do nothing? My baby's in there. Go! go!" and, with sudden energy, she sprang upright, her eyes wide open and burning, her small well featured face white as the linen she sought to hide.

The officer demurred no longer. In another instant he was trying the door at which she was again pointing.

It was locked.

Glancing back at the woman, now cowering almost to the floor, he pounded at the door and asked the man inside to open.

No answer came back.

With a sharp turn he glanced again at the wife.

"You say that your husband is in this room?"

She nodded, gasping faintly, "And the child!"

He turned back, listened, then beckoned to Mr. Saunders. "We shall have to break our way in," said he. "Put your shoulder well to the door. Now!"

The hinges of the door creaked; the lock gave way (this special officer weighed two hundred and seventy-five, as he found out, next day), and a prolonged and sweeping crash told the rest.

Mrs. Hammond gave a low cry; and, straining forward from where she crouched in terror on the floor, searched the faces of the two men for some hint of what they saw in the dimly-lighted space beyond. Something dreadful, something which made Mr. Saunders come rushing back with a shout:

"Take her away! Take her to our apartment, Jennie. She must not see— "

Not see! He realized the futility of his words as his gaze fell on the young woman who had risen up at his approach and now stood gazing at him without speech, without movement, but with a glare of terror in her eyes, which gave him his first realization of human misery.

His own glance fell before it. If he had followed his instinct he would have fled the house rather than answer the question of her look and the attitude of her whole frozen body.

Perhaps in mercy to his speechless terror, perhaps in mercy to herself, she was the one who at last found the word which voiced their mutual anguish.

"Dead?"

No answer. None was needed.

"And my baby?"

O, that cry! It curdled the hearts of all who heard it. It shook the souls of men and women both inside and outside the apartment; then all was forgotten in the wild rush she made. The wife and mother had flung herself upon the

scene, and, side by side with the not unmoved policeman, stood looking down upon the desolation made in one fatal instant in her home and heart.

They lay there together, both past help, both quite dead. The child had simply been strangled by the weight of his father's arm which lay directly across the upturned little throat. But the father was a victim of the shot they had heard. There was blood on his breast, and a pistol in his hand.

Suicide! The horrible truth was patent. No wonder they wanted to hold the young widow back. Her neighbour, Mrs. Saunders, crept in on tiptoe and put her arms about the swaying, fainting woman; but there was nothing to say— absolutely nothing.

At least, they thought not. But when they saw her throw herself down, not by her husband, but by the child, and drag it out from under that strangling arm and hug and kiss it and call out wildly for a doctor, the officer endeavoured to interfere and yet could not find the heart to do so, though he knew the child was dead and should not, according to all the rules of the coroner's office, be moved before that official arrived. Yet because no mother could be convinced of a fact like this, he let her sit with it on the floor and try all her little arts to revive it, while he gave orders to the janitor and waited himself for the arrival of doctor and coroner.

She was still sitting there in wide-eyed misery, alternately fondling the little body and drawing back to consult its small set features for some sign of life, when the doctor came, and, after one look at the child, drew it softly from her arms and laid it quietly in the crib from which its father had evidently lifted it but a short time before. Then he turned back to her, and found her on her feet, upheld by her two friends. She had understood his action, and without a groan had accepted her fate. Indeed, she seemed incapable of any further speech or action. She was staring down at her husband's body, which she, for the first time, seemed fully to see. Was her look one of grief or of resentment for the part he had played so unintentionally in her child's death? It was hard to tell; and when, with slowly rising finger, she pointed to the pistol so tightly clutched in the other outstretched hand, no one there— and by this time the room was full— could foretell what her words would be when her tongue regained its usage and she could speak.

What she did say was this:

"Is there a bullet gone? Did he fire off that pistol?" A question so manifestly one of delirium that no one answered it, which seemed to surprise her, though she said nothing till her glance had passed all around the walls of the room to where a window stood open to the night,— its lower sash being entirely raised. "There! look there!" she cried, with a commanding accent, and, throwing up her hands, sank a dead weight into the arms of those supporting her.

No one understood; but naturally more than one rushed to the window. An open space was before them. Here lay the fields not yet parcelled out into lots and built upon; but it was not upon these they looked, but upon the strong trellis which they found there, which, if it supported no vine, formed a veritable ladder between this window and the ground.

Could she have meant to call attention to this fact; and were her words expressive of another idea than the obvious one of suicide?

If so, to what lengths a woman's imagination can go! Or so their combined looks seemed to proclaim, when to their utter astonishment they saw the officer, who had presented a calm appearance up till now, shift his position and with a surprised grunt direct their eyes to a portion of the wall just visible beyond the half-drawn curtains of the bed. The mirror hanging there showed a star-shaped breakage, such as follows the sharp impact of a bullet or a fiercely projected stone.

"He fired two shots. One went wild; the other straight home."

It was the officer delivering his opinion.

Mr. Saunders, returning from the distant room where he had assisted in carrying Mrs. Hammond, cast a look at the shattered glass, and remarked forcibly:

"I heard but one; and I was sitting up, disturbed by that poor infant. Jennie, did you hear more than one shot?" he asked, turning toward his wife.

"No," she answered, but not with the readiness he had evidently expected. "I heard only one, but that was not quite usual in its tone. I'm used to guns," she explained, turning to the officer. "My father was an army man, and he taught me very early to load and fire a pistol. There was a prolonged sound to this shot; something like an echo of itself, following close upon the first ping. Didn't you notice that, Warren?"

"I remember something of the kind," her husband allowed.

"He shot twice and quickly," interposed the policeman, sententiously. "We shall find a spent bullet back of that mirror."

But when, upon the arrival of the coroner, an investigation was made of the mirror and the wall behind, no bullet was found either there or any where else in the room, save in the dead man's breast. Nor had more than one been shot from his pistol, as five full chambers testified. The case which seemed so simple had its mysteries, but the assertion made by Mrs. Saunders no longer carried weight, nor was the evidence offered by the broken mirror considered as indubitably establishing the fact that a second shot had been fired in the room.

Yet it was equally evident that the charge which had entered the dead speculator's breast had not been delivered at the close range of the pistol found clutched in his hand. There were no powder-marks to be discerned on his pajama-jacket, or on the flesh beneath. Thus anomaly confronted anomaly,

leaving open but one other theory: that the bullet found in Mr. Hammond's breast came from the window and the one he shot went out of it. But this would necessitate his having shot his pistol from a point far removed from where he was found; and his wound was such as made it difficult to believe that he would stagger far, if at all, after its infliction.

Yet, because the coroner was both conscientious and alert, he caused a most rigorous search to be made of the ground overlooked by the above mentioned window; a search in which the police joined, but which was without any result save that of rousing the attention of people in the neighbourhood and leading to a story being circulated of a man seen some time the night before crossing the fields in a great hurry. But as no further particulars were forthcoming, and not even a description of the man to be had, no emphasis would have been laid upon this story had it not transpired that the moment a report of it had come to Mrs. Hammond's ears (why is there always some one to carry these reports?) she roused from the torpor into which she had fallen, and in wild fashion exclaimed:

"I knew it! I expected it! He was shot through the window and by that wretch. He never shot himself." Violent declarations which trailed off into the one continuous wail, "O, my baby! my poor baby!"

Such words, even though the fruit of delirium, merited some sort of attention, or so this good coroner thought, and as soon as opportunity offered and she was sufficiently sane and quiet to respond to his questions, he asked her whom she had meant by that wretch, and what reason she had, or thought she had, of attributing her husband's death to any other agency than his own disgust with life.

And then it was that his sympathies, although greatly roused in her favour began to wane. She met the question with a cold stare followed by a few ambiguous words out of which he could make nothing. Had she said wretch? She did not remember. They must not be influenced by anything she might have uttered in her first grief. She was well-nigh insane at the time. But of one thing they might be sure: her husband had not shot himself; he was too much afraid of death for such an act. Besides, he was too happy. Whatever folks might say he was too fond of his family to wish to leave it.

Nor did the coroner or any other official succeed in eliciting anything further from her. Even when she was asked, with cruel insistence, how she explained the fact that the baby was found lying on the floor instead of in its crib, her only answer was: "His father was trying to soothe it. The child was crying dreadfully, as you have heard from those who were kept awake by him that night, and my husband was carrying him about when the shot came which caused George to fall and overlay the baby in his struggles."

"Carrying a baby about with a loaded pistol in his hand?" came back in stern retort.

She had no answer for this. She admitted when informed that the bullet extracted from her husband's body had been found to correspond exactly with those remaining in the five chambers of the pistol taken from his hand, that he was not only the owner of this pistol but was in the habit of sleeping with it under his pillow; but, beyond that, nothing; and this reticence, as well as her manner which was cold and repellent, told against her.

A verdict of suicide was rendered by the coroner's jury, and the life-insurance company, in which Mr. Hammond had but lately insured himself for a large sum, taking advantage of the suicide clause embodied in the policy, announced its determination of not paying the same.

Such was the situation, as known to Violet Strange and the general public, on the day she was asked to see Mrs. Hammond and learn what might alter her opinion as to the justice of this verdict and the stand taken by the Shuler Life Insurance Company.

The clock on the mantel in Miss Strange's rose-coloured boudoir had struck three, and Violet was gazing in some impatience at the door, when there came a gentle knock upon it, and the maid (one of the elderly, not youthful, kind) ushered in her expected visitor.

"You are Mrs. Hammond?" she asked, in natural awe of the too black figure outlined so sharply against the deep pink of the sea-shell room.

The answer was a slow lifting of the veil which shadowed the features she knew only from the cuts she had seen in newspapers.

"You are— Miss Strange?" stammered her visitor; "the young lady who—"

"I am," chimed in a voice as ringing as it was sweet. "I am the person you have come here to see. And this is my home. But that does not make me less interested in the unhappy, or less desirous of serving them. Certainly you have met with the two greatest losses which can come to a woman— I know your story well enough to say that—; but what have you to tell me in proof that you should not lose your anticipated income as well? Something vital, I hope, else I cannot help you; something which you should have told the coroner's jury— and did not."

The flush which was the sole answer these words called forth did not take from the refinement of the young widow's expression, but rather added to it; Violet watched it in its ebb and flow and, seriously affected by it (why, she did not know, for Mrs. Hammond had made no other appeal either by look or gesture), pushed forward a chair and begged her visitor to be seated.

"We can converse in perfect safety here," she said. "When you feel quite equal to it, let me hear what you have to communicate. It will never go any further. I could not do the work I do if I felt it necessary to have a confidant."

"But you are so young and so— so—"

"So inexperienced you would say and so evidently a member of what New Yorkers call 'society.' Do not let that trouble you. My inexperience is not likely to last long and my social pleasures are more apt to add to my efficiency than to detract from it."

With this Violet's face broke into a smile. It was not the brilliant one so often seen upon her lips, but there was something in its quality which carried encouragement to the widow and led her to say with obvious eagerness:

"You know the facts?"

"I have read all the papers."

"I was not believed on the stand."

"It was your manner—"

"I could not help my manner. I was keeping something back, and, being unused to deceit, I could not act quite naturally."

"Why did you keep something back? When you saw the unfavourable impression made by your reticence, why did you not speak up and frankly tell your story?"

"Because I was ashamed. Because I thought it would hurt me more to speak than to keep silent. I do not think so now; but I did then— and so made my great mistake. You must remember not only the awful shock of my double loss, but the sense of guilt accompanying it; for my husband and I had quarreled that night, quarreled bitterly— that was why I had run away into another room and not because I was feeling ill and impatient of the baby's fretful cries."

"So people have thought." In saying this, Miss Strange was perhaps cruelly emphatic. "You wish to explain that quarrel? You think it will be doing any good to your cause to go into that matter with me now?"

"I cannot say; but I must first clear my conscience and then try to convince you that quarrel or no quarrel, he never took his own life. He was not that kind. He had an abnormal fear of death. I do not like to say it but he was a physical coward. I have seen him turn pale at the least hint of danger. He could no more have turned that muzzle upon his own breast than he could have turned it upon his baby. Some other hand shot him, Miss Strange. Remember the open window, the shattered mirror; and I think I know that hand."

Her head had fallen forward on her breast. The emotion she showed was not so eloquent of grief as of deep personal shame.

"You think you know the man?" In saying this, Violet's voice sunk to a whisper. It was an accusation of murder she had just heard.

"To my great distress, yes. When Mr. Hammond and I were married," the widow now proceeded in a more determined tone, "there was another man— a very violent one— who vowed even at the church door that George and I should

never live out two full years together. We have not. Our second anniversary would have been in November."

"But—"

"Let me say this: the quarrel of which I speak was not serious enough to occasion any such act of despair on his part. A man would be mad to end his life on account of so slight a disagreement. It was not even on account of the person of whom I've just spoken, though that person had been mentioned between us earlier in the evening, Mr. Hammond having come across him face to face that very afternoon in the subway. Up to this time neither of us had seen or heard of him since our wedding-day."

"And you think this person whom you barely mentioned, so mindful of his old grudge that he sought out your domicile, and, with the intention of murder, climbed the trellis leading to your room and turned his pistol upon the shadowy figure which was all he could see in the semi-obscurity of a much lowered gas-jet?"

"A man in the dark does not need a bright light to see his enemy when he is intent upon revenge."

Miss Strange altered her tone.

"And your husband? You must acknowledge that he shot off his pistol whether the other did or not."

"It was in self-defence. He would shoot to save his own life— or the baby's."

"Then he must have heard or seen—"

"A man at the window."

"And would have shot there?"

"Or tried to."

"Tried to?"

"Yes; the other shot first— oh, I've thought it all out— causing my husband's bullet to go wild. It was his which broke the mirror."

Violet's eyes, bright as stars, suddenly narrowed.

"And what happened then?" she asked. "Why cannot they find the bullet?"

"Because it went out of the window;— glanced off and went out of the window."

Mrs. Hammond's tone was triumphant; her look spirited and intense.

Violet eyed her compassionately.

"Would a bullet glancing off from a mirror, however hung, be apt to reach a window so far on the opposite side?"

"I don't know; I only know that it did," was the contradictory, almost absurd, reply.

"What was the cause of the quarrel you speak of between your husband and yourself? You see, I must know the exact truth and all the truth to be of any assistance to you."

"It was— it was about the care I gave, or didn't give, the baby. I feel awfully to have to say it, but George did not think I did my full duty by the child. He said there was no need of its crying so; that if I gave it the proper attention it would not keep the neighbours and himself awake half the night. And I— I got angry and insisted that I did the best I could; that the child was naturally fretful and that if he wasn't satisfied with my way of looking after it, he might try his. All of which was very wrong and unreasonable on my part, as witness the awful punishment which followed."

"And what made you get up and leave him?"

"The growl he gave me in reply. When I heard that, I bounded out of bed and said I was going to the spare room to sleep; and if the baby cried he might just try what he could do himself to stop it."

"And he answered?"

"This, just this— I shall never forget his words as long as I live— 'If you go, you need not expect me to let you in again no matter what happens.' "

"He said that?"

"And locked the door after me. You see I could not tell all that."

"It might have been better if you had. It was such a natural quarrel and so unprovocative of actual tragedy."

Mrs. Hammond was silent. It was not difficult to see that she had no very keen regrets for her husband personally. But then he was not a very estimable man nor in any respect her equal.

"You were not happy with him," Violet ventured to remark.

"I was not a fully contented woman. But for all that he had no cause to complain of me except for the reason I have mentioned. I was not a very intelligent mother. But if the baby were living now— O, if he were living now— with what devotion I should care for him."

She was on her feet, her arms were raised, her face impassioned with feeling. Violet, gazing at her, heaved a little sigh. It was perhaps in keeping with the situation, perhaps extraneous to it, but whatever its source, it marked a change in her manner. With no further check upon her sympathy, she said very softly:

"It is well with the child."

The mother stiffened, swayed, and then burst into wild weeping.

"But not with me," she cried, "not with me. I am desolate and bereft. I have not even a home in which to hide my grief and no prospect of one."

"But," interposed Violet, "surely your husband left you something? You cannot be quite penniless?"

"My husband left nothing," was the answer, uttered without bitterness, but with all the hardness of fact. "He had debts. I shall pay those debts. When these and other necessary expenses are liquidated, there will be but little left. He

made no secret of the fact that he lived close up to his means. That is why he was induced to take on a life insurance. Not a friend of his but knows his improvidence. I— I have not even jewels. I have only my determination and an absolute conviction as to the real nature of my husband's death."

"What is the name of the man you secretly believe to have shot your husband from the trellis?"

Mrs. Hammond told her.

It was a new one to Violet. She said so and then asked:

"What else can you tell me about him?"

"Nothing, but that he is a very dark man and has a club-foot."

"Oh, what a mistake you've made."

"Mistake? Yes, I acknowledge that."

"I mean in not giving this last bit of information at once to the police. A man can be identified by such a defect. Even his footsteps can be traced. He might have been found that very day. Now, what have we to go upon?"

"You are right, but not expecting to have any difficulty about the insurance money I thought it would be generous in me to keep still. Besides, this is only surmise on my part. I feel certain that my husband was shot by another hand than his own, but I know of no way of proving it. Do you?"

Then Violet talked seriously with her, explaining how their only hope lay in the discovery of a second bullet in the room which had already been ransacked for this very purpose and without the shadow of a result.

A tea, a musicale, and an evening dance kept Violet Strange in a whirl for the remainder of the day. No brighter eye nor more contagious wit lent brilliance to these occasions, but with the passing of the midnight hour no one who had seen her in the blaze of electric lights would have recognized this favoured child of fortune in the earnest figure sitting in the obscurity of an up-town apartment, studying the walls, the ceilings, and the floors by the dim light of a lowered gas-jet. Violet Strange in society was a very different person from Violet Strange under the tension of her secret and peculiar work.

She had told them at home that she was going to spend the night with a friend; but only her old coachman knew who that friend was. Therefore a very natural sense of guilt mingled with her emotions at finding herself alone on a scene whose gruesome mystery she could solve only by identifying herself with the place and the man who had perished there.

Dismissing from her mind all thought of self, she strove to think as he thought, and act as he acted on the night when he found himself (a man of but little courage) left in this room with an ailing child.

At odds with himself, his wife, and possibly with the child screaming away in its crib, what would he be apt to do in his present emergency? Nothing at first, but as the screaming continued he would remember the old tales of fathers

walking the floor at night with crying babies, and hasten to follow suit. Violet, in her anxiety to reach his inmost thought, crossed to where the crib had stood, and, taking that as a start, began pacing the room in search of the spot from which a bullet, if shot, would glance aside from the mirror in the direction of the window. (Not that she was ready to accept this theory of Mrs. Hammond, but that she did not wish to entirely dismiss it without putting it to the test.)

She found it in an unexpected quarter of the room and much nearer the bed-head than where his body was found. This, which might seem to confuse matters, served, on the contrary to remove from the case one of its most serious difficulties. Standing here, he was within reach of the pillow under which his pistol lay hidden, and if startled, as his wife believed him to have been by a noise at the other end of the room, had but to crouch and reach behind him in order to find himself armed and ready for a possible intruder.

Imitating his action in this as in other things, she had herself crouched low at the bedside and was on the point of withdrawing her hand from under the pillow, when a new surprise checked her movement and held her fixed in her position, with eyes staring straight at the adjoining wall. She had seen there what he must have seen in making this same turn— the dark bars of the opposite window-frame outlined in the mirror— and understood at once what had happened. In the nervousness and terror of the moment, George Hammond had mistaken this reflection of the window for the window itself, and shot impulsively at the man he undoubtedly saw covering him from the trellis without. But while this explained the shattering of the mirror, how about the other and still more vital question, of where the bullet went afterward? Was the angle at which it had been fired acute enough to send it out of a window diagonally opposed? No; even if the pistol had been held closer to the man firing it than she had reason to believe, the angle still would be oblique enough to carry it on to the further wall.

But no sign of any such impact had been discovered on this wall. Consequently, the force of the bullet had been expended before reaching it, and when it fell—

Here, her glance, slowly traveling along the floor, impetuously paused. It had reached the spot where the two bodies had been found, and unconsciously her eyes rested there, conjuring up the picture of the bleeding father and the strangled child. How piteous and how dreadful it all was. If she could only understand— Suddenly she rose straight up, staring and immovable in the dim light. Had the idea— the explanation— the only possible explanation covering the whole phenomena come to her at last?

It would seem so, for as she so stood, a look of conviction settled over her features, and with this look, evidences of a horror which for all her fast

accumulating knowledge of life and its possibilities made her appear very small and very helpless.

A half-hour later, when Mrs. Hammond, in her anxiety at hearing nothing more from Miss Strange, opened the door of her room, it was to find, lying on the edge of the sill, the little detective's card with these words hastily written across it:

I do not feel as well as I could wish, and so have telephoned to my own coachman to come and take me home. I will either see or write you within a few days. But do not allow yourself to hope. I pray you do not allow yourself the least hope; the outcome is still very problematical.

When Violet's employer entered his office the next morning it was to find a veiled figure awaiting him which he at once recognized as that of his little deputy. She was slow in lifting her veil and when it finally came free he felt a momentary doubt as to his wisdom in giving her just such a matter as this to investigate. He was quite sure of his mistake when he saw her face, it was so drawn and pitiful.

"You have failed," said he.

"Of that you must judge," she answered; and drawing near she whispered in his ear.

"No!" he cried in his amazement.

"Think," she murmured, "think. Only so can all the facts be accounted for."

"I will look into it; I will certainly look into it," was his earnest reply. "If you are right— But never mind that. Go home and take a horseback ride in the Park. When I have news in regard to this I will let you know. Till then forget it all. Hear me, I charge you to forget everything but your balls and your parties."

And Violet obeyed him.

Some few days after this, the following statement appeared in all the papers:

"Owing to some remarkable work done by the firm of — — & — — , the well-known private detective agency, the claim made by Mrs. George Hammond against the Shuler Life Insurance Company is likely to be allowed without further litigation. As our readers will remember, the contestant has insisted from the first that the bullet causing her husband's death came from another pistol than the one found clutched in his own hand. But while reasons were not lacking to substantiate this assertion, the failure to discover more than the disputed track of a second bullet led to a verdict of suicide, and a refusal of the company to pay.

"But now that bullet has been found. And where? In the most startling place in the world, viz.: in the larynx of the child found lying dead upon the floor beside his father, strangled as was supposed by the weight of that father's arm. The theory is, and there seems to be none other, that the father, hearing a

suspicious noise at the window, set down the child he was endeavouring to soothe and made for the bed and his own pistol, and, mistaking a reflection of the assassin for the assassin himself, sent his shot sidewise at a mirror just as the other let go the trigger which drove a similar bullet into his breast. The course of the one was straight and fatal and that of the other deflected. Striking the mirror at an oblique angle, the bullet fell to the floor where it was picked up by the crawling child, and, as was most natural, thrust at once into his mouth. Perhaps it felt hot to the little tongue; perhaps the child was simply frightened by some convulsive movement of the father who evidently spent his last moment in an endeavour to reach the child, but, whatever the cause, in the quick gasp it gave, the bullet was drawn into the larynx, strangling him.

"That the father's arm, in his last struggle, should have fallen directly across the little throat is one of those anomalies which confounds reason and misleads justice by stopping investigation at the very point where truth lies and mystery disappears.

"Mrs. Hammond is to be congratulated that there are detectives who do not give too much credence to outward appearances."

We expect soon to hear of the capture of the man who sped home the death-dealing bullet.

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2: The Star-Child

Oscar Wilde

1854-1900

Collected in: *The House of Pomegranates*, 1891

ONCE UPON a time two poor Woodcutters were making their way home through a great pine-forest. It was winter, and a night of bitter cold. The snow lay thick upon the ground, and upon the branches of the trees: the frost kept snapping the little twigs on either side of them, as they passed: and when they came to the Mountain-Torrent she was hanging motionless in air, for the Ice-King had kissed her.

So cold was it that even the animals and the birds did not know what to make of it.

"Ugh!" snarled the Wolf, as he limped through the brushwood with his tail between his legs, "this is perfectly monstrous weather. Why doesn't the Government look to it?"

"Weet! weet! weet!" twittered the green Linnets, "the old Earth is dead, and they have laid her out in her white shroud."

"The Earth is going to be married, and this is her bridal dress," whispered the Turtle-doves to each other. Their little pink feet were quite frost-bitten, but they felt that it was their duty to take a romantic view of the situation.

"Nonsense!" growled the Wolf. "I tell you that it is all the fault of the Government, and if you don't believe me I shall eat you." The Wolf had a thoroughly practical mind, and was never at a loss for a good argument.

"Well, for my part," said the Woodpecker, who was a born philosopher, "I don't care an atomic theory for explanations. If a thing is so, it is so, and at present it is terribly cold."

Terribly cold it certainly was. The little Squirrels, who lived inside the tall fir-tree, kept rubbing each other's noses to keep themselves warm, and the Rabbits curled themselves up in their holes, and did not venture even to look out of doors. The only people who seemed to enjoy it were the great horned Owls. Their feathers were quite stiff with rime, but they did not mind, and they rolled their large yellow eyes, and called out to each other across the forest, "Tu-whit! "Tu-whoo! "Tu-whit! "Tu-whoo! what delightful weather we are having!"

On and on went the two Woodcutters, blowing lustily upon their fingers, and stamping with their huge iron-shod boots upon the caked snow. Once they sank into a deep drift, and came out as white as millers are, when the stones are grinding; and once they slipped on the hard smooth ice where the marsh-water was frozen, and their faggots fell out of their bundles, and they had to pick them up and bind them together again; and once they thought that they had lost their way, and a great terror seized on them, for they knew that the Snow is cruel to

those who sleep in her arms. But they put their trust in the good Saint Martin, who watches over all travellers, and retraced their steps, and went warily, and at last they reached the outskirts of the forest, and saw, far down in the valley beneath them, the lights of the village in which they dwelt.

So overjoyed were they at their deliverance that they laughed aloud, and the Earth seemed to them like a flower of silver, and the Moon like a flower of gold.

Yet, after that they had laughed they became sad, for they remembered their poverty, and one of them said to the other, "Why did we make merry, seeing that life is for the rich, and not for such as we are? Better that we had died of cold in the forest, or that some wild beast had fallen upon us and slain us."

"Truly," answered his companion, "much is given to some, and little is given to others. Injustice has parcelled out the world, nor is there equal division of aught save of sorrow."

But as they were bewailing their misery to each other this strange thing happened. There fell from heaven a very bright and beautiful star. It slipped down the side of the sky, passing by the other stars in its course, and, as they watched it wondering, it seemed to them to sink behind a clump of willow-trees that stood hard by a little sheepfold no more than a stone's throw away.

"Why! there is a crock of gold for whoever finds it," they cried, and they set to and ran, so eager were they for the gold.

And one of them ran faster than his mate, and outstripped him, and forced his way through the willows, and came out on the other side, and lo! there was indeed a thing of gold lying on the white snow. So he hastened towards it, and stooping down placed his hands upon it, and it was a cloak of golden tissue, curiously wrought with stars, and wrapped in many folds. And he cried out to his comrade that he had found the treasure that had fallen from the sky, and when his comrade had come up, they sat them down in the snow, and loosened the folds of the cloak that they might divide the pieces of gold. But, alas! no gold was in it, nor silver, nor, indeed, treasure of any kind, but only a little child who was asleep.

And one of them said to the other: "This is a bitter ending to our hope, nor have we any good fortune, for what doth a child profit to a man? Let us leave it here, and go our way, seeing that we are poor men, and have children of our own whose bread we may not give to another."

But his companion answered him: "Nay, but it were an evil thing to leave the child to perish here in the snow, and though I am as poor as thou art, and have many mouths to feed, and but little in the pot, yet will I bring it home with me, and my wife shall have care of it."

So very tenderly he took up the child, and wrapped the cloak around it to shield it from the harsh cold, and made his way down the hill to the village, his comrade marvelling much at his foolishness and softness of heart.

And when they came to the village, his comrade said to him, "Thou hast the child, therefore give me the cloak, for it is meet that we should share."

But he answered him: "Nay, for the cloak is neither mine nor thine, but the child's only," and he bade him Godspeed, and went to his own house and knocked.

And when his wife opened the door and saw that her husband had returned safe to her, she put her arms round his neck and kissed him, and took from his back the bundle of faggots, and brushed the snow off his boots, and bade him come in.

But he said to her, "I have found something in the forest, and I have brought it to thee to have care of it," and he stirred not from the threshold.

"What is it?" she cried. "Show it to me, for the house is bare, and we have need of many things." And he drew the cloak back, and showed her the sleeping child.

"Alack, goodman!" she murmured, "have we not children of our own, that thou must needs bring a changeling to sit by the hearth? And who knows if it will not bring us bad fortune? And how shall we tend it?" And she was wroth against him.

"Nay, but it is a Star-Child," he answered; and he told her the strange manner of the finding of it.

But she would not be appeased, but mocked at him, and spoke angrily, and cried: "Our children lack bread, and shall we feed the child of another? Who is there who careth for us? And who giveth us food?"

"Nay, but God careth for the sparrows even, and feedeth them," he answered.

"Do not the sparrows die of hunger in the winter?" she asked. "And is it not winter now?" And the man answered nothing, but stirred not from the threshold.

And a bitter wind from the forest came in through the open door, and made her tremble, and she shivered, and said to him: "Wilt thou not close the door? There cometh a bitter wind into the house, and I am cold."

"Into a house where a heart is hard cometh there not always a bitter wind?" he asked. And the woman answered him nothing, but crept closer to the fire.

And after a time she turned round and looked at him, and her eyes were full of tears. And he came in swiftly, and placed the child in her arms, and she kissed it, and laid it in a little bed where the youngest of their own children was lying. And on the morrow the Woodcutter took the curious cloak of gold and placed it

in a great chest, and a chain of amber that was round the child's neck his wife took and set it in the chest also.

SO THE STAR-CHILD was brought up with the children of the Woodcutter, and sat at the same board with them, and was their playmate. And every year he became more beautiful to look at, so that all those who dwelt in the village were filled with wonder, for, while they were swarthy and black-haired, he was white and delicate as sawn ivory, and his curls were like the rings of the daffodil. His lips, also, were like the petals of a red flower, and his eyes were like violets by a river of pure water, and his body like the narcissus of a field where the mower comes not.

Yet did his beauty work him evil. For he grew proud, and cruel and selfish. The children of the Woodcutter, and the other children of the village, he despised, saying that they were of mean parentage, while he was noble, being sprung from a Star, and he made himself master over them, and called them his servants. No pity had he for the poor, or for those who were blind or maimed or in any way afflicted, but would cast stones at them and drive them forth to the highway, and bid them beg their bread elsewhere, so that none save the outlaws came twice to that village to ask for alms. Indeed, he was as one enamoured of beauty, and would mock at the weakly and ill-favoured, and make jest of them; and himself he loved, and in summer, when the winds were still, he would lie by the well in the priest's orchard and look down at the marvel of his own face, and laugh for the pleasure he had in his fairness.

Often did the Woodcutter and his wife chide him, and say: "We did not deal with thee as thou dealest with those who are left desolate, and have none to succour them. Wherefore art thou so cruel to all who need pity?"

Often did the old priest send for him, and seek to teach him the love of living things, saying to him: "The fly is thy brother. Do it no harm. The wild birds that roam through the forest have their freedom. Snare them not for thy pleasure. God made the blind-worm and the mole, and each has its place. Who art thou to bring pain into God's world? Even the cattle of the field praise Him."

But the Star-Child heeded not their words, but would frown and flout, and go back to his companions, and lead them. And his companions followed him, for he was fair, and fleet of foot, and could dance, and pipe, and make music. And wherever the Star-Child led them they followed, and whatever the Star-Child bade them do, that did they. And when he pierced with a sharp reed the dim eyes of the mole, they laughed, and when he cast stones at the leper they laughed also. And in all things he ruled them, and they became hard of heart, even as he was.

NOW there passed one day through the village a poor beggar-woman. Her garments were torn and ragged, and her feet were bleeding from the rough road on which she had travelled, and she was in very evil plight. And being weary she sat her down under a chestnut-tree to rest.

But when the Star-Child saw her, he said to his companions, "See! There sitteth a foul beggar-woman under that fair and green-leaved tree. Come, let us drive her hence, for she is ugly and ill-favoured."

So he came near and threw stones at her, and mocked her, and she looked at him with terror in her eyes, nor did she move her gaze from him. And when the Woodcutter, who was cleaving logs in a haggard hard by, saw what the Star-Child was doing, he ran up and rebuked him, and said to him: "Surely thou art hard of heart and knowest not mercy, for what evil has this poor woman done to thee that thou shouldst treat her in this wise?"

And the Star-Child grew red with anger, and stamped his foot upon the ground, and said, "Who art thou to question me what I do? I am no son of thine to do thy bidding."

"Thou speakest truly," answered the Woodcutter, "yet did I show thee pity when I found thee in the forest."

And when the woman heard these words she gave a loud cry, and fell into a swoon. And the Woodcutter carried her to his own house, and his wife had care of her, and when she rose up from the swoon into which she had fallen, they set meat and drink before her, and bade her have comfort.

But she would neither eat nor drink, but said to the Woodcutter, "Didst thou not say that the child was found in the forest? And was it not ten years from this day?"

And the Woodcutter answered, "Yea, it was in the forest that I found him, and it is ten years from this day."

"And what signs didst thou find with him?" she cried. "Bare he not upon his neck a chain of amber? Was not round him a cloak of gold tissue broidered with stars?"

"Truly," answered the Woodcutter, "it was even as thou sayest."

And he took the cloak and the amber chain from the chest where they lay, and showed them to her.

And when she saw them she wept for joy, and said, "He is my little son whom I lost in the forest. I pray thee send for him quickly, for in search of him have I wandered over the whole world."

So the Woodcutter and his wife sent out and called to the Star-Child, and said to him, "Go into the house, and there shalt thou find thy mother, who is waiting for thee."

So he ran in, filled with wonder and great gladness. But when he saw her who was standing there, he laughed scornfully and said, "Why, where is my mother? For I see none here but this vile beggar-woman."

And the woman answered him, "I am thy mother."

"Thou art mad to say so," cried the Star-Child angrily. "I am no son of thine, for thou art a beggar, and ugly, and in rags. Therefore get thee hence, and let me see thy foul face no more."

"Nay, but thou art indeed my little son, whom I bare in the forest," she cried, and she fell on her knees, and held out her arms to him. "The robbers stole thee from me, and left thee to die," she murmured, "but I recognised thee when I saw thee, and the signs also have I recognised, the cloak of golden tissue and the amber-chain. Therefore I pray thee come with me, for over the whole world have I wandered in search of thee. Come with me, my son, for I have need of thy love."

But the Star-Child stirred not from his place, but shut the doors of his heart against her, nor was there any sound heard save the sound of the woman weeping for pain.

And at last he spoke to her, and his voice was hard and bitter. "If in very truth thou art my mother," he said, "it had been better hadst thou stayed away, and not come here to bring me to shame, seeing that I thought I was the child of some Star, and not a beggar's child, as thou tellest me that I am. Therefore get thee hence, and let me see thee no more."

"Alas! my son," she cried, "wilt thou not kiss me before I go? For I have suffered much to find thee."

"Nay," said the Star-Child, "but thou art too foul to look at, and rather would I kiss the adder or the toad than thee."

So the woman rose up, and went away into the forest weeping bitterly, and when the Star-Child saw that she had gone, he was glad, and ran back to his playmates that he might play with them.

But when they beheld him coming, they mocked him and said, "Why, thou art as foul as the toad, and as loathsome as the adder. Get thee hence, for we will not suffer thee to play with us," and they drave him out of the garden.

And the Star-Child frowned and said to himself, "What is this that they say to me? I will go to the well of water and look into it, and it shall tell me of my beauty."

So he went to the well of water and looked into it, and lo! his face was as the face of a toad, and his body was scaled like an adder. And he flung himself down on the grass and wept, and said to himself, "Surely this has come upon me by reason of my sin. For I have denied my mother, and driven her away, and been proud, and cruel to her. Wherefore I will go and seek her through the whole world, nor will I rest till I have found her."

And there came to him the little daughter of the Woodcutter, and she put her hand upon his shoulder and said, "What doth it matter if thou hast lost thy comeliness? Stay with us, and I will not mock at thee."

And he said to her, "Nay, but I have been cruel to my mother, and as a punishment has this evil been sent to me. Wherefore I must go hence, and wander through the world till I find her, and she give me her forgiveness."

So he ran away into the forest and called out to his mother to come to him, but there was no answer. All day long he called to her, and when the sun set he lay down to sleep on a bed of leaves, and the birds and the animals fled from him, for they remembered his cruelty, and he was alone save for the toad that watched him, and the slow adder that crawled past.

And in the morning he rose up, and plucked some bitter berries from the trees and ate them, and took his way through the great wood, weeping sorely. And of everything that he met he made inquiry if perchance they had seen his mother.

He said to the Mole, "Thou canst go beneath the earth. Tell me, is my mother there?"

And the Mole answered, "Thou hast blinded mine eyes. How should I know?"

He said to the Linnet, "Thou canst fly over the tops of the tall trees, and canst see the whole world. Tell me, canst thou see my mother?"

And the Linnet answered, "Thou hast clipt my wings for thy pleasure. How should I fly?"

And to the little Squirrel who lived in the fir-tree, and was lonely, he said, "Where is my mother?"

And the Squirrel answered, "Thou hast slain mine. Dost thou seek to slay thine also?"

And the Star-Child wept and bowed his head, and prayed forgiveness of God's things, and went on through the forest, seeking for the beggar-woman. And on the third day he came to the other side of the forest and went down into the plain.

And when he passed through the villages the children mocked him, and threw stones at him, and the carlots would not suffer him even to sleep in the byres lest he might bring mildew on the stored corn, so foul was he to look at, and their hired men drave him away, and there was none who had pity on him. Nor could he hear anywhere of the beggar-woman who was his mother, though for the space of three years he wandered over the world, and often seemed to see her on the road in front of him, and would call to her, and run after her till the sharp flints made his feet to bleed. But overtake her he could not, and those who dwelt by the way did ever deny that they had seen her, or any like to her, and they made sport of his sorrow.

For the space of three years he wandered over the world, and in the world there was neither love nor loving-kindness nor charity for him, but it was even such a world as he had made for himself in the days of his great pride.

AND ONE EVENING he came to the gate of a strong-walled city that stood by a river, and, weary and footsore though he was, he made to enter in. But the soldiers who stood on guard dropped their halberts across the entrance, and said roughly to him, "What is thy business in the city?"

"I am seeking for my mother," he answered, "and I pray ye to suffer me to pass, for it may be that she is in this city."

But they mocked at him, and one of them wagged a black beard, and set down his shield and cried, "Of a truth, thy mother will not be merry when she sees thee, for thou art more ill-favoured than the toad of the marsh, or the adder that crawls in the fen. Get thee gone. Get thee gone. Thy mother dwells not in this city."

And another, who held a yellow banner in his hand, said to him, "Who is thy mother, and wherefore art thou seeking for her?"

And he answered, "My mother is a beggar even as I am, and I have treated her evilly, and I pray ye to suffer me to pass that she may give me her forgiveness, if it be that she tarrieth in this city." But they would not, and pricked him with their spears.

And, as he turned away weeping, one whose armour was inlaid with gilt flowers, and on whose helmet couched a lion that had wings, came up and made inquiry of the soldiers who it was who had sought entrance. And they said to him, "It is a beggar and the child of a beggar, and we have driven him away."

"Nay," he cried, laughing, "but we will sell the foul thing for a slave, and his price shall be the price of a bowl of sweet wine."

And an old and evil-visaged man who was passing by called out, and said, "I will buy him for that price," and, when he had paid the price, he took the Star-Child by the hand and led him into the city.

And after that they had gone through many streets they came to a little door that was set in a wall that was covered with a pomegranate tree. And the old man touched the door with a ring of graved jasper and it opened, and they went down five steps of brass into a garden filled with black poppies and green jars of burnt clay. And the old man took then from his turban a scarf of figured silk, and bound with it the eyes of the Star-Child, and drave him in front of him. And when the scarf was taken off his eyes, the Star-Child found himself in a dungeon, that was lit by a lantern of horn.

And the old man set before him some mouldy bread on a trencher and said, "Eat," and some brackish water in a cup and said, "Drink," and when he had

eaten and drunk, the old man went out, locking the door behind him and fastening it with an iron chain.

AND ON THE MORROW the old man, who was indeed the subtlest of the magicians of Libya and had learned his art from one who dwelt in the tombs of the Nile, came in to him and frowned at him, and said, "In a wood that is nigh to the gate of this city of Giaours there are three pieces of gold. One is of white gold, and another is yellow gold, and the gold of the third is red. To-day thou shalt bring me the piece of white gold, and if thou bringest it not back, I will beat thee with a hundred stripes. Get thee away quickly, and at sunset I will be waiting for thee at the door of the garden. See that thou bringest the white gold, or it shall go ill with thee, for thou art my slave, and I have bought thee for the price of a bowl of sweet wine." And he bound the eyes of the Star-Child with the scarf of figured silk, and led him through the house, and through the garden of poppies, and up the five steps of brass. And having opened the little door with his ring he set him in the street.

And the Star-Child went out of the gate of the city, and came to the wood of which the Magician had spoken to him.

Now this wood was very fair to look at from without, and seemed full of singing birds and of sweet-scented flowers, and the Star-Child entered it gladly. Yet did its beauty profit him little, for wherever he went harsh briars and thorns shot up from the ground and encompassed him, and evil nettles stung him, and the thistle pierced him with her daggers, so that he was in sore distress. Nor could he anywhere find the piece of white gold of which the Magician had spoken, though he sought for it from morn to noon, and from noon to sunset. And at sunset he set his face towards home, weeping bitterly, for he knew what fate was in store for him.

But when he had reached the outskirts of the wood, he heard from a thicket a cry as of someone in pain. And forgetting his own sorrow he ran back to the place, and saw there a little Hare caught in a trap that some hunter had set for it.

And the Star-Child had pity on it, and released it, and said to it, "I am myself but a slave, yet may I give thee thy freedom."

And the Hare answered him, and said: "Surely thou hast given me freedom, and what shall I give thee in return?"

And the Star-Child said to it, "I am seeking for a piece of white gold, nor can I anywhere find it, and if I bring it not to my master he will beat me."

"Come thou with me," said the Hare, "and I will lead thee to it, for I know where it is hidden, and for what purpose."

"So the Star-Child went with the Hare, and lo! in the cleft of a great oak-tree he saw the piece of white gold that he was seeking. And he was filled with joy,

and seized it, and said to the Hare, "The service that I did to thee thou hast rendered back again many times over, and the kindness that I showed thee thou hast repaid a hundred fold."

"Nay," answered the Hare, "but as thou dealt with me, so I did deal with thee," and it ran away swiftly, and the Star-Child went towards the city.

Now at the gate of the city there was seated one who was a leper. Over his face hung a cowl of grey linen, and through the eyelets his eyes gleamed like red coals. And when he saw the Star-Child coming, he struck upon a wooden bowl, and clattered his bell, and called out to him, and said, "Give me a piece of money, or I must die of hunger. For they have thrust me out of the city, and there is no one who has pity on me."

"Alas!" cried the Star-Child, "I have but one piece of money in my wallet, and if I bring it not to my master he will beat me, for I am his slave."

But the leper entreated him, and prayed of him, till the Star-Child had pity, and gave him the piece of white gold.

And when he came to the Magician's house, the Magician opened to him, and brought him in, and said to him, "Hast thou the piece of white gold?" And the Star-Child answered, "I have it not." So the Magician fell upon him, and beat him, and set before him an empty trencher, and cried, "Eat," and an empty cup, and said, "Drink," and flung him again into the dungeon.

And on the morrow the Magician came to him, and said, "If to-day thou bringest me not the piece of yellow-gold, I will surely keep thee as my slave, and give thee three hundred stripes."

So the Star-Child went to the wood, and all day long he searched for the piece of yellow gold, but nowhere could he find it. And at sunset he sat him down and began to weep, and as he was weeping there came to him the little Hare that he had rescued from the trap.

And the Hare said to him, "Why art thou weeping? And what dost thou seek in the wood?"

And the Star-Child answered, "I am seeking for a piece of yellow gold that is hidden here, and if I find it not my master will beat me, and keep me as a slave."

"Follow me," cried the Hare, and it ran through the wood till it came to a pool of water. And at the bottom of the pool the piece of yellow gold was lying.

"How shall I thank thee?" said the Star-Child, "for, lo! this is the second time that you have succoured me."

"Nay, but thou hadst pity on me first," said the Hare, and it ran away swiftly.

And the Star-Child took the piece of yellow gold, and put it in his wallet, and hurried to the city. But the leper saw him coming, and ran to meet him, and knelt down and cried, "Give me a piece of money or I shall die of hunger."

And the Star-Child said to him, "I have in my wallet but one piece of yellow gold, and if I bring it not to my master he will beat me and keep me as his slave."

But the leper entreated him sore, so that the Star-Child had pity on him, and gave him the piece of yellow gold.

And when he came to the Magician's house, the Magician opened to him, and brought him in, and said to him, "Hast thou the piece of yellow gold?" And the Star-Child said to him, "I have it not." So the Magician fell upon him, and beat him, and loaded him with chains, and cast him again into the dungeon.

And on the morrow the Magician came to him, and said, "If to-day thou bringest me the piece of red gold I will set thee free, but if thou bringest it not I will surely slay thee."

So the Star-Child went to the wood, and all day long he searched for the piece of red gold, but nowhere could he find it. And at evening he sat him down, and wept, and as he was weeping there came to him the little Hare.

And the Hare said to him, "The piece of red gold that thou seekest is in the cavern that is behind thee. Therefore weep no more but be glad."

"How shall I reward thee," cried the Star-Child, "for lo! this is the third time thou hast succoured me."

"Nay, but thou hadst pity on me first," said the Hare, and it ran away swiftly.

And the Star-Child entered the cavern, and in its farthest corner he found the piece of red gold. So he put it in his wallet, and hurried to the city. And the leper seeing him coming, stood in the centre of the road, and cried out, and said to him, "Give me the piece of red money, or I must die," and the Star-Child had pity on him again, and gave him the piece of red gold, saying, "Thy need is greater than mine." Yet was his heart heavy, for he knew what evil fate awaited him.

BUT LO! as he passed through the gate of the city, the guards bowed down and made obeisance to him, saying, "How beautiful is our lord!" and a crowd of citizens followed him, and cried out, "Surely there is none so beautiful in the whole world!" so that the Star-Child wept, and said to himself, "They are mocking me, and making light of my misery." And so large was the concourse of the people, that he lost the threads of his way, and found himself at last in a great square, in which there was a palace of a King.

And the gate of the palace opened, and the priests and the high officers of the city ran forth to meet him, and they abased themselves before him, and said, "Thou art our lord for whom we have been waiting, and the son of our King."

And the Star-Child answered them and said, "I am no king's son, but the child of a poor beggar-woman. And how say ye that I am beautiful, for I know that I am evil to look at?"

Then he, whose armour was inlaid with gilt flowers, and on whose helmet couched a lion that had wings, held up a shield, and cried, "How saith my lord that he is not beautiful?"

And the Star-Child looked, and lo! his face was even as it had been, and his comeliness had come back to him, and he saw that in his eyes which he had not seen there before.

And the priests and the high officers knelt down and said to him, "It was prophesied of old that on this day should come he who was to rule over us. Therefore, let our lord take this crown and this sceptre, and be in his justice and mercy our King over us."

But he said to them, "I am not worthy, for I have denied the mother who bare me, nor may I rest till I have found her, and known her forgiveness. Therefore, let me go, for I must wander again over the world, and may not tarry here, though ye bring me the crown and the sceptre."

And as he spake he turned his face from them towards the street that led to the gate of the city, and lo! amongst the crowd that pressed round the soldiers, he saw the beggar-woman who was his mother, and at her side stood the leper, who had sat by the road.

And a cry of joy broke from his lips, and he ran over, and kneeling down he kissed the wounds on his mother's feet, and wet them with his tears. He bowed his head in the dust, and sobbing, as one whose heart might break, he said to her: "Mother, I denied thee in the hour of my pride. Accept me in the hour of my humility. Mother, I gave thee hatred. Do thou give me love. Mother, I rejected thee. Receive thy child now." But the beggar-woman answered him not a word.

And he reached out his hands, and clasped the white feet of the leper, and said to him: 'Thrice did I give thee of my mercy. Bid my mother speak to me once.' But the leper answered him not a word.

And he sobbed again, and said: "Mother, my suffering is greater than I can bear. Give me thy forgiveness, and let me go back to the forest." And the beggar-woman put her hand on his head, and said to him, "Rise," and the leper put his hand on his head, and said to him "Rise," also.

And he rose up from his feet, and looked at them, and lo! they were a King and a Queen.

And the Queen said to him, "This is thy father whom thou hast succoured."

And the King said, "This is thy mother, whose feet thou hast washed with thy tears."

And they fell on his neck and kissed him, and brought him into the palace, and clothed him in fair raiment, and set the crown upon his head, and the sceptre in his hand, and over the city that stood by the river he ruled, and was its lord. Much justice and mercy did he show to all, and the evil Magician he

banished, and to the Woodcutter and his wife he sent many rich gifts, and to their children he gave high honour. Nor would he suffer any to be cruel to bird or beast, but taught love and loving-kindness and charity, and to the poor he gave bread, and to the naked he gave raiment, and there was peace and plenty in the land.

Yet ruled he not long, so great had been his suffering, and so bitter the fire of his testing, for after the space of three years he died. And he who came after him ruled evilly.

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3: Spy In High Places

Sydney Horler

1888-1954

The Daily Mirror, UK, 11 Aug 1937

Barrier Miner (NSW) 6 Nov 1937

SEBASTIAN QUIN, that acute-minded member of the British Secret-Service,who had taken up Intelligence work because he realised that there were more important duties in life than being a successful character actor, looked across the gleaming napery and shining breakfast dishes and waited his time.

He had been sent to 901b, Piccadilly, that morning on a very delicate mission, and he did not want to bungle it.

The situation was indeed very embarrassing. Oswald Manisty, the young man who was sitting on the opposite side of the table, had fallen under the suspicion of his superiors in the Foreign Office because of certain leakages which it was known had occurred in a very important department of the F.O.

This was a time with the whole of Europe threatening to become a monster cauldron of malignancy— when official information of national importance had necessarily to be guarded with more than special care.

London, it was known, was full of foreign agents, anxious to send to their various Governments, information which Downing-street urgently desired, to keep secret.

In these circumstances the fact that Oswald Manisty had been. foolish enough to incur the distrust of his seniors at the Foreign Office because of his. associations with the young and beautiful Lydia Stainton, declared (not without reason, it was said) to be "Mayfair's Woman of Mystery," was causing official circles considerable alarm.

This is what Sir Brian Fordinghame, chief of Y.1. of British Intelligence and Sebastian Quin's immediate superior, had said to his agent the night before:

"Something must be done to stop this continued leakage from the F.O. Although we have arrested several, well-known foreign agents, and deported others, the trouble still con-tinues. Didn't that younger brother of yours, Jim, know Oswald Manisty?" the Secret Service chief broke off to inquire of Quin.

"I believe so— why?" replied tho secret agant.

"Merely that your younger brother's acquaintance with this man will serve as a very good excuse for you dropping; in on him to-morrow morning-at breakfast."

EVERYONE who counts in London night-life goes to the Rosy Dawn, that cosmopolitan rendezvous that so gaily adorns Piccadilly-circus. On the night that

Sebastian Quin sauntered in, looking the last word of bored elegance, the place was crowded.

Lydia Stainton was sitting at the corner table where Oswald Marirsty had told him fifteen hours before she would be found.

Threading a way across the packed floor, Quin took the seat opposite the woman, signalled a waiter, humming meanwhile a melody made popular at least ten years before.

On hearing" this refrain, "Redder Than the Rose," the woman looked up interrogatively.

"There is snow in Vienna now," she heard the stranger say in a low, cautious voice.

A brief hesitation— and then she replied in a voice that was scarcely above a whisper:

"But the flowers grow on the mountain side."

Her companion pushed aside the wine list. His manner was very business-like.

"We had better go,"'he said. "I have much to tell you."

Another momentary hesitation on the part of the woman. Then she put out a hand for her bag.

"Very well, but—"

She was answered curtly.

"Nothing more here, please."

Once the drawing-room of what had been described as the "loveliest house in London" was reached Lydia Stainton burst into words.

"Who are you?" she demanded..

The man went to the door and locked it.

"One cannot be too careful!" he exclaimed.

"Answer my question," she said. "Why didn't—" she hesitated for a moment— "come to-night?"

"Because he is ill. But, my dear, you aren't very flattering— what's wrong with me?"

"I have never seen you before."

"That is true," he lied. "But I gave you the correct password."

"Yes," she admitted, and bit her lip.

"Perhaps you're thinking I can't be trusted? That I'm here under false pretences?"

She stared at him bleakly.

"I do not intend telling you what I'm thinking until you have explained yourself," she said.

"I'M in the Foreign Office with Manisty," he said in a low tone. "I am, in fact, his immediate superior. It is through me that he has been able to pass on to you some information— information which I believe your employers consider valuable." He stopped, looking at the woman keenly. "I want to know who those employers are— if there is money to be made at this game I intend to have some of it myself."

"I don't know what you are talking about." Yet her eyes were troubled; clearly she was perturbed.

"Don't be a fool," he said. "Manisty's told me all about, you being a spy."

This brought her to her feet. "He dared to call me a spy ?"

"Of course," was the drawled comment. "We are all spies, aren't we? At least I shall be one, once you put me in touch with your employers. I've some pretty good stuff to sell them, let me add."

But the woman would not be drawn. Fear instead of cupidity still gripped her.

"I want you to go. If you do not I shall ring for the police."

The threat was dismissed with a wave of the hand.

"The police? Don't so silly, my dear. If they came I could easily bluff my way out of here, but it wouldn't be so simple for you, let me remind you. Don't forget that I've got all the facts from Manisty."

"What do you want me to do?" she asked.

"I've already told you— introduce me to your employers." '

"Why?"

"You're being very stupid, if you will allow me to say so-because, dear, heart, as I have already said, I want to make some money myself."

"A traitor?"

"Call me what you like," was the indifferent reply. "What's good enough for Manisty is good enough for me, although I am his senior in the Department."

AGAIN the woman retreated.

"I have no employers," she exclaimed, "and Oswald Manisty is a good friend of mine. I don't want to listen to you any longer, and must ask you once again to go—".

Her visitor sighed.

"That's very disappointing," he remarked, "but at. the risk of being un-gallant, I intend to stay. You are a spy, Lydia Strepoff."

Her face grew white; all the color suddenly ebbed from it.

"My name is Stainton!" she cried.

"That's merely the English versior of it; my dear. Manisty told me a good deal when I saw him this morning."

"He did not tell you that because he did not know."

A laugh greeted the statement.

"He knew you were Lydia Strepoff the notorious free-lance woman spy who is always willing to sell her ser-vices to the highest bidder. Younp Manisty is not such a fool as you led yourself to believe, my sweet Lydia. In other words, to use a vulgat phrase, he very successfully led you up the garden path.

"The stuff he gave you was just so much hooey; it didn't mean a thing. The important point to be discovered was who were your present employers— which is the object of my visit to-night. We guessed— and when I say we, I mean the British Intelligence, of course— but we had to make sure."

She laughed discordantly.

"You'll never-know that," she exclaimed.

"Forgive me, but I rather fancy that we shall," he corrected— and then suddenly ducked.

The next second a sound that might have been made by a revolver bullet tinging into masonry confirmed the astute nature of the Secret Service agent's curious behavior.

It had frequently been said by. his friends and enemies alike that Sebastian Quin appeared to have eyes all round his head

IT may have been that the gentleman wearing the mask who had stepped in so unexpectedly from the balcony outside the window of this very charmingly-furnished and appointed drawing-room, was surprised at the amazing fact that he had missed killing or at least wounding his bird..

But, in any case, he hesitated about his next move. And, just to prove the truth of the proverb once again he was lost.

For, after the fashion of a Rugby full back going for a full-blooded tackle. Sebastian Quin lunged forward and, ignoring the menace of the pointing gun, caught the intruder by the knees and brought him crashing to the floor.

It was the smattering of jiu-jitsu which Quin had acquired that brought him the victory over his much heavier opponent.

"I'm glad you had sufficient sense not to interfere, my dear," remarked Quin gently to the heavily-breathing Lydia Strepoff, when the would-be murderer lay limp and helpless.

The woman did not reply; all the fight seemed to have gone out of her. Instead she whispered: "I must have a drink."

Quin did not give the desired reply. "You'll stay just where you are," he answered-and as the woman started to put her hand up to her mouth he dashed it aside. A small white pellet rolled on to the carpet.

"The time hasn't come for-you to rommit suicide," he said curtly. "We shall want you to answer quite a lot of questions first."

"And I propose to start straight away," retorted the voice, and with that Sir Brian Fordinghame stepped into the room.

"I'M not so young as I used to be!" he exclaimed, to the staring Quin, "and climbing up that confounded balcony required a bit of doing; but what this man was able to accomplish," looking at the prostrate form of the defeated thug, "I was determined to equal.

"By the way, you know who it is, I suppose?" the speaker continued, stooping and removing the mask from the senseless man's face. "Yes, as I thought, it's Alexei Metternich, chief of the Savronian Secret Service... Well, well, well! That explains a lot. And now young lady, what about you?"

But the beautiful Lydia Strepoff was taking no further interest in the proceedings; almost before Sir .Brian Fordinghame had finished speaking she had slipped forward in her chair and had fallen in a dead faint to the floor.

Sebastian Quin was doing what he considered to be his duty.

"The whole thing has now been cleaned up," he told the shivering Oswald Manisty, "and because of the promise I got the chief of my Department, Sir Brian Fordinghame, to give me, I don't think you will hear anything more of the matter— not unless, of course," he went on in a sterner tone, "you start playing the fool again.

"In which case pernaps your own intelligence will tell you what will happen then. Not many men, I need scarely remind you, Manisty, I suppose, are allowed a second chance— you should know that. It's up to you to make the most of it, my lad."

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4: Steve Brown's Bunyip

John Arthur Barry

1851-1911

The Australasian 14 May 1892

Collected in: *Steve Brown's Bunyip and other stories*, 1905

THE GENERAL OPINION of those who felt called upon to give it was that Steve Brown, of the Scrubby Corner, 'wasn't any chop.' Not that, on the surface, there seemed much evidence confirmatory of such a verdict— rather, indeed, the contrary. If a traveller, drover or teamster lost his stock, Steve, after a long and arduous search, was invariably the first man to come across the missing animals— provided the reward was high enough. Yet, in spite of this useful gift of discovery, its owner was neither liked nor trusted. Uncharitable people— especially the ones whom he took such trouble to oblige—would persist in hinting that none knew so well where to find as those that hid. All sorts of odds and ends, too, from an unbranded calf to a sheepskin, from a new tarpaulin to a pair of hobbles, had a curious knack of disappearing within a circuit of fifty miles of the Browns' residence.

In appearance, Steve was long, lathy, awkward and freckled, also utterly ignorant of all things good for man to know. Suspicious, sly and unscrupulous, just able by a sort of instinct to decipher a brand on an animal, he was a thorough specimen of the very worst type of far inland Australian Bush Native, and only those who have met him can possibly imagine what that means. Years ago, his parents, fresh from the wilds of Connemara, had squatted on this forest reserve of Scrubby Corner. How they managed to live was a mystery. But they were never disturbed; and in time they died, leaving Steve, then eighteen, to shift for himself, by virtue of acquired knowledge. Shortly after the death of his mother, he took unto himself the daughter of an old shepherd on a run adjoining— a fit match in every way— and continued to keep house in the ramshackle shanty in the heart of the Corner. He had never been known to do a day's work if he could possibly get out of it; much preferring to pick up a precarious living by 'trading' stock, 'finding' stragglers, and in other ways even less honest than the last, but which nobody, so far, had taken the trouble of bringing home to him.

IT WAS SUNDAY, and the caravan was spelling for the day. Greg, having had his dinner— only a half ration, as feed was scarce— and feeling but httle inclined for a chat with the tiger, or the lion, or the bear, or any other of the sulky, brooding creatures behind the iron bars, whom he saw every day, and of whose company he was heartily tired, took it into his great head to have a look at the country. So, unperceived of Hassan Ali, who was fast asleep in the hot

sunshine, or any of the rest dozing in the tents, Greg, plucking a wattle up by the roots to keep the flies off, sauntered quietly away.

He was not impressed by in land Australia. In the first place it was hot and dusty, also the flies were even worse than in his native Ceylon. Nor, so far as he could discover, was there anything to chew— edible that is— no tender banana stems, no patches of young rice or succulent cane. All that he tried tasted bitter, tasted of gum, peppermint, or similar abominations.

He spat them out with a grunt of disgust, and meandered on. Presently the scrub grew thicker, and, heated more than ever by the exertion of pushing his huge body through an undergrowth of pine and wattle, he hailed with delight the sight of a big waterhole, still and dark, in the very heart of it. Descending the slope at the far side of the thickly-grassed, open glade, Steve Brown, driving a couple of 'lost' horses, paused in dismay and astonishment at sight of the immense beast, black, shining wetly, and sending up thick jets of water into the sunlight to an accompaniment of a continuous series of grunts and rumbling noises.

'*Hrrmp! hrrmp*!' blared Greg, in friendly greeting, as he caught sight of the figure staring fascinated. And then he laughed to himself as he saw how the loose horses, snorting with terror, galloped off one way, and the horseman another. But it was getting late; so, coming out of the water, and striking a well-beaten pad, he followed it. Supper time was approaching, and he kept his ears open for the shrill cry of Hassan Ali.

Meanwhile Steve had made a bee-line on the spur for home, with some vague idea surging through his dull brain of having caught a glimpse of an Avenging Power. It is mostly in this way that anything of the sort strikes the uneducated conscience.

'What's the matter now?' asked his wife as he entered, pale, and with hurried steps. 'You looks pretty badly scared. Did the traps spot yer a-plantin' them mokes, or what?'

'Traps be hanged!' replied Steve. 'I seen somethin' wuss nor traps. I seen the bunyip down at the big waterhole.'

'Garn, yer fool ! ' exclaimed his wife, who was tall, thin, sharp-faced, and freckled, like himself. 'What are you a-givin' us now? Why, yer gittin' wuss nor a black fellow wi' yer bunyips!'

'Well,' said Steve, fanning himself with his old cabbage tree hat, and glancing nervously out of the door, 'I'll tell yer how it was. Ye knows as how I dropped acrost that darkey's mokes when he was camped at the Ten Mile. Well, o' course, I takes 'em to the water in the scrub— you knows the shop —intendin' to hobble 'em out till such time as inquiries come this road. Well, jist as I gets in sight o' the water I seen, right in the middle of it, I seen— I seen—' but here he paused dead for want of a vocabulary.

'Well, thick-head, an' wot was it ye seed— yer own hugly shadder, I s'pose?' said Mrs Brown, as she caught up and slapped the baby playing with a pumpkin on the floor.'Look better on yer, it would, to wind me up a turn o' water, an' it washin' day to-morrer, 'stead o' comin' pitchin' fairy stories.'

It warn't,' replied Steve, taking no notice of the latter part of her speech. 'But it was as big— ay, an' a lot bigger'n this hut. All black, an' no hair it was ; an' 't'ad two white tuskes's, long as my leg, only crookt, an' a snout like a big snake, an' it were a-spoutin' water forty foot high, and soon's it seen me it bellered agin and agin.'

'You bin over to Walmsley's shanty to-day?' asked his wife, looking hard at his pale face and staring eyes.

'No, s'elp me!' replied Steve; 'not fer a month or more! An' yer knows, Mariar, as it aint very often I touches a drop o' ennythin' when I does go over.'

Which was strictly true, for Steve was an abstemious rogue.

'Well, then, you've got a stroke o' the sun,' said his better-half, fogmatically, 'an' you'd best take a dose of salts at oncest, afore ye goes off yer 'ead wuss.'

Hrrmp! hrrmp! Hrrmp!' trumpeted Greg cheerfully, as at this moment, interposing his huge bulk before the setting sun, he looked in at the back door with twinkling eyes. With a scream the woman, snatching up her child, bolted into the bedroom, leaving Steve quaking in an ecstasy of terror, as Greg, spying the pumpkin, deftly reached in with his trunk and asked for it with an insinuating grunt. But Steve, pretty certain that it was himself who was wanted, and that his time had come at last, tumbled off the stool and grovelled before the Unknown Terror.

Without coming in further, Greg could not get within a foot of the coveted article. To come in further would be to lift the house on his shoulders, so Greg hesitated. For ten years— long ago in the days of his youth— he had been a member of the Ceylon Civil Service, and had learnt discipline and respect for the constituted authorities. Also, besides being chief constable of his fellows, he had been a favourite at headquarters, had borne royalty itself, and was even named after Governor Gregory. Therefore, hungry as he was, Greg hesitated about demolishing a house for the sake of a pumpkin; but Steve, now on his knees in the middle of the floor, with that curling, snake like thing twisting and twitching before his eyes, knew less than nothing of all this. Had he been able, he would doubtless have prayed in an orthodox manner to be delivered out of the clutches of the Evil One. Being unable to pray, he did the best he could, which was indifferent.

'Oh good Mister Bunyip,' he quavered, 'let's off this oncest, an' I'll takes them mokes back to the nigger. I'll give up them two unbranded foals as I shook off the carrier larst week, likewise the bag o' flour off his waggin. If yer'll go away, Mr Bunyip, I'll never plant nor shake nothin' no more. I wont— s'elp me!

An' if yer'll go back quiet'— here the wall-plate began to crack, and—' Steve's voice to rise into a howl— 'I'll promise faithful never to come next anigh yer waterhole over yonder to plant bosses.'

As he concluded, Greg, having at length jammed his big head in far enough to just reach the pumpkin with his trunk, withdrew, taking both doorposts with him.

'He's gone, Mariar,' said Steve, after a pause, wiping his wet face; 'but it wor the narriest squeak you ever seed. Took nothin', he didn't, only that punkin as was on the floor. Tell you wot,' as his wife came trembling out of the other room, 'we're a-goin' to shift camp. Neighbours o' that sort ain't ter be played with. Ain't it a wonder, bein' so handy like, as he never come afore? I knows how it was, now!' he exclaimed, a happy inspiration seizing him. 'It were all through them two larst cussed mokes! The feller as owns 'em's a flash black-feller shearer. I had a pitch with him the night afore an' he reckons as how he'd just cut out ov a big shed on the Marthaguy. So I sez to myself, "You're good enough, ole chap, fer a fiver, ennyhow." '

' What's that got to do with it?' asked his wife softly, regarding the crushed doorway with affrighted face. Don't yer see? The bunyip's the blackfeller's Devil. Ole Billy Barlow tell'd me oncest as he seen the head ov one rise up out of a lagoon. I'll have to fossick up them mokes, Mariar, an' take 'em to that darkey straight away, afore wuss 'appens. S-sh, sh-sh! Wot's that?'

It was Greg, who wanted his supper badly, and was soliloquising at the other end of the hut. He had been down to a little fenced-in paling paddock on the flat, and, looking over, to his delight had seen a crop of maize, sweet and juicy and not too ripe, also more pumpkins. But with the love of the law and the memory of discip line still strong in him, he had returned to ask permission of the owner— the stupid white man who sat in his hut and talked nonsense. And now he was holding council with himself how best to make the fool understand that he was hungry, and wanted for his supper something more than a solitary pumpkin. Hassan Ali, he knew, had but dried hay and the rinds of melons to give him. Here, indeed, was a delectable change, and Greg's mouth watered as he gurgled gently in at the openmg which did duty for a window, and close to which the family crouched in terror. Why could not the stupid fellow understand? Could it be that he and his were deaf? A bright idea, and one to be acted upon, this last!

Therefore, carefully lifting up and displacing half the bark roof, Greg looked benignly down and trumpeted mightily until the hut shook as with an earthquake, and the whole land seemed to vibrate, whilst his audience grovelled speechless. Then, finding no resulting effect, and secure in the sense of having done his uttermost to make himself understood, he went off with a clear conscience to the corn-patch and luxuriated.

'It ain't no bunyip, Steve,' wailed his wife, as they heard the retreating steps; 'it's the "Destryin' Hangel" as I heerd a parson talk on oncest when I was a kid, an' that wor the "Last Tramp"— the noise wot shows as the world is comin' to an ind. It ain't no use o' runnin'. We're all agoin' to git burnt up wi' fire an' bremston! Look out, Steve, an' see if there's a big light ennywheres.'

'Sha'n't,' replied Steve. 'Wot's the good? If it's the end o' the world, wot's the use o' lookin'? An' I b'lieve 'ere's yer blasted Hangel a-comin' agen!'

Sure enough, Greg, having had a snack, was returning just to assure the folk that he was doing well; that his belly was half full, and that he was enjoying himself immensely. So he *hrrmped* softly round about in the darkness, and scratched his sides against the rough stone fireplace, and took off one of the rafters for a toothpick, and rumbled and gurgled meditatively, feeling that if he could only drop across a couple of quarts of toddy, as in the old Island days, his would be perfect bliss.

All through the hot summer night he passed at intervals from the paddock to the house and back, and all the night those others lay and shivered, and waited for the horror of the Unknown. Then, a little after sunrise, a long, loud, shrill call was heard, answered on the instant by a sustained hoarse blare, as Greg recognised the cry of his mahout and keeper.

And presently Steve, plucking up courage in the light, arose, and, looking out, shouted to his wife triumphantly,— 'Now, then, Mariar, who's right about the bunyip! There he goes off home to the waterhole with a black nigger on his back!"

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5: A Street Incident

C. J. Dennis (as by "C. J. D.")

1876-1938

The Gadfly, 23 May 1906

AS THE INDIGNANT CARRIER explained afterwards, it all happened before you could say "knife."

It was just about dusk. The lad on the bicycle, with head bent over the handle-bars, his thoughts probably on the hot dinner awaiting him at home, possibly on the girl he was going to meet afterwards, scorched round, the corner, opposite the hotel, riding on the wrong side of the road, and crashed into the carrier's horse. The startled animal floundered for an instant on the wet, slippery road, the frantic driver tugged at the reins, and, in the next second, the horse lay struggling on its side, with the boy and bicycle pinned underneath.

"Spare me days! W'y carn't yer keep on yer right side?"

The angry driver was standing in his van shaking his whip at the white, pain-distorted face that grinned up at him from amongst the mane of the fallen horse.

"For God's sake pull me out! I'm crushed!" shrieked the boy, his eyes rolling in agony.

But the driver, secure in the knowledge that he had duly observed the municipal by-law, and, filled with a holy indignation, cursed on.

It was a quiet spot, seldom frequented by pedestrians at that time of the day; but the little lady on the other side of the road, walking home after a hard day's shopping, had seen and heard all. She was a meek little lady, with a modest suburban reputation as a social reformer and an enemy of drink. When the impact happened she had dropped her sunshade and reticule, and, for an instant, stood rooted to the kerb, speechless with horror. A week before she had fainted at the sight of a bleeding finger: but before the outraged carrier was half through his decorative and indignant tirade, this timid disciple of temperance, whose proud boast it was that she had never seen the inside of an accursed bar, was sprinting for the corner door.

The next moment the inmates of the bar-room— the barman and two bleary loungers— were startled by a violent assault on the swing-doors and the sudden apparition of a small, respectably dressed female, with a wild eye, her hat worn rakishly on one side, shrieking for aid.

"Quick, quick!" panted the little lady. "There's been an accident! A horse has fallen on a boy! He can't get up! Oh, be quick, be quick! and bring some— bring some brandy !"

The barman regarded her suspiciously with a cold and fish-like eye, and went on polishing his glasses.

"Try a new game, missus," he advised, dispassionately. "That one's worked put."

"Oh, come, come quickly; he'll be killed!" cried the little lady, stamping her small feet into the sawdust of the bar-room floor.

Half-wakened from his accustomed torpor by her earnestness, one of the loungers moved with hesitation towards the door. He paused, gazed lovingly backward, and returned deliberately to his half-finished beer.

"Life's too short," he remarked, and, with this brief explanation, considered himself excused.

For one short second there shone in the little lady's scornful eye a curse more comprehensive, more withering than any ever uttered within the precincts of those licensed premises. Then the look of terrified anxiety returned, and, turning, she fled once more into the open, followed by the ironical laughter of the lords within.

Outside, she beheld confusion. A tramcar had stopped beside the scene of the accident. There was a chorus of startled feminine squeals, and a flutter of drapery as half a dozen women descended, and, headed by a muscular, business-like female in a short skirt, hastened towards the still struggling horse and shrieking boy.

The carrier descended from his van, and, rushing towards the tram, called on all and sundry to witness that he was on the right side of the road. The inmates of the bar, their curiosity aroused by the noises without, emerged leisurely.

The barman, throwing his towel over his shoulder, lighted a cigarette, and, leaning gracefully against the door-post, viewed the proceedings languidly, as became a sportsman and a man.

A large red man, who was eating pies on top of the car, related to his neighbour particulars of a similar accident which he had witnessed, seven years before, his words filtering through a mouthful of pastry and meat.

"For God's sake! He's crushing me!" shrieked the imprisoned boy.

"Hold the reins, somebody! Keep his head down," panted the business-like female.

"It's the Gor's truth! 'E come round the corner on 'is wrong side!" yelled the indignant carrier, recommencing a decorative description of the accident.

"Oh, quickly, quickly! Won't some of you men help?" wailed the little, meek lady.

"An' just as he got to the curve," mumbled the man with the pies, "Smash! clean into him, just like that."

"Lot of blankey excitement about nothin', aint there?" remarked the blase barman.

Half a dozen women, assisted by one weedy lad, were endeavouring, with nervous, unaccustomed hands, to extricate the still shrieking boy. The terrifled

horse, maddened by the tumult, renewed its struggles, and, wrenching its head free from the weak fingers that held it, rose on its fore feet, scattering the women, and, planting one iron-shod hoof full on the white, upturned face, crushed it into the mud of the road.

A woman in the crowd fainted. Several shrieked and rushed frantically about. The men on the car, suddenly awakening to the fact that something serious was happening, descended hastily, the large, red man cramming into his mouth the remainder of his last pie. Two workmen, who had just arrived, quieted the horse and dragged away the thing that lay beneath.

The barman, still leaning carelessly against the doorpost, blew a cloud of cigarette smoke, and opined that "the bloke had thrown a seven this time."

A motor car drove up and stopped.

"A doctor! It's a doctor!" shouted somebody.

A tall, grave man descended, and hastened to where the business-like female, now very white and scared, was trying, pathetically, with her small handkerchief, to wipe the poor, crushed features.

The doctor's examination was brief.

"It's all over with him," he said, turning to one of the workmen. "Better put him up in your dray and drive to the Morgue. I'll go on before you."

Many willing helpers came forward now, and, within a minute, the dray moved off with its ghastly burden.

"All aboard " shouted the tram conductor, suddenly awakening to a sense of his duty to the company. A crowd scrambled aboard the tram, chattering and gesticulating excitedly. A few remained to assist the still indignant carrier to harness his horse.

"You're all witnesses," he said, "I was on me right side of the road. There's no get away from that. I ain't to blame."

All chorussed assent, except the barman, who still puffed his cigarette, and, as became an oracle, gazed abstractedly into the middle distance. Then, with a gesture full of supreme contempt, he cast his cigarette end into the gutter, and gave forth his judgment.

"Them damn women," he said, in a voice of utter disgust. "Always pokin' their noses into wot don't concern 'em. Only fer their bloomin' curiosity that bloke mighter been as right as you or me this minute. Aw, it makes me sick !"

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6: Supply And Demand

O. Henry

1862-1910

New York Herald 13 Dec 1908

Collected in: *Options*, 1909

FINCH KEEPS a hats-cleaned- by-electricity- while-you- wait establishment, nine feet by twelve, in Third Avenue. Once a customer, you are always his. I do not know his secret process, but every four days your hat needs to be cleaned again.

Finch is a leathern, sallow, slow-footed man, between twenty and forty. You would say he had been brought up a bushelman in Essex Street. When business is slack he likes to talk, so I had my hat cleaned even oftener than it deserved, hoping Finch might let me into some of the secrets of the sweatshops.

One afternoon I dropped in and found Finch alone. He began to anoint my headpiece de Panama with his mysterious fluid that attracted dust and dirt like a magnet.

"They say the Indians weave 'em under water," said I, for a leader.

"Don't you believe it," said Finch. "No Indian or white man could stay under water that long. Say, do you pay much attention to politics? I see in the paper something about a law they've passed called 'the law of supply and demand.' "

I explained to him as well as I could that the reference was to a politico-economical law, and not to a legal statute.

"I didn't know," said Finch. "I heard a good deal about it a year or so ago, but in a one-sided way."

"Yes," said I, "political orators use it a great deal. In fact, they never give it a rest. I suppose you heard some of those cart-tail fellows spouting on the subject over here on the east side."

"I heard it from a king," said Finch— "the white king of a tribe of Indians in South America."

I was interested but not surprised. The big city is like a mother's knee to many who have strayed far and found the roads rough beneath their uncertain feet. At dusk they come home and sit upon the door-step. I know a piano player in a cheap café who has shot lions in Africa, a bell-boy who fought in the British army against the Zulus, an express-driver whose left arm had been cracked like a lobster's claw for a stew-pot of Patagonian cannibals when the boat of his rescuers hove in sight. So a hat-cleaner who had been a friend of a king did not oppress me.

"A new band?" asked Finch, with his dry, barren smile.

"Yes," said I, "and half an inch wider." I had had a new band five days before.

"I meets a man one night," said Finch, beginning his story—"a man brown as snuff, with money in every pocket, eating schweinerknuckel in Schlagel's. That

was two years ago, when I was a hose-cart driver for No. 98. His discourse runs to the subject of gold. He says that certain mountains in a country down South that he calls Gaudymala is full of it. He says the Indians wash it out of the streams in plural quantities.

" 'Oh, Geronimo!' says I. 'Indians! There's no Indians in the South,' I tell him, 'except Elks, Maccabees, and the buyers for the fall dry-goods trade. The Indians are all on the reservations,' says I.

" 'I'm telling you this with reservations,' says he. 'They ain't Buffalo Bill Indians; they're squattier and more pedigreed. They call 'em Inkers and Aspics, and they was old inhabitants when Mazuma was King of Mexico. They wash the gold out of the mountain streams,' says the brown man, 'and fill quills with it; and then they empty 'em into red jars till they are full; and then they pack it in buckskin sacks of one *arroba* each— an *arroba* is twenty-five pounds— and store it in a stone house, with an engraving of a idol with marcelled hair, playing a flute, over the door.'

" 'How do they work off this unearth increment?' I asks.

" 'They don't,' says the man. 'It's a case of "Ill fares the land with the great deal of velocity where wealth accumulates and there ain't any reciprocity."'

"After this man and me got through our conversation, which left him dry of information, I shook hands with him and told him I was sorry I couldn't believe him. And a month afterward I landed on the coast of this Gaudymala with $1,300 that I had been saving up for five years. I thought I knew what Indians liked, and I fixed myself accordingly. I loaded down four pack-mules with red woollen blankets, wrought-iron pails, jewelled side-combs for the ladies, glass necklaces, and safety-razors. I hired a black mozo, who was supposed to be a mule-driver and an interpreter too. It turned out that he could interpret mules all right, but he drove the English language much too hard. His name sounded like a Yale key when you push it in wrong side up, but I called him McClintock, which was close to the noise.

"Well, this gold village was forty miles up in the mountains, and it took us nine days to find it. But one afternoon McClintock led the other mules and myself over a rawhide bridge stretched across a precipice five thousand feet deep, it seemed to me. The hoofs of the beasts drummed on it just like before George M. Cohan makes his first entrance on the stage.

"This village was built of mud and stone, and had no streets. Some few yellow-and-brown persons popped their heads out-of-doors, looking about like Welsh rabbits with Worcester sauce on em. Out of the biggest house, that had a kind of a porch around it, steps a big white man, red as a beet in color, dressed in fine tanned deerskin clothes, with a gold chain around his neck, smoking a cigar. I've seen United States Senators of his style of features and build, also head-waiters and cops.

"He walks up and takes a look at us, while McClintock disembarks and begins to interpret to the lead mule while he smokes a cigarette.

" 'Hello, Buttinsky,' says the fine man to me. 'How did you get in the game? I didn't see you buy any chips. Who gave you the keys of the city?'

" 'I'm a poor traveller,' says I. 'Especially mule-back. You'll excuse me. Do you run a hack line or only a bluff?'

" 'Segregate yourself from your pseudo-equine quadruped,' says he, 'and come inside.'

"He raises a finger, and a villager runs up.

" 'This man will take care of your outfit,' says he, 'and I'll take care of you.'

"He leads me into the biggest house, and sets out the chairs and a kind of a drink the color of milk. It was the finest room I ever saw. The stone walls was hung all over with silk shawls, and there was red and yellow rugs on the floor, and jars of red pottery and Angora goat skins, and enough bamboo furniture to misfurnish half a dozen seaside cottages.

" 'In the first place,' says the man, 'you want to know who I am. I'm sole lessee and proprietor of this tribe of Indians. They call me the Grand Yacuma, which is to say King or Main Finger of the bunch. I've got more power here than a chargé d'affaires, a charge of dynamite, and a charge account at Tiffany's combined. In fact, I'm the Big Stick, with as many extra knots on it as there is on the record run of the *Lusitania*. Oh, I read the papers now and then,' says he. 'Now, let's hear your entitlements,' he goes on, 'and the meeting will be open.'

" 'Well,' says I, 'I am known as one W. D. Finch. Occupation, capitalist. Address, 541 East Thirty-second—'

" 'New York,' chips in the Noble Grand. 'I know,' says he, grinning. 'It ain't the first time you've seen it go down on the blotter. I can tell by the way you hand it out. Well, explain "capitalist."'

"I tells this boss plain what I come for and how I come to came.

" 'Gold-dust?' says he, looking as puzzled as a baby that's got a feather stuck on its molasses finger. 'That's funny. This ain't a gold-mining country. And you invested all your capital on a stranger's story? Well, well! These Indians of mine— they are the last of the tribe of Peches— are simple as children. They know nothing of the purchasing power of gold. I'm afraid you've been imposed on,' says he.

" 'Maybe so,' says I, 'but it sounded pretty straight to me.'

" 'W. D.,' says the King, all of a sudden, 'I'll give you a square deal. It ain't often I get to talk to a white man, and I'll give you a show for your money. It may be these constituents of mine have a few grains of gold-dust hid away in their clothes. To-morrow you may get out these goods you've brought up and see if you can make any sales. Now, I'm going to introduce myself unofficially. My name is Shane— Patrick Shane. I own this tribe of Peche Indians by right of

conquest— single handed and unafraid. I drifted up here four years ago, and won 'em by my size and complexion and nerve. I learned their language in six weeks— it's easy: you simply emit a string of consonants as long as your breath holds out and then point at what you're asking for.

" 'I conquered 'em, spectacularly,' goes on King Shane, 'and then I went at 'em with economical politics, law, sleight-of-hand, and a kind of New England ethics and parsimony. Every Sunday, or as near as I can guess at it, I preach to 'em in the council-house (I'm the council) on the law of supply and demand. I praise supply and knock demand. I use the same text every time. You wouldn't think, W. D.,' says Shane, 'that I had poetry in me, would you?'

" 'Well,' says I, 'I wouldn't know whether to call it poetry or not.'

" 'Tennyson,' says Shane, 'furnishes the poetic gospel I preach. I always considered him the boss poet. Here's the way the text goes:

"For, not to admire, if a man could learn it, were more
Than to walk all day like a Sultan of old in a garden of spice."

" 'You see, I teach 'em to cut out demand— that supply is the main thing. I teach 'em not to desire anything beyond their simplest needs. A little mutton, a little cocoa, and a little fruit brought up from the coast— that's all they want to make 'em happy. I've got 'em well trained. They make their own clothes and hats out of a vegetable fibre and straw, and they're a contented lot. It's a great thing,' winds up Shane, 'to have made a people happy by the incultivation of such simple institutions.'

"Well, the next day, with the King's permission, I has the McClintock open up a couple of sacks of my goods in the little plaza of the village. The Indians swarmed around by the hundred and looked the bargain-counter over. I shook red blankets at 'em, flashed finger-rings and ear-bobs, tried pearl necklaces and side-combs on the women, and a line of red hosiery on the men. 'Twas no use. They looked on like hungry graven images, but I never made a sale. I asked McClintock what was the trouble. Mac yawned three or four times, rolled a cigarette, made one or two confidential side remarks to a mule, and then condescended to inform me that the people had no money.

"Just then up strolls King Patrick, big and red and royal as usual, with the gold chain over his chest and his cigar in front of him.

" 'How's business, W. D.?' he asks.

" 'Fine,' says I. 'It's a bargain-day rush. I've got one more line of goods to offer before I shut up shop. I'll try 'em with safety-razors. I've got two gross that I bought at a fire sale.'

"Shane laughs till some kind of mameluke or private secretary he carries with him has to hold him up.

" 'O my sainted Aunt Jerusha!' says he, 'ain't you one of the Babes in the Goods, W. D.? Don't you know that no Indians ever shave? They pull out their whiskers instead.'

" 'Well,' says I, 'that's just what these razors would do for 'em— they wouldn't have any kick coming if they used 'em once.'

"Shane went away, and I could hear him laughing a block, if there had been any block.

" 'Tell 'em,' says I to McClintock, 'it ain't money I want— tell 'em I'll take gold-dust. Tell 'em I'll allow 'em sixteen dollars an ounce for it in trade. That's what I'm out for— the dust.'

"Mac interprets, and you'd have thought a squadron of cops had charged the crowd to disperse it. Every uncle's nephew and aunt's niece of 'em faded away inside of two minutes.

"At the royal palace that night me and the King talked it over.

" 'They've got the dust hid out somewhere,' says I, 'or they wouldn't have been so sensitive about it.'

"'They haven't,' says Shane. 'What's this gag you've got about gold? You been reading Edward Allen Poe? They ain't got any gold.'

" 'They put it in quills,' says I, 'and then they empty it in jars, and then into sacks of twenty-five pounds each. I got it straight.'

" 'W. D.,' says Shane, laughing and chewing his cigar, 'I don't often see a white man, and I feel like putting you on. I don't think you'll get away from here alive, anyhow, so I'm going to tell you. Come over here.'

"He draws aside a silk fibre curtain in a corner of the room and shows me a pile of buckskin sacks.

" 'Forty of 'em,' says Shane. 'One arroba in each one. In round numbers, $220,000 worth of gold-dust you see there. It's all mine. It belongs to the Grand Yacuma. They bring it all to me. Two hundred and twenty thousand dollars— think of that, you glass-bead peddler,' says Shane— 'and all mine.'

" 'Little good it does you,' says I, contemptuously and hatefully. 'And so you are the government depository of this gang of moneyless money-makers? Don't you pay enough interest on it to enable one of your depositors to buy an Augusta (Maine) Pullman carbon diamond worth $200 for $4.85?'

" 'Listen,' says Patrick Shane, with the sweat coming out on his brow. 'I'm confidant with you, as you have, somehow, enlisted my regards. Did you ever,' he says, 'feel the avoirdupois power of gold— not the troy weight of it, but the sixteen-ounces-to-the-pound force of it?'

" 'Never,' says I. 'I never take in any bad money.'

"Shane drops down on the floor and throws his arms over the sacks of gold-dust.

" 'I love it,' says he. 'I want to feel the touch of it day and night. It's my pleasure in life. I come in this room, and I'm a king and a rich man. I'll be a millionaire in another year. The pile's getting bigger every month. I've got the whole tribe washing out the sands in the creeks. I'm the happiest man in the world, W. D. I just want to be near this gold, and know it's mine and it's increasing every day. Now, you know,' says he, 'why my Indians wouldn't buy your goods. They can't. They bring all the dust to me. I'm their king. I've taught 'em not to desire or admire. You might as well shut up shop.'

" 'I'll tell you what you are,' says I. 'You're a plain, contemptible miser. You preach supply and you forget demand. Now, supply,' I goes on, 'is never anything but supply. On the contrary,' says I, 'demand is a much broader syllogism and assertion. Demand includes the rights of our women and children, and charity and friendship, and even a little begging on the street corners. They've both got to harmonize equally. And I've got a few things up my commercial sleeve yet,' says I, 'that may jostle your preconceived ideas of politics and economy.

"The next morning I had McClintock bring up another mule-load of goods to the plaza and open it up. The people gathered around the same as before.

"I got out the finest line of necklaces, bracelets, hair-combs, and earrings that I carried, and had the women put 'em on. And then I played trumps.

"Out of my last pack I opened up a half gross of hand-mirrors, with solid tinfoil backs, and passed 'em around among the ladies. That was the first introduction of looking-glasses among the Peche Indians.

"Shane walks by with his big laugh.

" 'Business looking up any?' he asks.

" 'It's looking at itself right now,' says I.

"By-and-by a kind of a murmur goes through the crowd. The women had looked into the magic crystal and seen that they were beautiful, and was confiding the secret to the men. The men seemed to be urging the lack of money and the hard times just before the election, but their excuses didn't go.

"Then was my time.

"I called McClintock away from an animated conversation with his mules and told him to do some interpreting.

" 'Tell 'em,' says I, 'that gold-dust will buy for them these befitting ornaments for kings and queens of the earth. Tell 'em the yellow sand they wash out of the waters for the High Sanctified Yacomay and Chop Suey of the tribe will buy the precious jewels and charms that will make them beautiful and preserve and pickle them from evil spirits. Tell 'em the Pittsburgh banks are paying four per cent. interest on deposits by mail, while this get-rich-frequently custodian of the public funds ain't even paying attention. Keep telling 'em, Mac,'

says I, 'to let the gold-dust family do their work. Talk to 'em like a born anti-Bryanite,' says I. 'Remind 'em that Tom Watson's gone back to Georgia,' says I.

"McClintock waves his hand affectionately at one of his mules, and then hurls a few stickfuls of minion type at the mob of shoppers.

"A gutta-percha Indian man, with a lady hanging on his arm, with three strings of my fish-scale jewelry and imitation marble beads around her neck, stands up on a block of stone and makes a talk that sounds like a man shaking dice in a box to fill aces and sixes.

" 'He says,' says McClintock, 'that the people not know that gold-dust will buy their things. The women very mad. The Grand Yacuma tell them it no good but for keep to make bad spirits keep away.'

" 'You can't keep bad spirits away from money,' says I.

" 'They say,' goes on McClintock, 'the Yacuma fool them. They raise plenty row.'

" 'Going! Going!' says I. 'Gold-dust or cash takes the entire stock. The dust weighed before you, and taken at sixteen dollars the ounce— the highest price on the Gaudymala coast.'

"Then the crowd disperses all of a sudden, and I don't know what's up. Mac and me packs away the hand-mirrors and jewelry they had handed back to us, and we had the mules back to the corral they had set apart for our garage.

"While we was there we hear great noises of shouting, and down across the plaza runs Patrick Shane, hotfoot, with his clothes ripped half off, and scratches on his face like a cat had fought him hard for every one of its lives.

" 'They're looting the treasury, W. D.,' he sings out. 'They're going to kill me and you, too. Unlimber a couple of mules at once. We'll have to make a getaway in a couple of minutes.'

" 'They've found out,' says I,' the truth about the law of supply and demand.'

" 'It's the women, mostly,' says the King. 'And they used to admire me so!'

" 'They hadn't seen looking-glasses then,' says I.

" 'They've got knives and hatchets,' says Shane; 'hurry!'

" 'Take that roan mule,' says I. 'You and your law of supply! I'll ride the dun, for he's two knots per hour the faster. The roan has a stiff knee, but he may make it,' says I. 'If you'd included reciprocity in your political platform I might have given you the dun,' says I.

"Shane and McClintock and me mounted our mules and rode across the rawhide bridge just as the Peches reached the other side and began firing stones and long knives at us. We cut the thongs that held up our end of the bridge and headed for the coast."

A TALL, bulky policeman came into Finch's shop at that moment and leaned an elbow on the showcase. Finch nodded at him friendly.

"I heard down at Casey's," said the cop, in rumbling, husky tones, "that there was going to be a picnic of the Hat-Cleaners' Union over at Bergen Beach, Sunday. Is that right?"

"Sure," said Finch. "There'll be a dandy time."

"Gimme five tickets," said the cop, throwing a five-dollar bill on the showcase.

"Why," said Finch, "ain't you going it a little too—"

"Go to h—!" said the cop. "You got 'em to sell, ain't you? Somebody's got to buy 'em. Wish I could go along."

I was glad to See Finch so well thought of in his neighborhood.

And then in came a wee girl of seven, with dirty face and pure blue eyes and a smutched and insufficient dress.

"Mamma says," she recited shrilly, "that you must give me eighty cents for the grocer and nineteen for the milkman and five cents for me to buy hokey-pokey with— but she didn't say that," the elf concluded, with a hopeful but honest grin.

Finch shelled out the money, counting it twice, but I noticed that the total sum that the small girl received was one dollar and four cents.

"That's the right kind of a law," remarked Finch, as he carefully broke some of the stitches of my hatband so that it would assuredly come off within a few days— "the law of supply and demand. But they've both got to work together. I'll bet," he went on, with his dry smile, "she'll get jelly beans with that nickel— she likes 'em. What's supply if there's no demand for it?"

"What ever became of the King?" I asked, curiously.

"Oh, I might have told you," said Finch. "That was Shane came in and bought the tickets. He came back with me, and he's on the force now."

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7: The Mystery of the Lone House

John Oakley

1868–1945

Australian Town and Country Journal (Sydney) 15 June 1910

Obscure British author, best known for his novel "That Wilmslow Girl", 1895.

FENTON WAS A DOCTOR without a practice, I a barrister without briefs. He labelled himself a Man of Science, and me, a Man of Letters, though science and literature in our particular cases were hardly more; than hobbies. I think there is very little more to say about us, except that Fenton filled in the intervals of scientific research with various phases of the motor craze, and that I helped him. At all events, I went half shares in the fines, and that is a very substantial portion of the cost of a motoring equipment nowadays.

I mention the motorcar because one of them— a 22 h.p. Carlington— played a very important part in the opening scenes of our drama.

We had lost our way 12 miles from Rawnton, and a good deal more than 12 miles, apparently, from anywhere else. It was a warm, sultry night, in late-August, with heavy storm clouds lying low in the sky, and every sign that the long-threatened break in the weather was not far off.

"We must go back, to Rawnton," I suggested, "We haven't met a soul for miles, and—"

"There is a light over there," Fenton interrupted. "We can inquire there, if is an alternative to going back, anyway."

"All serene," I replied, philosophically.

Fenton proceeded slowly and carefully along a road darkened by heavy, over-hanging trees, still thick with foliage, though the leaves were beginning to fall, and drew up eventually at a pair of large gates standing wide open. There was a lodge close by, but it was empty, as a very cursory investigation sufficed to assure us. But from the gates a broad drive swept up to a large house standing wrapped in gloom, save for two windows on the ground floor, whence I proceeded the light that had attracted Fenton's attention.

"It is a big place," I suggested. "It seems hardly good enough to go knocking up the nobility and gentry of the neighborhood merely to ask the way. And how quiet I everything is!"

"Rubbish!" was Fenton's reply. "Besides, there isn't much evidence of nobility and gentry about that empty lodge. Probably there's nobody here but a caretaker."

And lifting the huge old-fashioned knocker, which hung on the door just about level with his waist, he gave a sounding rat-tat. When the echoes had died

away, and they appeared almost interminable, giving one indeed the impression of an empty house, the brooding silence seemed to fall once more.

Fenton knocked again, and then again, I but each time with a precisely similar re-I suit. And then I made a discovery. I

"Why!" I cried, more than a little startled, for I will confess quite frankly that I did not like the look of the place, "the door I is not fastened."

Nor was it. Indeed, at a push from Fenton's hand it swung sullenly back, disclosing a gloomy hall, furnished in dark and sombre fashion, and lit by a single lamp disposed upon a bracket over a cavernous fireplace. I do not think, however, that we should have ventured in unbidden, but for the room on the right, and the glimpse of terror that we caught therein.

It was well, though not brilliantly, lighted with wax candles, and the remains of dinner were upon the table. The room itself was adequately furnished in rather heavy, some what out-of-date style.

But it was none of these things that had attracted our notice— that had from the first been fixed upon, the occupant of the apartment. He had been seated at the table apparently, but now he was lying partly across it, still, however, resting in his chair, with his face turned from us. One hand hung by his side, while the other was stretched out across the white tablecloth, and this right hand was holding a tiny revolver, almost a toy to look at, but a sufficiently deadly weapon at close quarters.

"He is ill," Fenton said quickly.

"He is fast asleep," I muttered.

But we both knew better. He was dead.

"Suicide?" I asked, as Fenton bent over him.

"I should say so," he replied, touching the revolver. "Yes, it is tightly held. You cannot put a revolver into a dead man's hand and get him to clutch it as that man is doing. He was alive when he took that revolver in his hand — yes. But, come, there must be somebody else in the house. We must — what's that, Crayford?"

For a moment or two we listened intently to a sound of low, muffled throbbing, as if there were machinery at work in the cellars.

"Gad! Fenton," I cried, with swift light; "it is your motor!"

But Fenton had already made for the hall door. "Somebody has been here!" he cried. "Somebody has gone out!"

The door which we had left open behind us was closed and locked. Fenton tried it again and again, but it was fast, and resisted all his efforts.

"Come, let us go by the window," he said. Two minutes later we were outside, only, however, to find full confirmation of our fears. The motor car had disappeared.

While we stood there striving to collect our scattered wits, we heard, footsteps on the gravel not many yards away, and then somebody close by us broke into a merry, tuneful whistle.

Fenton strode towards him. "Who are you?" he demanded.

"I think I am the one to put that question," was the response. "Who are you, and what the deuce are you doing here?"

"By Jove!" Fenton cried. "It's Derringford."

ii

I KNEW DERRINGFORD by repute only, but I knew also that he and Fenton were close friends. He was on the Stock Exchange,-was known, indeed, as an operator of more than average brilliance, who was reputed to be worth a lot of money. He was younger than either of us by a year or two, having still, indeed, to celebrate his thirty-second birthday, and he also was a bachelor— as yet. I say as yet, because Fenton had once said something about an Australian heiress, though apparently even he knew no details.

"Yes," replied the newcomer, "it is Derringford, but who you are I'm blest if I can see in the darkness."

"It's Fenton, and this is my friend Crayford."

"Fenton! Great Scott! old chap, and whatever in Fortune's name are you doing here?"

"Just now," Fenton replied, grimly, "We are looking for a motor-car. But let me question you. There is more in it than that. Do you know this house and its— its occupant?"

"A little," Derringford replied with a half-laugh. "I dined with them not much more than an hour ago. But how did you come here, and what is it about a motor car?"

"In a moment. Whom did you leave in the house?"

"Why, the old man, Mr. Cramley, and, of course, Ethel "

"Ethel!"

"Yes, his daughter."

"Oh, and whom else?"

"Nobody."

"Servants?"

"No, and that is the most cranky part of it. I was arguing it with the old chap over dinner. I said he had no right to bring her to this awful place — they call it the Lone House — without so much as a maid. But I didn't make much impression. Come in and be introduced, perhaps you "

"And' now," Fenton interrupted, "did you —brace yourself for bad . news, old fellow "

"Bad news! Bad news! Ethel, is she ?"

"Did you leave the old man— Mr. Cramley, did you say— alive and well?"

"Alive and well? Of course. At least as well as he ever is. But why do you ask? Fenton, in God's name, what is the matter?"

"He is dead."

"Dead!"

"Ay, and by his own hand."

"And Ethel?"

"Come in and see," Fenton went on, gravely. "Nay, not by the door, because that is fast. You must go in as we came out, by the window."

Derringford was terribly overcome by the sight that met his eyes as he clambered through the window into the dining-room, but even then his first thought was for the girl.

"Where is she?" he demanded.

"I do not know," Fenton replied; "I have not seen her. We must search."

And we did so, from roof to basement, and outside, but not a trace of the missing girl could we discern. "She has gone," Fenton said, "and it must have been she who took my motor car."

"But why should she go?" Derringford demanded, half-fearfully, half-irritably. 'Why should the old man commit suicide? The one mystery is part of the other. But now tell us your story."

Derringford had met old Cramley and Ethel in Paris about a year before, and had fallen straightway in love with the girl. They were from Australia, so at least he understood, and were evidently in no want of money. But there was obviously some mystery about them which Derringford had not succeeded in penetrating.

In the first place they were for ever on the move— from Paris to Vienna, from Vienna to London, from London to New York, and thence back to Paris. By some, this was put down as mere ordinary restlessness, the globe-trotting craze largely developed. It was all the old man; the girl would willingly have settled down, was anxious even so to do, but her father kept her ever on the move in his train.

He had known them about 12 months now, and it was partly at his persuasion that they had taken a furnished house at Brighton; where they had remained nearly five weeks. Derringford had visited them several times, the old man having raised no objection to his daughter's engagement, though Derringford admitted that he did not seem enthusiastic. They had been at Brighton, as I have said, nearly five weeks, when Derringford received a letter from Ethel, announcing that her father had left the seaside, and had taken the Lone House.

"I came down this morning," Derringford went on, "and found them installed here, all alone, without even a servant. But both Ethel and he have had to rough it in the old days in Australia, and they were so far at no loss. In fact, Ethel had cooked what little dinner we had. But I did not like it, and I talked to the old man very seriously about it across the dinner-table. When dinner was over, I went out for a stroll and a cigar ostensibly, but really to have a look in at the inn in the village yonder, to see if I could find some decent woman to come up here and help Ethel out. I was away perhaps an hour, perhaps a little longer."

"Yet— I suppose there was no hint or suggestion— in the previous conversation, I mean— of anything— well, of anything of this sort?"

"Of suicide, do you mean?"

Fenton nodded.

"Nothing, absolutely nothing. It came as the most awful shock to me."

"Did it ever occur to you that he might have reasons for his restlessness?"

"Many times."

"Such, for instance, as— fear of pursuit— some enemy on his track?"

"Yes— that."

"But did you ever hear anything from him, or from the girl, that suggested that?"

"From him, yes; but only in nebulous fashion; from Ethel, never a word."

Events as they concerned the dead man I may be very rapidly summarised.

An inquest was held, and, of course, the newspapers made a sensation of it. To them, as to us, the heart of the mystery was the disappearance of the girl, and Derringford's own position was a good deal canvassed. But it was quite evident that the old man had committed suicide, and there the Coroner's jury had to leave it.

iii

FENTON AND I were seated in my rooms one evening some eight or ten days later, talking about Derringford and the girl, when the door opened, and the man himself appeared. I never saw so great a change in anybody in so short a time as that tragedy and its attendant mystery had wrought in Derringford's appearance. He was white and haggard in face, and seemed in the eight days to have aged by fully as many years. I

"Hullo!" Fenton cried, bringing his feet off the mantelpiece; "what is the matter? You look—"

"We have found your motor car," Derringford replied wearily.

"H'm! I'll mix you a brandy and soda. You must be careful, or you'll find yourself going down hill too quick to pull up. And I the girl—"

"Nothing."

Our visitor's story was soon told.

About I three miles from the house, across some fields, was a piece of water of small extent, but very deep. It was known in the district as Starlight Hole, though whence it I derived its name nobody could say. This had been dragged, at first without result; but when at last a portion of a rubber tyre I came to view, Derringford insisted on having the hole drained, and it was thus that the motor car was brought to light, reposing, very much rusted, and a good deaI knocked about, at the bottom.

"Have you made any other discovery?" Fenton asked.

Derringford, hesitated, making no reply.

"The fact is," Fenton went on, "all this fits in."

"Fits in with what?" I queried. "With the suicide?"

"It was not a suicide."

I turned on him an amazed glance. The police, the coroner, the local doctor, and even the newspaper men had agreed at all events on that. Derringford, I noticed, did not move.

"That is my theory," Fenton went on. "The man was shot with a revolver similar to the one he held in his hand, but not with it."

"Do you mean to suggest that Ethel killed I him?" Derringford demanded fiercely, so fiercely indeed that I recognised on the instant the strong under-current of fear. He, too, had guessed that it was not suicide.

"I would not suggest that," Fenton replied, adding after a pause: "Did you find the I bullet hole in the wall?"

Derringford's jaw dropped, then he nodded.

"I see you know," he said.

"Yes, I found it the next morning just by the bottom left-hand corner of the picture of the water-wheel, exactly opposite Mr. Cramley's chair."

"Why did you say nothing? I asked.

"Because the discovery might have had awkward consequences. I expected the girl to turn up any minute, and besides, Derringford's own position might have required some explanation— not to mention our own."

Derringford nodded his assent.

"What happened was this," Fenton went on. "There were two persons, each armed with an exactly similar revolver, carrying an exactly similar bullet. One was Mr. Cramley the other was— shall we say— Mr. X. Both fired, in all probability simultaneously, but Cramley missed, and his bullet went into the wall by the picture of the water-wheel. X. did not miss, and Cramley I paid the penalty."

Derringford nodded again.

"I figured it I out like that," he said.

iv

THE LAST ACT in the drama was that in which I played the "star" part. I Derringford and Fenton were away on the Continent, laboriously tracing the past of the late Mr. Cramley, for Fenton was possessed of the idea that there was some incident in the dead man's history which would give us the clue we wanted to the inner meaning of the tragedy.

I was seated in my rooms one morning I when Gorley, Derringford's man made his appearance, accompanied by a rather smart-looking, sea-faring youth, apparently about eighteen years of age.

"Hullo! Gorley," I cried, "what is it?"

"I was told to come to you sir,' he replied mysteriously.

Gorley — a white-headed old man of sixty had not, of course, been let into the whole of the secret, but he had been with Derringford many years, and was with Derringford as father before him, and he knew enough for present purposes.

"Miss Ethel Cramley—" Gorley began.

"Where is she?" I cried, starting up.

"In that note, sir," Gorley returned, handing me a crumpled scrap of paper.

The note was brief, but hardly to the point:

"To Mr. Ralph Derringford, Massingham Chambers," it ran, "Help, Ethel."

There was no indication where the writer might be found, no suggestion of the nature of the danger which threatened her, no hint as to how the help might best be rendered.

"Where did you find this?" I asked, turning to the youth, for I guessed instinctively that he had brought it.

"In my boat," he responded gruffly. "It were chucked out of the port-hole of Mester Wincombe's boat."

"A yacht?"

"That's it. He lives at Cliffepool, and he keeps the *Saucy Susan*."

I knew Cliffepool a tiny fishing village, with an antiquated, ramshackle jetty, and a tiny natural harbor, just about large enough to accommodate a yacht, and a score or so of fishing smacks.

"Yes, go on," I said. "Tell me how you got the paper."

"I were rowing across the Pool," he replied, "and I come under the bows of the *Saucy Susan*, when summat hit me on the hand; and rolled into the bottom of the boat. When I got to the jetty I found this paper wrapped round a suvrin. So I went on and didn't tell nobody."

"Good lad," I ejaculated.

"I thinks it over, and I goes to the parson. I axes about Massingham Chambers. 'It's a place in London, he says, where gentlemen live,' I'm told, and

so I comes up, and I sees this chap. 'I want Mr. Derringford,' I says. 'You can't have him,' says he; 'Wot's it about,' he says. 'Well,' I says, 'there might be sum'dy name of that,' and then he takes me by the shoulders and runs me down the stairs, and into a carriage, and I shows him the note on the way."

"It is excellent," I said: "I will, go back to Cliffepool with you."

I put my revolver in my pocket, and twenty minutes later we set out on the journey.

I learnt something about Mr. Wincombe, though nobody, apparently, knew very much. He inhabited a big red house near the summit of the cliffs, and had lived there about four years. Whence he came Rye did not know, but was sure it was from "furrin parts" somewhere, for he had a black man as servant, a Hindoo, as I gathered from Rye's picturesque but by no means flattering description.

We went straight to the Red House. The man who answered our summons at the door, a Hindoo, in fact, as I had surmised from Rye's description, seemed a little inclined to refuse us admission, but then I heard a voice from a room on our right call out.

"Who is it, Boola, and what do they want?"

I pushed past the colored servant, and a moment later was confronting, revolver in hand, a very old man, who sat in a low lounge chair before the fire.

"Who the deuce are' you?" he growled.

"My name is Ronald Crayford," I responded, "and if you move from your seat, or cry out for help, I shall shoot you. I can hit a visiting card edgeways at fifty paces, so am not likely to miss you. I should only wing you, not kill you, though winging is a painful enough operation."

"You are extremely energetic," he said. "And what do you want— money?"

"No; I want Miss Ethel Cramley."

He started slightly— so slightly that I almost missed it.

"I see you understand me," I went on. "Miss Ethel Cramley is with you. I want her."

A smile, a grin, rather, crept along the cruel lines of the old man's mouth, but his eyes remained steadfast and malicious. The grin did not rise to them.

"Miss Ethel Cramley," he said; "yes, she is with me. But who has a better right to her than I have? She is my wife!"

"Your wife?" Involuntarily I lowered my weapon and paused a moment irresolutely. Then I drew a bow at a venture.

"So it was you who shot Mr. Cramley?" I said, quietly.

He sprang from his seat, but an ominous and threatening movement from my revolver sent him back again.

"Yes," I went on, "he fired at you and missed, and then you shot him."

"But— but he committed suicide."

"So the coroner's jury said; but you and I know better than that."

He turned his eyes to the floor, and sat as if he were thinking deeply. To me he appeared to pay not the slightest attention.

"Were you a friend of Cramley's?" he asked at length, but without raising his head.

"Never saw him— alive."

"Then the girl—?"

"Nor her, neither."

"I thought— you, then, are not her lover— you are not Mr. Derringford?"

"As I told you, I have never set eyes on her."

"Then, why— she is my wife— and—"

"You must have been married very recently."

"Not longer ago than this morning.

"You terrified her into it."

"Do you think so?" he said, with an un-melodious chuckle. "Don't I look the sort of person a girl would marry for love or the fun of the thing?"

"If you loved her—"

"Loved her!" he almost screamed. "Loved her! I hate her and all the brood!"

"You married her for revenge, then," I asked, a little wonderingly.

"Of course," he jeered, "And wasn't it a prime revenge! Could you imagine a more horrible fate or more terrible punishment for a woman than to be married to me? Torture and death would be nothing to it."

I quite agreed with him. But I did not say so.

"However, " he went on. "it was not revenge, at least not on her. It was money, and I want nothing from her but that. It is my own, too, and that is why I want it. That black-hearted scoundrel, Cramley, robbed me of it years and years ago, as he robbed me of my wife— at least she would have been my I wife but that he stepped in and took her from me. Now you have the whole story. I shot him and then took her away. But it I wasn't murder— it was a duel. I offered him a chance for his life. I gave him a revolver and faced him on equal terms. But he I shot before the signal, cur that he was, and missed, and then I shot him. I married the girl because she had his money. Yes, I frightened her into it, but not by terrifying her. I did but threaten to shoot her I lover as I had shot her father. She married me to save his life. Quite a romance, I isn't it?"

"Where is she?"

"She is on my yacht. I sent her there directly after the ceremony. I want nothing of her but her money, and that is mine by right. It is my money, and I will have it, and you can have the girl."

"And if you do not get the money?"

"Then she shall stay with me as my wife. But if I get the money, she can go free."

I wired to Fenton and Derringford, who arrived at Cliffepool two days later.

We called immediately on Mr. Wincombe, and Fenton gave one long look at the old man.

"I should accept the bargain," he said quietly, "he to have the money and the girl to go free, provided that at Mr. Wincombe's death one-half the money reverts to Mrs. Wincombe. That is, she will give him one-half the money absolutely, but only the use of the other half for life. Derringford, Crayford, I and I will be trustees."

"I agree," said the old man, with a queer chuckle "It is share and share alike. I don't want her— I want the money."

"You will do well to agree," Fenton returned, "or instead of the money you might I have— a hangman's rope."

"I agree," the old man said again, a little wearily.

"What object had you in settling the thing so easily?" I asked Fenton, as we sat over supper that night in the inn at Cliffepool.

"I will tell you," he replied. "One glance at the old man sufficed for me. He will not I be alive twelve months to-day. The hand of disease is heavy upon him, and he is doomed."

THAT was two years ago. Yesterday Ethel and Derringford were married. Wincombe left his half the money to a hospital.

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8: Death Dancers

Arthur Leo Zagat

1895-1949

Dime Mystery April 1934

WHEN I saw that strange clearing for the first time, plunging out from behind the screening evergreens, the hairs at the back of my neck prickled and I was chilled by a sudden inward cold. Perhaps it was the oddly ominous shadow as the sun dropped below Dark Mountain's looming peak; perhaps the way our dog, Joseph, with the coat of many colors, growled and cringed against my feet, communicated to me a feeling of something horribly wrong about the place. Perhaps it was neither of these but an adumbration of the horrors that had been and were to be enacted here that I sensed impalpably tainting the tree-hemmed circle. Whatever it was, I was not the only one to feel it. Art Shane, and Jimmy Carle, our chainman, stood rigid as I, staring through slitted eyes and breathing a bit hard.

"What do you make of it Dan?" Art asked finally, his lusty bellow hushed for once.

"Queer!" My slow monosyllable was almost whispered, though as far as I knew we were the only humans within a score of miles. "Damn queer!"

For three days, pushing our railroad survey through the untenanted Wiscarado State Forest, we had seen nothing but trees, great towering pines that dwarfed us into three insignificant, crawling worms. And now, at the end of the third day's final traverse, we had come upon this open space, flat as a table, a rent in the mountain's aboreal garment some hundred feet across. Absolutely circular, as if its boundaries had been scribed with gigantic compasses, it was obviously man-formed. Natural causes could never have attained such regularity. Nor had the clearing been recently made; its floor except at the center, was covered with too heavy a growth of grass and vines for that.

Except at the mathematical center! There a thirty foot ring was absolutely bare, the earth showing, clean! Within that, the hub of the whole formation, was a single huge boulder, gray-green and lichen-covered, a squat, flat-topped cylinder immemorially aged. This also was obviously not the work of nature, neither in shape nor position. Humans had formed it and brought it here, years ago.

It put a man furiously to think. How, for instance, had they hauled that giant stone up here? And why? *Why had that central ring not been overgrown, long ago*?

I shuddered, then reddened. Swell chief of a survey party I was making, getting the jitters over finding an unexpected clearing with an old stone stuck in the middle of it! I could imagine what dad or John Hepburn would have said

could they have seen me. The old Tiger, with the first Dan Hale at his elbow, clawed his way across half a continent, fighting savage nature on the one hand and the no less savage Wolf Hopper and his gangs of Estey roughnecks on the other. And here I was getting cold shivers up my yellow spine over the first thing that popped up that was not cut and dried! I clenched my fists and swore under my breath.

"Come on," I said. "I'm going to look that rock over."

I started across to it, and the others followed. I got a glimpse of eighteenyear-old Jimmy's face. His lower lip was caught under his teeth and too much white showed in his eyes. He'd been nervous as hell all day, peering around tree trunks for things that weren't there. A weak sister, all right. Too bad. He was a likable kid except for the streak in him.

Maybe he wouldn't have shown up quite so badly if it weren't for the contrast with Shane. My assistant was out of the Western Division and I'd known him less than a week, but there was a set to his jaw that I liked, and a competent swing to his big shoulders. He had a grin, too, that got under my skin....

"Look at this, Dan." Art nodded at an oval depression in the rock's upper surface. "I'd say it was water-worn, but there's nothing to keep any weathering from affecting the whole top."

I am well over six feet, but the boulder rose chin-high to me and its diameter doubled its height. The shallow, bowllike depression touched the edge at one point and from there a weathered groove tan straight down the stone's side. Where it reached the ground the earth was darkened, stained as if some dark fluid had soaked into it. I bent to examine the blotch more closely.

"Dan!" Jimmy squealed. "Art! What's Joseph got? What's the dog doing? Look?'

I jerked up, followed the kid's pointing finger. The dog was across the clearing, digging furiously. He was barking short, excited barks; and even from where I stood I could see that the hair on his neck was bristling like a ruff.

I was fed up with the carrot-topped youngster's jumpiness, with my own too.

"Go ahead and find out what he's doing if you want to," I growled.

They started away and I stopped again to get some of the stained dirt between my fingers. It was stickily granular. I looked at the mark it made on my skin. It was reddish-brown, grainy. It was dried blood!

Jimmy screamed, chokingly. There was horror in Shane's shout! "Dan! Come here! Dan!" I whirled and hurtled across to them.

Joey was gnawing at something, growling. I got him by the scruff of the neck and pulled him away.

The thing at which he was gnawing— protruding whitely from the disturbed earth— was a human hand!

WE GOT Joey tied to a tree, got the trench-spade from Jim's pack, and finished the job the dog had started. I felt sick long before we were through, and there wasn't much to choose between the fish-belly white of the kid's face and Shane's green mug. The man—there was enough left of him to tell he had been that—had been dead four or five weeks at least. His hair was very long and black, but his beard was shot with gray. There was no sign of any clothing having been buried with him.

His head lolled over, sidewise. It was I who uncovered it, and unthinkingly I reached to straighten it. The feel of 'his bloated flesh— God! I rubbed my fingers against my trouser leg, shuddering, saw the reason for the unnatural position of his skull. His throat had been slashed— sliced clear through to the backbone!

"What's that in his mouth?" I think it was Art who asked. "What is it?"

I forced myself to look closer. There was a thorny flower-stem, stuck between the yellow teeth, and what hadn't moldered of the flower looked as if it had been a rose. Not a tiny wildflower, but a full-blown, cultivated rose!

"Where the hell did that come from!" I blurted.

"Never grew in the woods. Must have come from Pinehurst."

"But that's twenty-five miles from here, down the mountain. And I doubt whether anybody grows roses in that godforsaken hamlet."

Shane shrreged. "More important to know how the corpse got here. He didn't take that slice out of his own windpipe."

"No, and he didn't bury himself either. It's murder, Art, murder!"

We stared at each other. A chill ran through me.

Then I pulled myself together. "Whoever did it is a long ways away from here by now," I said. "We'll report this at the first town we get to."

"But..."

"But nothing. Our job is to get this exploration done. We're a railway survey party, not a posse of detectives. Lord knows we've got our work cut out to get through and get a report in before the time-limit. We'll cover this up, make camp, and be ready for work at sun-up."

"Camp?" Carle's voice was a croak. "Where?"

"Right here in this clearing. It's the best camp-site we've found since we started from Pinehurst."

"B-but this—" Jimmy squeezed out through white lips. "Th-this..."

"Great Jumping Jehosaphat!" I bellowed. "The stiff isn't going to bother us any— not if we keep to leeward of it." My skin was still crawling with goosepimples, but I wasn't going to let him know that. "The killer is hundreds of miles from here by now."

The kid's eyes were dark pools in the glimering paleness of his face. "I can't, Mr. Hale— I can't sleep with this around—" He was staring at the grave. "I know I won't live through the night if I do!"

I grabbed his shoulder, whirled him around to me. "Look here, Carle!" I snapped. "You'll sleep when and where I tell you to, and do as I tell you, or you're through. For good. Quit on me now and I'll have you blacklisted on every road from Canada to Mexico!"

Shane put a hand on my arm. "Hey, Dan," he admonished. "Don't be so rough on the kid." A slow grin creased his bigboned face. "Remember you were a cub once yourself."

I shoved him aside. "Keep out of this, Shane," I grunted. "I'm in charge of this outfit and by God, I'm going to run it!"

Jimmy blinked, and his face was so woe-begone that I almost chortled in spite of my anger. But Art saluted; said, in a meek, piping voice, "Yes, sir," and bent to pick up the spade. "Come on, Jimmy," he added. "We'll shovel the dirt back while the boss picks out a spot." As I turned away I could just hear him whistling between his teeth, "Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Wolf?"

That made me realize what an ass I was, blowing about my own importance. Anyone could guess that this was my first big job in the field after being tied to a desk for more chafing years than I care to think about. I skirted the clearing edge and recalled what dad used to say about Hepburn, before dad passed on:

"The Tiger never raised his voice to one of us until he was ready to kick him out of camp. And then he was a holy terror. He'd stand there, pulling at the lobe of his ear with his big mitt and roaring like the big cat he was named after, and the chap he was bawling out felt just about big enough to crawl under a snake's belly. Glory be, when old John jerked his ear like that he sure pulled the latch-string to hell. If you make half the man he was, Danny boy, I'll smile in my grave."

To my left the mysterious rock seemed to loom a living, ominous presence, quiescent only for the moment. A strange hush lay over everything. I had a queer sense that some alien presence was watching me from the darkness of the trees. My hands shook a little as I knelt to start a fire.

2: A Rose in the Moonlight

ONE of us talked much, after our meal of canned willie and baked potatoes was finished. The dog had chewed through his leash, and we'd had a devil of a time keeping him from again exhuming the murdered corpse. He was lashed tightly to a nearby sapling now, his muzzle bandaged to quiet his infernal growling. That incident had put the final damper on our spirits. We sat hunched

moodily around the fire, each busy with his own thoughts. After a while I glanced at my wrist watch.

"Seven-thirty, fellows," I said. "Turn in. We start at sun-up."

Jimmy looked at me with lack-luster eyes. "T'll sit up and watch, Mr. Hale," he offered. "I can't sleep."

I jumped to my feet, loomed over him. "You'll sleep, young fellow!" I snapped. "If you aren't snoozing in thirty seconds I'll *put* you to sleep— with this." I pushed my fist against his eyes. "Understand?"

The lad looked up at me, his mouth working, not making a sound. I've never seen a face so miserable. Damn it, would I have to make good my threat?

"Take this pill, Jim,' Art said smoothly. "That'll help you."

"No! I won't take any dope. I won't." His voice was edged with hysteria.

"It isn't dope, old man. Just bromides, to quiet your nerves. Swell to sober up on; that's what I carry them for."

The boy looked at my assistant like an adoring pup. "You— you're not kidding me?"

"May I be struck dead," Shane grinned. "Take it, bub."

"Thanks." He washed the white disk down with a swig from his canteen. Then he crawled into his blankets, and closed his eyes. In seconds he was breathing quietly.

Shane motioned me to the other side of the fire. "What say, Dan," he murmured. "Think we ought to set a watch?"

I could afford to be honest with him; there was no question about his guts. "We better had," I agreed. "I don't like the looks of things. Fellow that did for that corpse may still be prowling around. ['ll take the first watch, wake you up at one."

"Oke. Watch the fire—it's getting chilly."

I made myself comfortable with my back against a tree. Somehow the firelight seemed not to penetrate far into the close-pressing dark. The big stone was just a darker bulk against the black wall of the pines. I felt stifled. That feeling of being watched was upon me again. A half-dozen times I jumped at the crackle of a twig in the woods, the rustle of the breeze in the looming needles.

But after a while I yawned. The heat of the fire, the somnolent rustle of the pines, were getting me. I propped my lids open. So far things looked swell. It would take doing, but the route over Dark Mountain looked feasible. The L. T. & C. would yet be able to build the cut-off that would beat the Estey to tidewater by ten hours. Tomorrow would tell the story. Tomorrow— we'd start early— and...

A SOUND pulled me out of sleep—a welling sound, vast somehow as the mountain itself, yet so far down the scale of hearing that I felt rather than heard

it, felt it as a tremendous vibration impacting my cramped body. I was on my feet before it died away, peering into the darkness. The fire was low. Nothing seemed to stir, not even the blanketed forms of my sleeping companions. The sound was gone— if there had been a sound. I tried to convince myself I had dreamed it. But I couldn't shake off the unreasoning dread that oppressed me, the vague sense of impending catastrophe. For some reason I connected it with the monolith in the clearing's center— forced my gaze to the stone. And saw that, exactly at the point where its edge was nicked by the descending groove, a tiny light glowed, silvery-blue and unearthly!

My scalp tightened for one horrible instant. Blood hammered in my temples. Then the explanation came to me and I laughed, shortly. The mountainside we were on faced east. The moon must have risen, far down on the forest-hidden horizon, must be slanting its rays up along the tree-tops. And one thin beam, sifting through by some trick of foliage, was just touching the boulder's edge.

Hell of a watch I was keeping, falling asleep! Not much but embers was left of the fire. I got a chunk from the pile we had gathered, walked rather unsteadily to the flickering mound and placed the new fuel where. the blue flames still licked feebly. The resinous wood caught— flared— threw light along the ground. And I froze.

It couldn't be there— what I thought I saw on the side away from the sleeping men. Against all reason that it should be there— a single rose, erect on its short stem, nodding gently. Red as a gout of blood! I rubbed my eyes— looked again. It bobbed gently in the faint breeze.

There had been a rose in the mouth of the bloated cadaver—a rose where no rose could possibly be. And here was another! A blob of red in the flickering, eerie light— sinister ...

How had it gotten there? Who had stuck it there in the earth— what prowler moving silently from out of the forest gloom?

"Roses in the moonlight..." A phrase from some forgotten poem threaded through my numbed brain. They had brought death to— someone. Was this rose too a mocking prophesy of death?

Long waves of cold swelled up through me— chills of abysmal fear. I stared at the thing with widened eyes— saw that a square of white was impaled on one long thorn. ...

After an eternity I found strength to move, to bend and slip that paper off. There were words on it, crudely printed words that are still burned into my brain:

STRANGER, YOUR WAY IS BARRED!
GO BACK OR TREAD THE DANCE OF DOOM!

3: Flight in the Dark

FIRELIGHT flickered across the paper and made the words dance. Dance! The Dance of Doom! What was this threat—what did it portend? *What was the Dance of Doom*?

Suddenly then, while staring at the paper, a new tenseness struck at me—a new fear. There was no sound, no flicker of movement. But I knew there were eyes upon me—eyes from somewhere in the blackness—watching me. My corded neck ached with the slow effort to raise my head, to turn it, slowly, in a long, fearful scanning of the clearing's edge. My straining eyes came slowly around to the point in that dark arc where I knew the grave of the murdered man to be.

And there— at that very spot— a vague, pale form glimmered against the forest gloom. Was it moonlight, the dim, cold luminance by which I saw it, or did it glow with its own spectral light? The phosphorescence of rot, of sepulchral decay?

It was motionless—and I unmoving— while supernatural terror rocked the very foundations of my reason. And then, after an eternity, it moved— backward or forward I could not tell— but it did move— and vanish.

Something— some awful clamor of my soul for assurance that this thing was real and not an emanation from the desecrated grave— flung me into action. My feet drummed across the clearing— hurled me past the looming monolith and on toward the point where the apparition had been.

And with movement came thought. It was someone alive— human. It must be! The killer— the killer, of course! It was the killer and I was not armed. Yet I prayed it might be he. Otherwise... My left foot thudded into soft earth— the grave. The forest was just ahead. I wrenched to a stop, listened.

There was sound, deep in the trees— underbrush crackling— a footfall. Ghosts do not make sounds in the forest! I plunged after— into moonlight spattered gloom— into a weird maze of gigantic black trunks— fuzzy bushes— soft slippery carpeting of fallen needles. I caught a glimpse of a flitting white form, twisted to it, skidded, and caromed off a rough bole.

There was my quarry— gliding through the thicket that hindered me, that snatched at me with its brambles, lashed me with its low-hung branches. It glided so effortlessly, and I forced passage so painfully— yet somehow I never lost sight of it— never lost hope. Always it was just ahead— just to the left or right. When I stumbled, when I fell and heaved myself up with the gasping thought that now— now surely— it would be gone, I saw it instantly. But always beyond my reach. Always just beyond my reach.

A strange, uncanny, voiceless flight and pursuit that was, through the immemorial forest, through the light-splotched darkness. The first madness of the chase went from me, reason functioned, and even as I darted, plunged, through the tearing briary bush I knew fear again.

For it was plain, plain as the rod-line in a transit eye-piece, that I was trapped— lured and trapped. This form I pursued, this killer who thrust roses in the mouths of his victims, was baiting me, drawing me on and on into the forest, far from my companions, far from any who could answer my call for help. He could lose me at any moment— lose me and then swoop on me from behind some bush, some dark covert, slash my throat, and thrust his infernal rose between my teeth. Leave me there to rot, with the rose of death between my lips.

That was his plan, and I knew it, now. Yet I ran on after him— ran on and on— while the fingers of terror plucked at me from the darkness and dread pounded in my breast. I must keep him in sight, must keep his flitting, white, incredible form in front of me. For as long as I saw him I was still safe— but only as long as I saw him... .

HOW long would this simulated flight, this hopeless, fear-laden pursuit, continue? How long could it continue? My feet were ton-weights at the ends of my weary legs, knives twisted in my heaving breast, my face was criss-crossed with deep, bleeding scratches. Only terror— terror of that moment when I should see him no longer, when he should spring aside, vanish, haunch and leap on my unsuspecting back, his blade whetted for slaughter—only that terror spurred me on. Even that—in minutes—would not be enough.

And then it happened. A widening of the moonlight in a wind-rift—a fallen tree trunk.... He tripped on an outflung, dead branch. I left my feet in a frantic dive, got hands on his robe— jerked him down as he strove to rise— heaved and got my body over him, pressing him down. I raised my fist to smash him— and did not strike!

For it was a woman's face that stared into mine— panic-twisted! Long brown hair tumbled down, twined around my stiffened arm that held her! And the warmth of a woman's body struck through to mine that pinned her down!

I heaved upright, not loosing my grip on her arm, dragged her up with me. Blue light slanted down into the windriven opening, shimmered over the lithe, full-curved figure to which the white robe clung, half-revealing, painted her face with its soft luminance. The face was young in its hazy frame of hair, its wide mouth red-lipped, nostrils flaring, somehow feral. A face done in broad strokes, square-jawed, high cheek-boned. A pagan face, not beautiful, and more than beautiful.

Young! But in the great dark pools of her eyes lurked something old as time— a fear ancient when these towering arboreal giants were seeds, wind tossed— a fear that must have crawled in the very womb of the world. And that fear was not of me!

I knew it, gasping for breath and clutching her arm in that moonlit glen— knew it as though some thought-current flashed between us. She was afraid, ghastly afraid, of something that stalked these woods. I knew then she had not sought our fire to warn or slay, but to seek sanctuary with us from some peril whose very presence hushed the tiny creatures of the wild.

A moment I swayed, the pall of her dread folding over me like a shroud covering us both— and then I cursed myself for a fool! For my eyes— dropping— caught a red device on her robe, over her heart— a red emblazonment of a rose, full blown, so marvelously worked it seemed alive. A full blown rose...

Anger surged up in me, gave me back my voice. "What is the *Dance of Doom?*" I gritted through clenched teeth. "What is it?"

The fear in her eyes flared—and suddenly was gone. Not a line in her face changed, but expression was gone from it, humanness was gone. It was a mask— chiseled from stone, and those eyes veiled, emotionless. She spoke, and her voice was without inflection. "I do not know."

"You damn well do! You left that note for me. What's it all about?"

Her lips tightened.

"By God," I mouthed. "I'll make you falk<lillescs.

Something stopped me—a crackle in the underbrush just behind me, a soft footfall. I twisted to it. And crouched, staring.

4: Madman's Chant

HE WAS tall, immensely tall, the old, old man who stood there, unmoving, and his seamed face was suffused with wrath. His deep-sunk eyes blazed from their hollow pits, the very hairs of his white beard seemed to writhe with a terrible anger. His thick cudgel was raised over my head. In instants it must come down and crush my skull. It quivered— a soundless scream tore at my throat! But it did not fall.

Instead, from behind the screening of his beard a booming voice filled the forest with hollow sound. "Stranger— your way is barred!"

The thick staff did come down, now, but slowly. It came slowly down till it pointed straight at me. "Go back! Leave the forest. Or you will surely tread the Dance of Doom!"

I was crouched, gaping at him, gaping at the bony, skeleton hand that clutched his stout club, gaping at the white robe that cloaked his giant form. I

could not force my eyes up again to meet this blazing ones— dared not. For I knew that if I did I was lost. Even so, even with my eyes fixed on the red rose over his heart, terror shook me as a dog shakes a captured rat.

And then— perhaps the extremity of my fear broke down in a small measure the barrier between two worlds— I seeemd to hear my father's voice: "The devil himself couldn't stop Hepburn— the devil and all his imps. He'd claw the heart out of Lucifer quick as shooting if he tried to bar his way." Dad had drummed the saga of the old Tiger's deeds into my ears till they had become a very part of my soul— and now his wisdom was justified. Fear seeped out of me. I straightened.

"Go back— Like hell I will! I'm putting a railroad through here, and you, with all your nightgown flummery and red rose monkey business, can't stop me !"

If anger had reddened his eyes before, a very hell of fury flashed from them now.

"No railroad shall ever profane this good ground," he said.

"No?" My muscles tensed, ready to grab his stick if he made a lunge at me, and my voice held steady. "Try and stop me!"

"You persist?"

I thrust my jaw out and met his blazing eyes with my own. "Yes!"

"Then you must dance!" He took one backward step and was gone in the darkness of the clumped trees.

Curiously, I could not hear him go. But those last words of his rippled fear up my spine again. Not because there was a threat in it, but because there was pity.

Pity and an odd sadness. It was as if he were sorry for what was going to happen to me.

I looked around. The girl was gone, too, of course. I had let go of her when the old man appeared, and she hadn't waited. I couldn't get her out of my mind. That look in her eyes...!

I'd better get back to camp and wake up the boys. This thing wasn't over yet, not by a damned sight. There was a gun somewhere in my pack, too. I'd be more comfortable with the feel of that in my hand.

I started off— and stopped. Which way was the camp? Up or down? To left or right? I hadn't the slightest idea. I didn't know which way I had run, chasing that girt, nor how long, nor how far. I might be right on top of the clearing, or I might be miles away. I bit my lip, tried to think. No. *I couldn't remember*.

I CURSED. Nothing to get scared about, for I could always get to civilization by going downhill. But that wasn't what bothered me. This damn nonsense might hang up the survey days. And I had to get my report in in forty-eight hours. If I didn't, Wolf Hooper would have the L. T. & C. under his thumb again and the Tiger's whelps would be licked for the last time.

It was twenty years, almost to the day, since Hooper had smashed John Hepburn, taken the Louisiana, Texas and California away from him, and sent the old fighter into the limbo of some sanitarium for the mind-weakened rich. Two decades had passed before the time was ripe for Hepburn's old crowd to stage the sensational stock-exchange raid that wrested the Tiger's road from its bondage to Southern Transcontinental, and started a new war whose next battle had been staged in Wiscardo's legislature. A battle that had bled Hepburn's boys white to win— if it had been won.

There was but one way to lick the Estey gang so that they would stay licked. If we could build a cut-off through State Park, over Dark Mountain, it would take ten hours from our running time and get back the traffic of which Hooper had bled us, the traffic we needed to stay alive. We had clawed a bill through that gave us the necessary permission— with a time limit. Hooper had sneaked that joker in, that time-limit of ten days to begin construction. And we must post a half-million dollar bond for completion before a shovel was turned.

The L. T. & C. treasury was almost dry. If the line could be run at ground-level we could post the bond, start grading, and clinch the franchise. But if it were necessary to tunnel— twenty miles of bore, that meant— we were sunk.

And that was what I was here to find out—had found out with only a shadow of doubt remaining. One more day's work and I could be sure. That was why I could not seek safety in flight down the mountain, why I must find the clearing and the camp.

Besides— Good Lord! What might happen to Art and Jimmy in the meantime? They were asleep— confident I was on watch. If I didn't get back....

What was that? A long wailing sound from my left— far off. There it was again, nearer. A wail that rose and fell, rose and fell, half-human, half— something else. Nearer still. A thin crescendo, vibrant with fear. A heavy body threshing through the woods. A gibbering howl. Words. Words I couldn't make out— but human words. The threshing, the wailing were thunderous now, were upon me!

Something crashed through into the little clearing, thudded against me before I could dodge it, sheered off. I saw horrorstruck eyes, a white face. Jim Carle's face! He plunged on. I dove after him.

"Jim!" I cried. "It's Dan, Jim. It's Dan!"

He whirled— snarling. His mackinaw was ripped from his shoulder, his shirt was in shreds. There was a long knife-slash across his cheek. His hand was bleeding.

"Dan!" he gibbered. "Dan! They've got him— they've got Art." A sob ripped from his lips. "Oh God! They've got him! Come on. Run!" If I hadn't seen him talking I should not have known that squeak for his voice. "Run or they'll get us too!" He whirled, started off again.

I grabbed his belt, hauled him back. "Wait!" I snapped. "What happened? Who's got Art? What have they done to him?"

He jerked, struck at me. "Let me go! They'll catch me. They'll catch you! Come on! Run!" He was completely mad, insane with fear! He ripped a clawed hand across my face. "Let me go!"'

"Let you go, hell," I grunted. "We're going back— back to help Art!"

"No!" he mulled. "Not back there! Not back to them! Never!"

Shane wouldn't have given up without a scrap. This— this yellow cur had left him, to fight alone. I must go to Art— help him. But I couldn't let this terrorblind kid rave through the woods, alone. He'd be dead before morning, he'd bat his brains out against some tree. What to do?

"Let go!" He twisted and sank his teeth in my hand.

My bunched fist cracked flush on the button. He collapsed, sprawled. Clean out.

He'd be off again when he came to. Off again to death in the woods! I ripped his web belt from its loops, jerked free his wrap leggings. In seconds he was lashed, bound to a sapling. He couldn't get away, now, till I was ready to come back for him.

God forgive me! I bound him there, helpless, powerless to defend himself. But he knows I meant it for the best!

NO difficulty now about finding the clearing, for Carle had trampled a plain path through the brush. I took it at a run— through splotched light and black pools of shadow, passed blacker bulks concealing an unnamable threat. At last I sniffed wood smoke and slowed. If they were still there— if Shane was still alive, still fighting— only a surprise attack could succeed. I dropped to the ground and crawled, sliding almost soundlessly through the brush.

There was no sound from the clearing ahead.... A lump formed in my throat. I was too late— Art Shane was dead. I would never warm to his grin again. I stopped, and earth-smell was like grave-smell in my quivering nostrils.

Panic shrieked, gibbering, in my brain. "They're waiting for you. They've set an ambush for you. Turn and run. Turn and run, before it's too late." I lifted— and stiffened.

I could not abandon Art. Perhaps he was not killed. Perhaps they had left him— whoever "they" were— lying out there in the clearing, unconscious, bleeding, dying. I must go on. *I must know what they had done to him*.

I started crawling again. And now a sound did come from ahead, a sound that rasped nerve ends of ancestral fear. A curious chanting sound. A blood-curdling ululation, rhythmic but unmelodic, that pulsed to me through the forest darkness, that beat to me, and around me, and within me, that thumped, thumped its savage rhythm within my very brain. Vague, ancient memories

stirred in me, gripped me with primordial fear. I envisaged shuffling feet; brown, shuffling feet; aboriginal feet circling in a dance.

The darkness broke. I glimpsed red embers of a dying fire, just ahead. Belly to the ground I snaked those last few feet, inched my head beyond the last obscuring tree.

Red coals glowed, out there. I saw rumpled blankets, tossed aside; our piled packs; stacked instruments. But no sign of any human, no sign of Art Shane's torn body. Clear now, and loud, the savage dance song thumped against my aching eardrums. I forced my gaze to the clearing-center whence it came.

Moon-glow had broadened, making a lake of light that bathed the rock and filled the earthen ring. And in that ring a huge, stark-naked figure shuffled and swayed and postured in time to the pulsing, thudding rhythm of his own primal chant! He faced the great monolith as he danced, bowed to it in savage adoration, postulated to it in obscene worship of the bulking stone. His song throbbed in my veins, beat in my blood, till it was all I could do to hold myself from dashing out there and joining him in that primeval idolatry.

And then I saw the descending groove in the rock-face, saw that it was dark, that it glistened, wetly, a slow pool forming where it reached the earth. My eyes lifted. Mounding above the stone edge a black form bulked— a head lolled in the niche where the groove began. The head twitched. The form writhed.

"Art!" His name ripped from my throat and I was on my feet, was hurtling across. the clearing. "Art!" Oh my God! Was Shane stretched atop that sacrificial stone? Was it Shane's blood that dripped so slowly down that damned groove? Horror hurled me at that dancing, savage figure. Horror and the lust to kill, to tear Shane's murderer limb from limb! "Art!"

The naked dancer whirled to meet me. I saw his face, his gibbering, twisted face.

This chanting savage, this aboriginal postulant, this nude sacrificiant who trod the Dance of Doom, was— Art Shane!

I SKEWED to pass him, dug heels into the ground and twisted to confront him again. His eyes were wide, glazed and unseeing. There was froth on his contorted lips and his nostrils flared. "Art!" I cried. "Art Shane! What are you doing? Art!"

He stared at me. His brow furrowed— then cleared. His mouth worked.

"They come," he intoned in a strained queer voice. "The Children of the Rose gather to the sacrifice. Earth drinks blood, rose-red, and the clan gathers. Come dance, brother, dance." His hands beat the time of his interrupted chant, and his body swayed. "The hour of Doom approaches. Dance, brother, dance."

Mad! He was staring mad! What had driven him so? He was no neurotic, no yellow-streaked weakling like Jimmy Carle. What horror had struck at him from

the forest to drive reason from his mind? What was the sacrifice whose blood oozed down the stone?

A whimper answered me, a whimper and a low growl. I ventured a swift side glance. It was Joseph, the dog! Joseph, with his throat cut and his life-stream feeding the thirsty ground. Joseph, who quivered and died in the instant of my darting glance.

"Dance!" Shane leaped at me, grabbed my arms, trying to force me into his insane revel. "Dance!"

I thrust him away from me. "Art! Art Shane!" I shouted. "Stop it, Art!"

He reeled back to me. Somehow, hideously, his every movement kept time to the barbaric chant to which he had danced, the savage rhythm that still pulsed in my brain. He reeled back and pawed at me. "Dance, brother. Dance!"

No use. There was only one way to stop him. My fist jerked back.

But the blow was never completed. In that instant I was seized from behind! An iron grip clamped my wrist— swung me around.

I was in the clutch of the old man of the forest! Instantly, as his fingers had seized my wrist his eyes seized mine. They were deep, dark pools, into which my own gaze sank. They were all the world, and terror writhed in them. Suddenly I was powerless, unable to move, while a dull sense of utter defeat swelled within me.

His voice came from a great distance. "Stranger. Have you seen the power of the Rose of Doom?"

I heard a response. It must have been I who made it. "I have."

"Do you still wish to tread the Dance of Doom?"

My flesh crawled. I knew now, or thought I knew, what that meant. "No!"

"Is the way across Dark Mountain barred to you and yours?"

Almost, I said it. But something, some last faint remnant of will, stopped me. My teeth clamped on the word. For suddenly I knew that if once I voiced that "Yes," if once the syllable those compelling eyes demanded found form in sound, I was lost. I should be released— to stagger back down the mountain with that "Yes" deep planted in my consciousness. And it would find expression in a lying report to the men who trusted me, Hepburn's boys, my father's friends! "We cannot build over Dark Mountain. The way is barred."

But if I refused— I heard the gibbering of Art Shane behind me— felt the tomtom of savagery in my blood. If I refused— would I become as he? The twin pools of hypnosis, into which my aching eyes plumbed to find only unending swirl on swirl of awful threat, held me captive. Fear hissed in my ears, "Say 'yes' and save your soul."

My neck corded, my veins were icy streams and my brow was cold with sweat. Tiger Hepburn would have sold his soul to build a mile of road. My throat worked, my tongue moved, and the word squeezed out: "No."

It broke the spell. "No," I shouted.

"No. We'll drive the line through in spite of your damned tricks!"

I jerked away from the old devil's grasp, leaped at him with fists flailing, reached him once. Then his club crashed down. ...

5: Messenger of Death

MUSTY earth-smell was in my nostrils, and the dank fetor of the tomb. Pain throbbed at the back of my skull, dull pain. I opened my eyes, blinked. A dim glow lighted rock wall, glistening with moisture, an arched rock roof, low-hanging. I tried to lift a probing hand to the agony in my head, could not. I was tightly bound. I was a prisoner— trussed like a hog awaiting the butcher's knife.

And what was I awaiting? The old man of the forest would never dare to loose me so that I might carry my story out of Dark Mountain. If this were not my tomb a grave waited for me out in the clearing, a grave like that in which rotted the corpse we had found.

I wondered if he would thrust a rose between my dead lips. "Roses in the moonlight... ."

This wouldn't do. I must think, must try to find some way out. I was still alive, still in possession of my right senses. Poor Art! The ancient in the white robe was a hypnotist, that was evident; an adept at the art. He had almost gotten me, as he had certainly succeeded in getting Shane in his power.

Somehow that decision eased me. For death itself is not half so horrible as insanity. To see one close to you, one who has worked shoulder to shoulder with you, to see such an one mindless, a gibbering lunatic, is worse than to see him dead. I think it was the collapse of John Hepburn's mind that killed my dad. I huddered again as I remembered Art posturing naked before that rock.

Slow footfalls paced slowly to my right, passed, came back again. The cave opening must be there. That must be a guard, posted to watch me. Was it the girl? Peculiarly enough, I realized I was anxious to see her again. The pagan beauty of her face was clear to my mind's eye, despite all that had passed since I glimpsed it. I could still feel the warmth of her slim body against mine.

I could move neither arms nor legs, but I could roll over. I did so, to the right. The mouth of the cave was just man-high. There was a rock wall opposite, a corridor of; sorts, empty for the moment. The stone showed chiselmarks.

The footsteps came again. Someone walked slowly across the aperture, tall and white-robed. He glanced in.

"Art!" I exclaimed. "Art Shane!"

"Silence in there." He looked at me but I could swear he did not see me. His eyes were unfocused, their pupils unnaturally small in the dimness. "Silence!"

"Art. Don't you know me? It's Dan. Dan Hale."

For a moment his brow furrowed, as it had when I called his name while he danced. And, as then, the momentary effort was abortive. "Silence!" he said again. "He who has been chosen for the Dance of Doom must meditate in silence !'"

He said it mechanically, in that odd, strained voice that was not really his. . . then turned away to resume his sentrygo.

Poor fellow! Somehow his fate seemed worse than mine. Was he destined to remain here forever, dragging out his life in a hypnotic trance, acolyte of God alone knew what horrible ritual?

Perhaps when the railroad came through he would be rescued—cured. But the railroad would never come through now. Not the L. T. & C. I should never return to make my report, Shane would not return. When hope for us was given up it would be too late for another survey to work through. Hooper of the Estey would build the line then. I groaned. I had let them down, the men who had fought to revenge the old Tiger. The men who had trusted me because I was my father's son, bore his name. I had let them down!

LIGHT flickered, out in the corridor, yellow light that brightened as it approached. There was a faint whisper of nearing feet. Shane halted, lifted his head, expectantly. A candle, held in a white hand, appeared at the doorway edge, then a figure, a face. Brown hair rippling over shoulders white-clothed. The girl of the wood. The girl whose face I had wanted to see once more before I died.

Art advanced to meet her. "Is the hour of Doom at hand?" he intoned.

So that was what brought her here! She was the messenger of Death. Yet I did not care. What was the difference, she or another?

"Not yet!" Flat and inflectionless, the words dropped from her lips. "But it approaches. Have patience, neophyte." I noticed that she held the candle at arm's length, that its flame quivered nearer Shane than her.

"The call has gone out and the Children of the Rose gather," she said. Her voice dropped, I couldn't make out what she said next, but apparently she was giving him instructions. Art bent forward to hear her better, and for a moment they conversed thus, those strange, white-robed figures.

Then abruptly Shane reeled, flung out a hand to the wall, fell against it, slid down along it to the floor. The girl flung the candle from her, whirled, and came into the cave. In her other hand, that had been hidden in the folds of her robe, a knife glittered. She knelt to me, and the blade lifted, poised....

Sudden enlightenment soared through my brain. She was the executioner! A hypnotised man will not kill; they had feared Art's interference at the last. The candle's flame was drugged— he was out of the way— and now—

I jerked away, rolling. Useless to fight. I could not escape. But moments are precious— when they are the last you will live....

"Don't," she whispered. "Don't. He may come!"

Astounding words! I stared at her. What did she mean? "Who?" I croaked, inanely.

"Hush. Oh hush. Don't ask questions. Let me cut those ropes!"

Then— then she had not come to slash my throat. She was rescuing me! Before I could recover from the shattering realization it was done. I was free!

"But why— why?"

A soft hand went across my mouth. "Don't ask questions. Hurry. There's a chance— a tiny chance we may get out before he misses me." But I was answered. Her dark eyes were no longer mute, expressionless. Nor was it fear that made them starry.

And a leaping warmth in my own pulse responded to what her eyes told me!

"Oh, hurry!" She was insistent. "Follow me— and be very quiet. If he hears us—"

I got to my feet, winced as returning blood needled my limbs.

"I'm Dan Hale. Who are you?"

"Call me Nina. But come."

She was out of the cave. I followed perforce, stumbled over Shane's limp body. "Wait, Nina," I said huskily, and bent to it, heaved it to my shoulders. It was a staggering weight.

"Leave him!" she whispered. "You cannot escape with that load."

"No! He's my friend. I cannot leave him. Go on."

Just outside the cave mouth was another opening into the ground, and this we entered. It was a maze of rock-walled tunnels she led me through, a labyrinth I could never retrace. Towards the end I don't think I even saw them, so agonizing had become Shane's weight on my bent back. If it hadn't been for her hand on my arm, her whispered encouragement, I should never have made it. But at last we crawled out through a jagged hole and I felt the clean coolness of the open air again. It revived me.

"Where now?" I gasped, easing my burden against the vine-covered embankment that was all that showed of the underground system out of which we had come. The moon was almost at its zenith, and in its flooding light it seemed that every needle on the towering pines showed distinctly.

"Wait," Nina breathed, and crouched, listening. I listened also, and could hear nothing but the soft sough-sough of the breeze through dark foliage. But suddenly the girl put out her hand. "Down!" I could scarcely hear her. "Don't breathe."

Something of her panic communicated itself to me and I dropped, tensed. Just in time. For in a moment I too heard the soft pad-pad of footsteps and, not ten yards away, saw a form flit by, an unbelievable, ghastly shape!

It— whatever it was— man, woman, or something evil evoked from the forest mists— was swathed in white; legs, body, even its head wrapped in a tight white covering through which only the eyes were visible. It glided through the trees somehow unhuman, with scarcely a sound except that soft pad, pad of its swathed feet. And in one white-covered hand it held a single rose— full blown— like a globule of blood.

"Good Lord!" I turned to Nina fiercely. "What is it?"

SHE looked at me despairingly. "That was a Child of the Rose. They are gathering for the Dance of Doom. The moon is full. He has called them and they are gathering." She was close against me and I felt her shudder. "I am afraid we are too late— the forest is thronged with them."

"In God's name who are these Children of the Rose? What are they? What is this Dance of Doom?"

"I—don't know. I have been here with him as long as I can remember, but always he has made me keep to my cave on the nights when the Children dance. It— it is something horrible— that I know. For the sounds that came to me from the forest on the nights of the full moon—" She made a gesture, that, and the look that peered from her eyes, told me enough.

"He! Whom do you mean? The old man?"

"Yes."

"Who is he?"

"I think— he is my father. He must be, he has been so very kind. Only in the last week he has changed. He has been moody— curt. I have been frightened. And today he told me that it was time I joined the Dance of Doom." Her eyes widened. "His face was terrible when he told me. I— I wanted to run away— but I did not dare. Then— then I saw your fire, and—"

I put my hand over hers. "I know. I rushed at you like a madman and scared the wits out of you."

"You could not have known. But— when I saw you— when you held me— I knew I had been waiting for you— all my life."

She said it simply, like the child of nature she was. And I thrilled to it. Words rushed to my lips. I choked them back. Time enough for that when we had won through. I took her hand, held it tightly.

"I know a path down the mountain that is hidden," she said after a moment. "Shall we try it?"

"We'll have to," I answered. "It's suicide to stay here." I had my own ideas about what the Dance of Doom entailed. I hadn't forgotten the grave in the clearing, nor what the hypnotised Shane had done to the dog.

"All right," she responded. "Come."

I turned to lift Shane again, and hesitated. Our progress through the forest must be swift, swift and stealthy, if I were to get Nina away. Carrying Art would make that impossible. We would surely be traced and caught. Dared I leave him?

"We could throw these vines over him, hide him." Nina's low voice chimed with my thoughts. "I think he will be safe till morning, and then the Children of the Rose will be gone."

I nodded slowly. No use sacrificing all of us in a vain attempt to drag him along. He'd have to take his chances. I got the thick leaves over him and turned away.

"Come," she said.

The girl stole through the woods like a shadow, but my own clumsy progress seemed to be thunderous. We seemed to be to one side of the clearing. I was tensed, quivering. Every tiny sound, every leaf rustle seemed a threat. Once Nina dropped to the shadow of a bush. I dropped too, and another of the white-swathed apparitions showed momentarily among the trees. He passed, and we started off again.

Then we came to a trampled swathe through the brush, and I stopped. "My God!" I burst out. "I forgot."

She whirled to me. "What is it? What is it, Dan?"

"Jimmy, Jimmy Carle. I left him— off there— bound to a tree."

"Jimmy? Who....?"

I explained, quickly. "We've got to free him, Nina," I said. "We've got to."

"But...."

I turned down the path that marked his frantic flight. There was no time to argue, no time to debate. It would be murder to leave him there, bound, helpless. And it was only a few steps.

"There he is!" I exclaimed.

He was slumped against the lashings, his head sunk forward. I got to him. "Jimmy!"

He did not stir.

"Jimmy!" I stooped, put a hand on his shoulder. His head rolled away from me. I saw blood— a great gout of blood, already dry, dyeing his neck, his shirt front. His throat was slashed to the bone. And in his mouth— good God!— in his mouth a red rose was thrust, full blown!

A scream— stifled— close behind. I twisted. Nina was struggling in the arms of a white-swathed ghoul. Another was leaping at me. I lunged to meet him, my

fist arcing. It never touched him! For another and another of the old man's masked followers swarmed on me, swamped me, bore me, threshing, to the ground. As I fell I saw the bearded ancient himself, eyes flaming and cudgel upraised, towering above me.

6: Last Chance

I WAS in the prison-cave again, lashed now beyond hope of escape. But I was not alone. Nina was there too, a prisoner, helpless as I. And from somewhere outside, faint, but clear, came a pulsing that I recognized. The chant of the Doom Dance, throbbing, thudding, pounding its unholy rhythm into my quivering brain. But it was not one man alone that chanted the savage paean— it was a throng of white-swathed, ghastly fanatics. I had seen them, heard them, as Nina and I were carried back into this rocky maze from which we had thought to flee.

We did not talk, I and this girl I had found only to lose again so soon, so horribly. Only our eyes clung, drank each other in. We dared not speak... for dread was a crawling, live thing in that cave. There had been no mercy in the old man's face as his voice had boomed, out there in the forest glade, just before they bore us away: "She who would rob the Rose must feed the Rose. The good ground will drink deep tonight."

A footfall thudded, in the entrance behind me. They were coming for us. I tried to smile at Nina.

"Hale!"

I rolled over at sound of Art Shane's voice, his old voice, and hope flamed within me. I stared up at him. He was still in the robe of the Children of the Rose, but his eyes were no longer dazed. Had he come out from the hypnosis that held him— had he come to save us?

"Nasty fix you're in, Dan. Nasty mess." There was something gloating in the way he said it, something reptilian. But surely he was normal once more.

"Looks like it." I said steadily enough.

"There's a way out. If you're not a stubborn fool." His words dripped down to me, dripped down from a mouth that scarcely moved. "You just have to say the word."

"What do you mean?"

"Look?" He pulled the flap of his robe open. Beneath it he was fully clothed, and two holstered automatics hung from his belt. "Those nuts aren't armed— I can shoot a path through them. Promise me to report that the route over Dark Mountain is impossible, and I'll do it."

The floor heaved under me, and my head swam. "But it is. You know it, man. It's easy."

"Know it? Hell! I knew it a month ago, when I surveyed the cut-off for the Estey. That's when I ran across the old bird in the night-shirt and fixed up this little entertainment for you."

"Then you're—"

"Working for Wolf Hooper. Sure, now you got it. Did you think he laid down on the job when the bunch of paupers that sent you out licked him at the State House? There's twenty grand in this job for me, and I'm a ring-tailed pussy-cat if I haven't earned it."

"You're telling me the Children of the Rose are fakes!"

"Oh, they're straight enough. I come from this neck of the woods; always knew there was some kind of cult up here that had the idea Dark Mountain belonged to them. So when the boss nut popped up I knew just how to play him. Fell right in with him, admitted the way was barred, kidded him good and proper. When he put it on me would I join his outfit I jumped at the chance. Reckoned I could use them if we lost out on the franchise. Figured on scaring out anyone the L.T. & C. sent to look things over."

I tried to throw the contempt, the horror, I had for him, into my eyes, my voice. "You inflamed them to murder to win your filthy pay!"

He shrugged. "I didn't think it would come to that," he said, "but you were mulish and they got out of hand. What the hell! It ain't the first time guys have been croaked in a scrap between the two roads. Tiger Hepburn did plenty of it in his day."

"But that was clean fighting, with an even chance. This...."

"Cut the gabbing. What do you say. Promise?"

It was Hobson's choice— whatever my answer would be. Either way we were licked.

"If I agree," I questioned, "you get me and Nina out of here?"

"Hell no! I'm not including the girl. I'm not taking a chance on her— she might ball up the works. The two of us will have a tight squeeze as it is."

A red haze swam across my eyes. "You rat!" I snapped. "You can go to hell!" To save her I might have made the rotten deal. But now....

He licked his lips, grinned. How could I ever have thought his smile pleasant, friendly?

"Just as you say, Hale," he laughed, "I like it better this way but I though I'd give you a chance. When this is over, I'll go back and make the report myself. Boy, how I will weep when I tell them a landslide buried you and Jimmy."

The chanting was growing louder, closer. Shane looked furtively around and slipped away. I had time only for a whispered, "Heads up, sweetheart," to Nina before the obscene procession appeared. A long line of white-swathed mummies pranced in, circled around us. Two bent to me, two to Nina. They lifted us and a long animal howl punctuated the horrible rhythm of their hymn.

7: The Dance of Doom

THE clearing was a bowl into which the moon, almost overhead, poured merciless light. I lay, trussed so that I could not move, on the flat top of the monolith. Another bound figure was feet away from me. It was Nina, but she was outstretched in the oval depression whose use I had guessed, ages ago it seemed. Her head overhung the rock-edge, and her neck lay exactly in the jog that nicked it. Squatted at my side, making doubly sure I could not escape, was Shane— his eyes unfocused once more, his lips twitching in time to the swelling pulse of the dance. And above the prostrate girl loomed the tall, weird form of the bearded leader of the cult. Looking up at him, I fancied he towered to the very sky. In one gnarled hand a long, keen knife caught the moonlight, and at his feet two red roses lay.

But at the moment the terror of the scene focused in the earthen ring below and about the rock. They were circling about us, faceless, bodiless myrmidons of the Rose, circling and posturing and dancing, in a primeval measure whose utter abandon paled to mildness Shane's solitary prancing that had held me horror-stricken not an hour before. And from their hidden, muffled mouths came the chant of Doom, the thudding, thumping, booming voice of antediluvian fear, the murder hymn to some mad idol conceived by the crazed brain of the ancient. It was the voice of the wild itself— the very trees seemed to dance to its awful pulse— the very mountain to heave in its primordial rhythm. It was the quintessence of savagery, it was civilization abandoned, the triumph song of the ancient nature gods, come back to claim their own.

Suddenly it hushed— and silence thundered in the glen. I saw that the bearded priest of the lost religion had raised the knife— that he was quivering with some strange ecstasy. For a moment the silence held— then his voice boomed into the quiet:

"Children of the Rose, the night-orb nears its zenith—the moment of Doom is at hand. The good ground is athirst— and it shall drink deep. The good ground is athirst— and its thirst shall be slaked with the blood of him who would bind it with thongs of steel. Its thirst shall be slaked with the blood of her who is apostate to the worship of the Rose. Children of the Rose— shall the good ground drink?"

And in a muffled, awful chorus the white-swathed, mouthless devils responded: "Let the good ground drink."

The ancient knelt, his knife poised over Nina's throat, his bearded face upturned to where the glowing disk of the moon was within a hairline of the meridian. In my ear Shane whispered, "What say, Hale? There's time, even yet. When he drives in the knife... They won't notice us."

"Go to—"

Just then the old man's free hand moved— crept up alongside his bearded cheek— *and pulled at the lobe of his ear!*

In that instant, faced as I was with death, this gesture of the madman struck me as if it had been a blow. Dad's oft-repeated words came flocking back to me. John Hepburn, insane, still lived. The old man's fierce glare of anger, like no other living man's... was he... could he be...? Or was I going mad myself, mad from the certainty of doom...?

"Hepburn! John Hepburn! *Tiger Hepburn!*" My voice was a blast in that stillness. "Hepburn! He's a Hooper man! There's a Hooper man here! A Hooper spy!"

The old man jerked to me— and I saw sudden light blaze into his eyes. "Dan!" he said fumbling. "It's Dan Hale's voice!"

"John!" I took the cue. "John Hepburn! I'm Dan Hale. Wolf Hooper sent this fellow! He's an Estey spy."

Then Shane made his mistake. If he had kept quiet— or brazened it out.... But he sprang to his feet, tore the robe from him, reached for his guns. The old man— Tiger Hepburn— leaped for him, his knife flashing.

Shane got one gun out and it blazed. The Tiger jerked back with the impact of the bullet, folded, and sprawled across the stone. The knife slid from his flaccid hand, slid over the stone edge. John Hepburn had died as he had lived— fighting Wolf Hooper's men.

Shane whirled to me, his gun snouting.

"You dog," he gritted. "You won't—" He stopped short. A white wave was breaking over the rock-top, a ravening white wave of swathed, horrible figures, more horrible now for their snarling, animal-like baying. Shane's gun thudded, but a mummy, plunging between, took the lead death meant for me. The others shrilled, "Kill! Kill!" and Shane vanished under the white torrent.

I heard the body-muffled crash of his gunfire, once, twice. Then, as bandaged; plunging feet spurned me, kicked me from the platform, I heard him scream. That piercing agonized shriek rings in my nightmares, even now.

I rolled over, thudded to the ground, and felt a searing pain in my side. While that bestial chaos still raged overhead I twisted to see what had cut me, and sudden hope blazed across my swirling brain. It was the old man's knife! In cutting me it had sliced the rope binding me, loosening it just enough that I could jerk, get fingers on the black hilt, cut the bonds about my ankles.

I heaved to my feet, my wrists still lashed together but my arms free and in front of me. The knife was grasped in my taut knuckles.

They had shoved Nina aside, near the edge, were dragging what was left of Shane to take her place at the sacrificial niche. They were intent on their gruesome task— did not see me reach up and slice that keen-edged blade

through the ropes around her, did not see her roll off into my arms and join me in headlong flight to the shelter of the forest.

We got safely into their welcome gloom— but none too soon! For behind us a great shout arose:

"It drinks. The good ground drinks!"

I dared not glance back, but in my mind's eye I could see that dark groove, wet and glistening, could see the dark-red pool gathering on the earth below.

As we stumbled through the trees, clinging together, sound followed up— thudding, thumping, rhythmic, horribly rhythmic, the chant of the Dance of Doom. It pulsed through the darkness of the woods; throbbed its savage, unmelodic cadence through the forest aghast; throbbed in my blood, in my brain, till the whole world seemed to beat primordial horror into my very soul.

Then Nina drew closer to me. I felt the warmth of her dear body, and my blood throbbed with a new rhythm.

———————

9: The Trail of Behemoth

R. Austin Freeman

1862-1943

Pearson's Magazine Nov 1926

Collected in: *The Famous Cases of Dr. Thorndyke*, 1929

Freeman's regular scientific detective was Dr Thornyke, a scientist and barrister, and his "Watson," who narrates his cases, is Dr. Jervis. Freeman was himself a practicing doctor, in the UK and in Ghana, before taking up writing fiction.

OF ALL THE MINOR dissipations in which temperate men indulge there is none, I think, more alluring than the after-breakfast pipe. I had just lit mine and was standing before the fire with the unopened paper in my hand when my ear caught the sound of hurried footsteps ascending the stair. Now experience has made me somewhat of a connoisseur in footsteps. A good many are heard on our stair, heralding the advent of a great variety of clients, and I have learned to distinguish those which are premonitory of urgent cases. Such I judged the present ones to be, and my judgment was confirmed by a hasty, importunate tattoo on our small brass knocker. Regretfully taking the much-appreciated pipe from my mouth, I crossed the room and threw the door open.

"Good morning, Dr. Jervis," said our visitor, a barrister whom I knew slightly. "Is your colleague at home?"

"No, Mr. Bidwell," I replied. "I am sorry to say he is out of town. He won't be back until the day after to-morrow."

Mr. Bidwell was visibly disappointed.

"Ha! Pity!" he exclaimed; and then with quick tact he added: "But still, you are here. It comes to the same thing."

"I don't know about that," said I. "But, at any rate, I am at your service."

"Thank you," said he. "And in that case I will ask you to come round with me at once to Tanfield Court. A most shocking thing has happened. My old friend and neighbour, Giles Herrington, has been— well, he is dead— died suddenly, and I think there can be no doubt that he was killed. Can you come now? I will give you the particulars as we go."

I scribbled a hasty note to say where I had gone, and having laid it on the table, got my hat and set forth with Mr. Bidwell.

"It has only just been discovered," said he, as we crossed King's Bench Walk. "The laundress who does his chambers and mine was battering at my door when I arrived— I don't live in the Temple, you know. She was as pale as a ghost and in an awful state of alarm and agitation. It seems that she had gone up to Herrington's chambers to get his breakfast ready as usual; but when she went into the sitting-room she found him lying dead on the floor. Thereupon she

rushed down to my chambers— I am usually an early bird— and there I found her, as I said, battering at my door, although she has a key.

"Well, I went up with her to my friend's chambers— they are on the first floor, just over mine— and there, sure enough, was poor old Giles lying on the floor, cold and stiff. Evidently he had been lying there all night."

"Were there any marks of violence on the body?" I asked.

"I didn't notice any," he replied, "but I didn't look very closely. What I did notice was that the place was all in disorder— a chair overturned and things knocked off the table. It was pretty evident that there had been a struggle and that he had not met his death by fair means."

"And what do you want us to do?" I asked.

"Well," he replied, "I was Herrington's friend; about the only friend he had, for he was not an amiable or a sociable man; and I am the executor of his will.

"Appearances suggest very strongly that he has been murdered, and I take it upon myself to see that his murderer is brought to account. Our friendship seems to demand that. Of course, the police will go into the affair, and if it turns out to be all plain sailing, there will be nothing for you to do. But the murderer, if there is one, has got to be secured and convicted, and if the police can't manage it, I want you and Thorndyke to see the case through. This is the place."

He hurried in through the entry and up the stairs to the first-floor landing, where he rapped loudly at the closed "oak" of a set of chambers above which was painted the name of "Mr. Giles Herrington."

After an interval, during which Mr. Bidwell repeated the summons, the massive door opened and a familiar face looked out: the face of Inspector Badger of the Criminal Investigation Department. The expression that it bore was not one of welcome, and my experience of the inspector caused me to brace myself up for the inevitable contest.

"What is your business?" he inquired forbiddingly.

Mr. Bidwell took the question to himself and replied:

"I am Mr. Herrington's executor, and in that capacity I have instructed Dr. Jervis and his colleague, Dr. Thorndyke, to watch the case on my behalf. I take it that you are a police officer?"

"I am," replied Badger, "and I can't admit any unauthorised persons to these chambers."

"We are not unauthorised persons," said Mr. Bidwell. "We are here on legitimate business. Do I understand that you refuse admission to the legal representatives of the deceased man?"

In the face of Mr. Bidwell's firm and masterful attitude, Badger began, as usual, to weaken. Eventually, having warned us to convey no information to anybody, he grudgingly opened the door and admitted us.

"I have only just arrived, myself," he said. "I happened to be in the porter's lodge on other business when the laundress came and gave the alarm."

As I stepped into the room and looked round, I saw at a glance the clear indications of a crime. The place was in the utmost disorder. The cloth had been dragged from the table, littering the floor with broken glass, books, a tobacco jar, and various other objects. A chair sprawled on its back, the fender was dislodged from its position, the hearth-rug was all awry; and in the midst of the wreckage, on the space of floor between the table and the fireplace, the body of a man was stretched in a not uneasy posture.

I stooped over him and looked him over searchingly; an elderly man, clean-shaved and slightly bald, with a grim, rather forbidding countenance, which was not, however, distorted or apparently unusual in expression. There were no obvious injuries, but the crumpled state of the collar caused me to look more closely at the throat and neck, and I then saw pretty plainly a number of slightly discoloured marks, such as would be made by fingers tightly grasping the throat. Evidently Badger had already observed them, for he remarked:

"There's no need to ask you what he died of, doctor; I can see that for myself."

"The actual cause of death," said I, "is not quite evident. He doesn't appear to have died from suffocation, but those are very unmistakable marks on the throat."

"Uncommonly," agreed Badger; "and they are enough for my purpose without any medical hair-splittings. How long do you think he has been dead?"

"From nine to twelve hours," I replied, "but nearer nine, I should think."

The inspector looked at his watch.

"That makes it between nine o'clock and midnight, but nearer midnight," said he. "Well, we shall hear if the night porter has anything to tell us. I've sent word for him to come over, and the laundress, too. And here is one of 'em."

It was, in fact, both of them, for when the inspector opened the door, they were discovered conversing eagerly in whispers.

"One at a time," said Badger. "I'll have the porter in first"; and having admitted the man, he unceremoniously shut the door on the woman. The night porter saluted me as he came in— we were old acquaintances— and then halted near the door, where he stood stiffly, with his eyes riveted on the corpse.

"Now," said Badger, "I want you to try to remember if you let in any strangers last night, and if so, what their business was."

"I remember quite well," the porter replied. "I let in three strangers while I was on duty. One was going to Mr. Bolter in Fig Tree Court, one was going to Sir Alfred Blain's chambers, and the third said he had an appointment with Mr. Herrington."

"Ha!" exclaimed Badger, rubbing his hands. "Now, what time did you let him in?"

"It was just after ten-fifteen."

"Can you tell us what he was like and how he was dressed?"

"Yes," was the reply. "He didn't know where Tanfield Court was, and I had to walk down and show him, so I was able to have a good look at him. He was a middle-sized man, rather thin, dark hair, small moustache, no beard, and he had a long, sharp nose with a bump on the bridge. He wore a soft felt hat, a loose light overcoat, and he carried a thickish rough stick."

"What class of man was he? Seem to be a gentleman?"

"He was quite a gentlemanly kind of man, so far as I could judge, but he looked a bit shabby as to his clothes."

"Did you let him out?"

"Yes. He came to the gate a few minutes before eleven."

"And did you notice anything unusual about him then?"

"I did," the porter replied impressively. "I noticed that his collar was all crumpled and his hat was dusty and dented. His face was a bit red, and he looked rather upset, as if he had been having a tussle with somebody. I looked at him particularly and wondered what had been happening, seeing that Mr. Herrington was a quiet, elderly gentleman, though he was certainly a bit peppery at times."

The inspector took down these particulars gleefully in a large notebook and asked:

"Is that all you know of the affair?" And when the porter replied that it was, he said: "Then I will ask you to read this statement and sign your name below it."

The porter read through his statement and carefully signed his name at the foot. He was about to depart when Badger said:

"Before you go, perhaps you had better help us to move the body into the bedroom. It isn't decent to leave it lying there."

Accordingly the four of us lifted the dead man and carried him into the bedroom, where we laid him on the undisturbed bed and covered him with a rug. Then the porter was dismissed, with instructions to send in Mrs. Runt.

The laundress's statement was substantially a repetition of what Mr. Bidwell had told me. She had let herself into the chambers in the usual way, had come suddenly on the dead body of the tenant, and had forthwith rushed downstairs to give the alarm. When she had concluded the inspector stood for a few moments looking thoughtfully at his notes.

"I suppose," he said presently, "you haven't looked round these chambers this morning? Can't say if there is anything unusual about them, or anything missing?"

The laundress shook her head.

"I was too upset," she said, with another furtive glance at the place where the corpse had lain; "but," she added, letting her eyes roam vaguely round the room, "there doesn't seem to be anything missing, so far as I can see— wait! Yes, there is. There's something gone from that nail on the wall; and it was there yesterday morning, because I remember dusting it."

"Ha!" exclaimed Badger. "Now what was it that was hanging on that nail?"

"Well," Mrs. Runt replied hesitatingly, "I really don't know what it was. Seemed like a sort of sword or dagger, but I never looked at it particularly, and I never took it off its nail. I used to dust it as it hung."

"Still," said Badger, "you can give us some sort of description of it, I suppose?"

"I don't know that I can," she replied. "It had a leather case, and the handle was covered with leather, I think, and it had a sort of loop, and it used to hang on that nail."

"Yes, you said that before," Badger commented sourly. "When you say it had a case, do you mean a sheath?"

"You can call it a sheath if you like," she retorted, evidently ruffled by the inspector's manner, "I call it a case."

"And how big was it? How long, for instance?"

Mrs. Runt held out her hands about a yard apart, looked at them critically, shortened the interval to a foot, extended it to two, and still varying the distance, looked vaguely at the inspector.

"I should say it was about that," she said.

"About what?" snorted Badger. "Do you mean a foot or two feet or a yard? Can't you give us some idea?"

"I can't say no clearer than what I have," she snapped. "I don't go round gentlemen's chambers measuring the things."

It seemed to me that Badger's questions were rather unnecessary, for the wall-paper below the nail gave the required information. A coloured patch on the faded ground furnished a pretty clear silhouette of a broad-bladed sword or large dagger, about two feet six inches long, which had apparently hung from the nail by a loop or ring at the end of the handle. But it was not my business to point this out. I turned to Bidwell and asked:

"Can you tell us what the thing was?"

"I am afraid I can't," he replied. "I have very seldom been in these chambers. Herrington and I usually met in mine and went to the club. I have a dim recollection of something hanging on that nail, but I have not the least idea what it was or what it was like. But do you think it really matters? The thing was almost certainly a curio of some kind. It couldn't have been of any appreciable value. It is absurd, on the face of it, to suppose that this man came to

Herrington's chambers, apparently by appointment, and murdered him for the sake of getting possession of an antique sword or dagger. Don't you think so?"

I did, and so, apparently, did the inspector, with the qualification that "the thing seemed to have disappeared, and its disappearance ought to be accounted for"; which was perfectly true, though I did not quite see how the "accounting for" was to be effected. However, as the laundress had told all that she knew, Badger gave her her dismissal and she retired to the landing, where I noticed that the night porter was still lurking. Mr. Bidwell also took his departure, and happening, a few moments later, to glance out of the window, I saw him walking slowly across the court, apparently conferring with the laundress and the porter.

As soon as we were alone, Badger assumed a friendly and confidential manner and proceeded to give advice.

"I gather that Mr. Bidwell wants you to investigate this case, but I don't fancy it is in your line at all. It is just a matter of tracing that stranger and getting hold of him. Then we shall have to find out what property there was on these premises. The laundress says that there is nothing missing, but of course no one supposes that the man came here to take the furniture. It is most probable that the motive was robbery of some kind. There's no sign of anything broken open; but then, there wouldn't be, as the keys were available."

Nevertheless he prowled round the room, examining every receptacle that had a lock and trying the drawers of the writing-table and of what looked like a file cabinet.

"You will have your work cut out," I remarked, "to trace that man. The porter's description was pretty vague."

"Yes," he replied; "there isn't much to go on. That's where you come in," he added with a grin, "with your microscopes and air-pumps and things. Now if Dr. Thorndyke was here he would just sweep a bit of dust from the floor and collect any stray oddments and have a good look at them through his magnifier, and then we should know all about it. Can't you do a bit in that line? There's plenty of dust on the floor. And here's a pin. Wonderful significant thing is a pin. And here's a wax vesta; now, that ought to tell you quite a lot. And here is the end of a leather boot-lace— at least, that is what it looks like. That must have come out of somebody's boot. Have a look at it, doctor, and see if you can tell me what kind of boot it came out of and whose boot it was."

He laid the fragment, and the match, and the pin on the table and grinned at me somewhat offensively. Inwardly I resented his impertinence— perhaps the more so since I realised that Thorndyke would probably not have been so completely gravelled as I undoubtedly was. But I considered it politic to take his clumsy irony in good part, and even to carry on his elephantine joke. Accordingly, I picked up the three "clues," one after the other, and examined

them gravely, noting that the supposed boot-lace appeared to be composed of whalebone or vulcanite.

"Well, inspector," I said. "I can't give you the answer off-hand. There's no microscope here. But I will examine these objects at my leisure and let you have the information in due course."

With that I wrapped them with ostentatious care in a piece of note-paper and bestowed them in my pocket, a proceeding which the inspector watched with a sour smile.

"I'm afraid you'll be too late," said he. "Our men will probably pick up the tracks while you are doing the microscope stunt. However, I mustn't stay here any longer. We can't do anything until we know what valuables there were on the premises; and I must have the body removed and examined by the police surgeon."

He moved towards the door, and as I had no further business in the rooms, I followed, and leaving him to lock up, I took my way back to our chambers.

When Thorndyke returned to town a couple of days later, I mentioned the case to him. But what Badger had said appeared to be true. It was a case of ascertaining the identity of the stranger who had visited the dead man on that fatal night, and this seemed to be a matter for the police rather than for us. So the case remained in abeyance until the evening following the inquest, when Mr. Bidwell called on us, accompanied by a Mr. Carston, whom he introduced as an old friend of his and of Herrington's family.

"I have called," he said, "to bring you a full report of the evidence at the inquest. I had a shorthand writer there, and this is a typed transcript of his notes. Nothing fresh transpired beyond what Dr. Jervis knows and has probably told you, but I thought you had better have all the information in writing."

"There is no clue as to who the suspicious visitor was, I suppose?" said Thorndyke.

"Not the slightest," replied Bidwell. "The porter's description is all they have to go on, and of course it would apply to hundreds of persons. But, in connection with that, there is a question on which I should like to take your opinion. Poor Herrington once mentioned to me that he was subjected to a good deal of annoyance by a certain person who from time to time applied to him for financial help. I gathered that some sort of claim was advanced, and that the demands for money were more or less of the nature of blackmail. Giles didn't say who the person was, but I got the impression that he was a relative. Now, my friend Carston, who attended the inquest with me, noticed that the porter's description of the stranger would apply fairly well to a nephew of Giles's, whom he knows slightly and who is a somewhat shady character; and the question that Carston and I have been debating is whether these facts ought

to be communicated to the police. It is a serious matter to put a man under suspicion on such very slender data; and yet— — "

"And yet," said Carston, "the facts certainly fit the circumstances. This fellow— his name is Godfrey Herrington— is a typical ne'er-do-weel. Nobody knows how he lives. He doesn't appear to do any work. And then there is the personality of the deceased. I didn't know Giles Herrington very well, but I knew his brother, Sir Gilbert, pretty intimately, and if Giles was at all like him, a catastrophe might easily have occurred."

"What was Sir Gilbert's special characteristic?" Thorndyke asked.

"Unamiability," was the reply. "He was a most cantankerous, overbearing man, and violent at times. I knew him when I was at the Colonial Office with him, and one of his official acts will show the sort of man he was. You may remember it, Bidwell— the Bekwè affair. There was some trouble in Bekwè, which is one of the minor kingdoms bordering on Ashanti, and Sir Gilbert was sent out as a special commissioner to settle it. And settle it he did with a vengeance. He took up an armed force, deposed the king of Bekwè, seized the royal stool, message stick, state sword, drums, and the other insignia of royalty, and brought them away with him. And what made it worse was that he treated these important things as mere loot: kept some of them himself and gave away others as presents to his friends.

"It was an intolerably high-handed proceeding, and it caused a rare outcry. Even the Colonial Governor protested, and in the end the Secretary of State directed the Governor to reinstate the king and restore the stolen insignia, as these things went with the royal title and were necessary for the ceremonies of reinstatement or the accession of a new king."

"And were they restored?" asked Bidwell.

"Most of them were. But just about this time Gilbert died, and as the whereabouts of one or two of them were unknown, it was impossible to collect them then. I don't know if they have been found since."

Here Thorndyke led Mr. Carston back to the point from which he had digressed.

"You are suggesting that certain peculiarities of temper and temperament on the part of the deceased might have some bearing on the circumstances of his death."

"Yes," said Carston. "If Giles Herrington was at all like his brother— I don't know whether he was—" here he looked inquiringly at Bidwell, who nodded emphatically.

"I should say he was, undoubtedly," said he. "He was my friend, and I was greatly attached to him; but to others, I must admit, he must have appeared a decidedly morose, cantankerous, and irascible man."

"Very well," resumed Carston. "If you imagine this cadging, blackmailing wastrel calling on him and trying to squeeze him, and then you imagine Herrington refusing to be squeezed and becoming abusive and even violent, you have a fair set of antecedents for— for what, in fact, did happen."

"By the way," said Thorndyke, "what exactly did happen, according to the evidence?"

"The medical evidence," replied Bidwell, "showed that the immediate cause of death was heart failure. There were marks of fingers on the throat, as you know, and various other bruises. It was evident that deceased had been violently assaulted, but death was not directly due to the injuries."

"And the finding of the jury?" asked Thorndyke.

"Wilful murder, committed by some person unknown."

"It doesn't appear to me," said I, "that Mr. Carston's suggestion has much present bearing on the case. It is really a point for the defence. But we are concerned with the identity of the unknown man."

"I am inclined to agree with Dr. Jervis," said Bidwell. "We have got to catch the hare before we go into culinary details."

"My point is," said Carston, "that Herrington's peculiar temper suggests a set of circumstances that would render it probable that his visitor was his nephew Godfrey."

"There is some truth in that," Thorndyke agreed. "It is highly speculative, but a reasonable speculation cannot be disregarded when the known facts are so few. My feeling is that the police ought to be informed of the existence of this man and his possible relations with the deceased. As to whether he is or is not the suspected stranger, that could be settled at once if he were confronted with the night porter."

"Yes, that is true," said Bidwell. "I think Carston and I had better call at Scotland Yard and give the Assistant Commissioner a hint on the subject. It will have to be a very guarded hint, of course."

"Was the question of motive raised?" Thorndyke asked. "As to robbery, for instance."

"There is no evidence of robbery," replied Bidwell. "I have been through all the receptacles in the chambers, and everything seems intact. The keys were in poor Giles's pocket and nothing seems to have been disturbed; indeed, it doesn't appear that there was any portable property of value on the premises."

"Well," said Thorndyke, "the first thing that has to be done is to establish the identity of the nocturnal visitor. That is the business of the police. And if you call and tell them what you have told us, they will, at least, have something to investigate. They should have no difficulty in proving either that he is or is not the man whom the porter let in at the gate; and until they have settled that question, there is no need for us to take any action."

"Exactly," said Bidwell, rising and taking up his hat. "If the police can complete the case, there is nothing for us to do. However, I will leave you the report of the inquest to look over at your leisure, and will keep you informed as to how the case progresses."

When our two friends had gone, Thorndyke sat for some time turning over the sheets of the report and glancing through the depositions of the witnesses. Presently he remarked:

"If it turns out that this man, Godfrey Herrington, is not the man whom the porter let in, the police will be left in the air. Apart from Bidwell's purely speculative suggestion, there seems to be no clue whatever to the visitor's identity."

"Badger would like to hear you say that," said I. "He was very sarcastic respecting our methods of research," and here I gave him an account of my interview with the inspector, including the "clues" with which he had presented me.

"It was like his impudence," Thorndyke commented smilingly, "to pull the leg of my learned junior. Still, there was a germ of sense in what he said. A collection of dust from the floor of that room, in which two men had engaged in a violent struggle, would certainly yield traces of both of them."

"Mixed up with the traces of a good many others," I remarked.

"True," he admitted. "But that would not affect the value of a positive trace of a particular individual. Supposing, for instance, that Godfrey Herrington were known to have dyed hair; and suppose that one or more dyed male hairs were found in the dust from the floor of the room. That would establish a probability that he had been in that room, and also that he was the person who had struggled with the deceased."

"Yes, I see that," said I. "Perhaps I ought to have collected some of the dust. But it isn't too late now, as Bidwell has locked up the chambers. Meanwhile, let me present you with Badger's clues. They came off the floor."

I searched in my pocket and produced the paper packet, the existence of which I had forgotten, and having opened it, offered it to him with an ironical bow. He looked gravely at the little collection, and, disregarding the pin and the match, picked out the third object and examined it curiously.

"That is the alleged boot-lace end," he remarked. "It doesn't do much credit to Badger's powers of observation. It is as unlike leather as it could well be."

"Yes," I agreed, "it is obviously whalebone or vulcanite."

"It isn't vulcanite," said he, looking closely at the broken end and getting out his pocket lens for a more minute inspection.

"What do you suppose it is?" I asked, my curiosity stimulated by the evident interest with which he was examining the object.

"We needn't suppose," he replied. "I fancy that if we get Polton to make a cross section of it, the microscope will tell us what it is. I will take it up to him now."

As he went out and I heard him ascending to the laboratory where our assistant, Polton, was at work, I was conscious of a feeling of vexation and a sense of failure. It was always thus. I had treated this fragment with the same levity as had the inspector, just dropping it into my pocket and forgetting it. Probably the thing was of no interest or importance; but whether it was or not, Thorndyke would not be satisfied until he knew for certain what it was. And that habit of examining everything, of letting nothing pass without the closest scrutiny, was one of the great secrets of his success as an investigator.

When he came down again I reopened the subject.

"It has occurred to me," I said, "that it might be as well for us to have a look at that room. My inspection was rather perfunctory, as Badger was there."

"I have just been thinking the same," he replied. "If Godfrey is not the man, and the police are left stranded, Bidwell will look to us to take up the inquiry, and by that time the room may have been disturbed. I think we will get the key from Bidwell to-morrow morning and make a thorough examination. And we may as well adopt Badger's excellent suggestion respecting the dust. I will instruct Polton to come over with us and bring a full-sized vacuum-cleaner, and we can go over what he collects at our leisure."

Agreeably to this arrangement, we presented ourselves on the following morning at Mr. Bidwell's chambers, accompanied by Polton, who, however, being acutely conscious of the vacuum-cleaner, which was thinly disguised in brown paper, sneaked up the stairs and got out of sight. Bidwell opened the door himself, and Thorndyke explained our intentions to him.

"Of course you can have the key," he said, "but I don't know that it is worth your while to go into the matter. There have been developments since I saw you last night. When Carston and I called at Scotland Yard we found that we were too late. Godfrey Herrington had come forward and made a voluntary statement."

"That was wise of him," said Thorndyke, "but he would have been wiser still to have notified the porter of what had happened and sent for a doctor. He claims that the death was a misadventure, of course?"

"Not at all," replied Bidwell. "He states that when he left, Giles was perfectly well; so well that he was able to kick him— Godfrey— down the stairs and pitch him out on to the pavement. It seems, according to his account, that he called to try to get some financial help from his uncle. He admits that he was rather importunate and persisted after Giles had definitely refused. Then Giles got suddenly into a rage, thrust him out of the chambers, ran him down the stairs, and threw him out into Tanfield Court. It is a perfectly coherent story, and quite

probable up to a certain point, but it doesn't account for the bruises on Giles's body or the finger-marks on his throat."

"No," agreed Thorndyke; "either he is lying, or he is the victim of some very inexplicable circumstances. But I gather that you have no further interest in the case?"

Bidwell reflected.

"Well," he said, "I don't know about that. Of course I don't believe him, but it is just possible that he is telling the truth. My feeling is that, if he is guilty, I want him convicted; but if by any chance he is innocent— well, he is Giles's nephew, and I suppose it is my duty to see that he has a fair chance. Yes, I think I would like you to watch the case independently— with a perfectly open mind, neither for nor against. But I don't see that there is much that you can do."

"Neither do I," said Thorndyke. "But one can observe and note the visible facts, if there are any. Has anything been done to the rooms?"

"Nothing whatever," was the reply. "They are just as Dr. Jervis and I found them the morning after the catastrophe."

With this he handed Thorndyke the key and we ascended to the landing, where we found Polton on guard with the vacuum-cleaner, like a sentry armed with some new and unorthodox weapon.

The appearance of the room was unchanged. The half-dislodged table-cloth, the litter of broken glass on the floor, even the displaced fender and hearth-rug, were just as I had last seen them. Thorndyke looked about him critically and remarked:

"The appearances hardly support Godfrey's statement. There was clearly a prolonged and violent struggle, not a mere ejectment. And look at the table-cloth. The uncovered part of the table is that nearest the door, and most of the things have fallen off at the end nearest the fireplace. Obviously, the body that dislodged the cloth was moving away from the door, not towards it, which again suggests something more than an unresisted ejectment."

He again looked round, and his glance fell on the nail and the coloured silhouette on the wall-paper.

"That, I presume," said he, "is where the mysterious sword or dagger hung. It is rather large for a dagger and somewhat wide for a sword, though barbaric swords are of all shapes and sizes."

He produced his spring tape and carefully measured the phantom shape on the wall. "Thirty-one inches long," he reported, "including the loop at the end of the handle, by which it hung; seven and a half inches at the top of the scabbard, tapering rather irregularly to three inches at the tip. A curious shape. I don't remember ever having seen a sword quite like it."

Meanwhile Polton, having picked up the broken glass and other objects, had uncovered the vacuum-cleaner and now started the motor— which was driven

by an attached dry battery— and proceeded very systematically to trundle the machine along the floor. At every two or three sweeps he paused to empty the receiver, placing the grey, felt-like mass on a sheet of paper, with a pencilled note of the part of the room from whence it came. The size of these masses of felted dust, and the astonishing change in the colour of the carpet that marked the trail of the cleaner, suggested that Mrs. Runt's activities had been of a somewhat perfunctory character. Polton's dredgings apparently represented the accumulations of years.

"Wonderful lot of hairs in this old dust," Polton remarked as he deposited a fresh consignment on the paper, "especially in this lot. It came from under that looking-glass on the wall. Perhaps that clothes brush that hangs under the glass accounts for it."

"Yes," I agreed, "they will be hairs brushed off Mr. Herrington's collar and shoulders. But," I added, taking the brush from its nail and examining it, "Mrs. Runt seems to have used the glass, too. There are three long hairs still sticking to the brush."

As Thorndyke was still occupied in browsing inquisitively round the room, I proceeded to make a preliminary inspection of the heaps of dust, picking out the hairs and other recognisable objects with my pocket forceps, and putting them on a separate sheet of paper. Of the former, the bulk were pretty obviously those of the late tenant— white or dull black male hairs— but Mrs. Runt had contributed quite liberally, for I picked out of the various heaps over a dozen long hairs, the mousy brown colour of which seemed to identify them as hers. The remainder were mostly ordinary male hairs of various colours, eyebrow hairs and eyelashes, of no special interest, with one exception. This was a black hair which lay flat on the paper in a close coil, like a tiny watch-spring.

"I wonder who this negro was," said I, inspecting it through my lens.

"Probably some African or West Indian Law student," Thorndyke suggested. "There are always a good many about the Inns of Court."

He came round to examine my collection, and while he was viewing the negro hair with the aid of my lens, I renewed my investigations of the little dust-heaps. Presently I made a new discovery.

"Why," I exclaimed, "here is another of Badger's boot-laces— another piece of the same one, I think. By the way, did you ascertain what that boot-lace really was?"

"Yes," he replied. "Polton made a section of it and mounted it; and furthermore, he made a magnified photograph of it. I have the photograph in my pocket, so you can answer your own question."

He produced from his letter-case a half-plate print which he handed to me and which I examined curiously.

"It is a singular object," said I, "but I don't quite make it out. It looks rather like a bundle of hairs embedded in some transparent substance."

"That, in effect," he replied, "is what it is. It is an elephant's hair, probably from the tail. But, as you see, it is a compound hair; virtually a group of hairs agglutinated into a single stem. Most very large hairs are compound. A tiger's whiskers, for instance, are large, stiff hairs which, if cut across, are seen to be formed of several largish hairs fused together; and the colossal hair which grows on the nose of the rhinoceros— the so-called nasal horn— is made up of thousands of subordinate hairs."

"It is a remarkable-looking thing," I said, handing back the photograph; "very distinctive— if you happen to know what it is. But the mystery is how on earth it came here. There are no elephants in the Temple."

"I certainly haven't noticed any," he replied; "and, as you say, the presence of an elephant's hair in a room in the middle of London is a rather remarkable circumstance. And yet, perhaps, if we consider all the other circumstances, it may not be impossible to form a conjecture as to how it came here. I recommend the problem to my learned friend for consideration at his leisure; and now, as we have seen all that there is to see— which is mighty little— we may as well leave Polton to finish the collection of data from the floor. We can take your little selection with us."

He folded the paper containing the hairs that I had picked out into a neat packet, which he slipped into his pocket; then, having handed the key of the outer door to Polton, for return to Mr. Bidwell, he went out and I followed. We descended the stairs slowly, both of us deeply reflective. As to the subject of his meditations I could form no opinion, but my own were occupied by the problem which he had suggested; and the more I reflected on it, the less capable of solution did it appear.

We had nearly reached the ground floor when I became aware of quick footsteps descending the stairs behind us. Near the entry our follower overtook us, and as we stood aside to let him pass, I had a brief vision of a shortish, dapper, smartly-dressed coloured man— apparently an African or West Indian— who carried a small suit-case and a set of golf-clubs.

"Now," said I, in a low tone, "I wonder if that gentleman is the late owner of that negro hair that I picked up. It seems intrinsically probable as he appears to live in this building, and would be a near neighbour of Herrington's." I halted at the entry and read out the only name painted on the door-post as appertaining to the second floor— Mr. Kwaku Essien, which, I decided, seemed to fit a gentleman of colour.

But Thorndyke was not listening. His long legs were already carrying him, with a deceptively leisurely air, across Tanfield Court in the wake of Mr. Essien, and at about the same pace. I put on a spurt and overtook him, a little mystified

by his sudden air of purpose and by the fact that he was not walking in the direction of our chambers. Still more mystified was I when it became clear that Thorndyke was following the African and keeping at a constant distance in rear of him; but I made no comment until, having pursued our quarry to the top of Middle Temple Lane, we saw him hail a taxi and drive off. Then I demanded an explanation.

"I wanted to see him fairly out of the precincts," was the reply, "because I have a particular desire to see what his chambers are like. I only hope his door has a practicable latch."

I stared at him in dismay.

"You surely don't contemplate breaking into his chambers!" I exclaimed.

"Certainly not," he replied. "If the latch won't yield to gentle persuasion, I shall give it up. But don't let me involve you, Jervis. I admit that it is a slightly irregular proceeding."

"Irregular!" I repeated. "It is house-breaking, pure and simple. I can only hope that you won't be able to get in."

The hope turned out to be a vain one, as I had secretly feared. When we had reconnoitred the stairs and established the encouraging fact that the third floor was untenanted, we inspected the door above which our victim's name was painted; and a glance at the yawning key-hole— diagnostic of an old-fashioned draw-latch— told me that the deed was as good as done.

"Now, Jervis," said Thorndyke, producing from his pocket the curious instrument that he described as a "smoker's companion"— it was an undeniable pick-lock, made by Polton under his direction— "you had better clear out and wait for me at our chambers."

"I shall do nothing of the kind," I replied. "I am an accessory before the fact already, so I may as well stay and see the crime committed."

"Then in that case," said he, "you had better keep a look-out from the landing window and call me if anyone comes to the house. That will make us perfectly safe."

I accordingly took my station at the window, and Thorndyke, having knocked several times at the "oak" without eliciting any response, set to work with the smoker's companion. In less than a minute the latch clicked, the outer door opened, and Thorndyke, pushing the inner door open, entered, leaving both doors ajar. I was devoured by curiosity as to what his purpose was. Obviously it must be a very definite one to justify this most extraordinary proceeding. But I dared not leave my post for a moment, seeing that we were really engaged in a very serious breach of the law and it was of vital importance that we should not be surprised in the act. I was therefore unable to observe my colleague's proceedings, and I waited impatiently to see if anything came of this unlawful entry.

I had waited thus some ten minutes, keeping a close watch on the pavement below, when I heard Thorndyke quickly cross the room and approach the door. A moment later he came out on the landing, bearing in his hand an object which, while it enlightened me as to the purpose of the raid, added to my mystification.

"That looks like the missing sword from Herrington's room!" I exclaimed, gazing at it in amazement.

"Yes," he replied. "I found it in a drawer in the bedroom. Only it isn't a sword."

"Then, what the deuce is it?" I demanded, for the thing looked like a broad-bladed sword in a soft leather scabbard of somewhat rude native workmanship.

By way of reply he slowly drew the object from its sheath, and as it came into sight, I uttered an exclamation of astonishment. To the inexpert eye it appeared an elongated body about nine inches in length covered with coarse, black leather, from either side of which sprang a multitude of what looked like thick, black wires. Above, it was furnished with a leather handle which was surmounted by a suspension loop of plaited leather.

"I take it," said I, "that this is an elephant's tail."

"Yes," he replied, "and a rather remarkable specimen. The hairs are of unusual length. Some of them, you see, are nearly eighteen inches long."

"And what are you going to do now?" I asked.

"I am going to put it back where I found it. Then I shall run down to Scotland Yard and advise Miller to get a search warrant. He is too discreet to ask inconvenient questions."

I must admit that it was a great relief to me when, a minute later, Thorndyke came out and shut the door; but I could not deny that the raid had been justified by the results. What had, presumably, been a mere surmise had been converted into a definite fact on which action could confidently be taken.

"I suppose," said I, as we walked down towards the Embankment en route for Scotland Yard, "I ought to have spotted this case."

"You had the means," Thorndyke replied. "At your first visit you learned that an object of some kind had disappeared from the wall. It seemed to be a trivial object of no value, and not likely to be connected with the crime. So you disregarded it. But it had disappeared. Its disappearance was not accounted for, and that disappearance seemed to coincide in time with the death of Herrington. It undoubtedly called for investigation. Then you found on the floor an object the nature of which was unknown to you. Obviously, you ought to have ascertained what it was."

"Yes, I ought," I admitted, "though I am not sure that I should have been much forrader even then. In fact, I am not so very much forrader even now. I don't see how you spotted this man Essien, and I don't understand why he took

all this trouble and risk and even committed a murder to get possession of this trumpery curio. Of course I can make a vague guess. But I should like to hear how you ran the man and the thing to earth."

"Very well," said Thorndyke. "Let me retrace the train of discoveries and inferences in their order. First I learned that an object, supposed to be a barbaric sword of some kind, had disappeared about the time of the murder— if it *was* a murder. Then we heard from Carston that Sir Gilbert Herrington had appropriated the insignia and ceremonial objects belonging to the king of Bekwè; that some had subsequently been restored, but others had been given to friends as curios. As I listened to that story, the possibility occurred to me that this curio which had disappeared might be one of the missing ceremonial objects. It was not only possible: it was quite probable. For Giles Herrington was a very likely person to have received one of these gifts, and his morose temper made it unlikely that he would restore it. And then, since such an object would be of great value to somebody, and since it was actually stolen property, there would be good reasons why some interested person should take forcible possession of it. This, of course, was mere hypothesis of a rather shadowy kind. But when you produced an object which I at once suspected, and then proved, to be an elephant's hair, the hypothesis became a reasonable working theory. For, among the ceremonial objects which form what we may call the regalia of a West African king is the elephant's tail which is carried before him by a special officer as a symbol of his power and strength. An elephant's tail had pretty certainly been stolen from the king, and Carston said nothing about its having been restored.

"Well, when we went to Herrington's chambers just now, it was clear to me that the thing which had disappeared was certainly not a sword. The phantom shape on the wall did not show much, but it did show plainly that the object had hung from the nail by a large loop at the end of the handle. But the suspension loop of a sword or dagger is always on the scabbard, never on the hilt. But if the thing was not a sword, what was it? The elephant's hair that you found on the floor seemed to answer the question.

"Now, as we came in, I had noticed on the door-post the West African name, Kwaku Essien. A man whose name is Kwaku is pretty certainly a negro. But if this was an elephant's tail, its lawful owner was a negro, and that owner wanted to recover it and was morally entitled to take possession of it. Here was another striking agreement. The chambers over Herrington's were occupied by a negro. Finally, you found among the floor dust a negro's hair. Then a negro had actually been in this room. But from what we know of Herrington, that negro was not there as an invited visitor. All the probabilities pointed to Mr. Essien. But the probabilities were not enough to act on. Then we had a stroke of sheer luck. We

got the chance to explore Essien's chambers and seek the crucial fact. But here we are at Scotland Yard."

THAT NIGHT, at about eight o'clock, a familiar tattoo on our knocker announced the arrival of Mr. Superintendent Miller, not entirely unexpected, as I guessed.

"Well," he said, as I let him in, "the coloured nobleman has come home. I've just had a message from the man who was detailed to watch the premises."

"Are you going to make the arrest now?" asked Thorndyke.

"Yes, and I should be glad if you could come across with me. You know more about the case than I do."

Thorndyke assented at once, and we set forth together. As we entered Tanfield Court we passed a man who was lurking in the shadow of an entry, and who silently indicated the lighted windows of the chambers for which we were bound. Ascending the stairs up which I had lately climbed with unlawful intent, we halted at Mr. Essien's door, on which the superintendent executed an elaborate flourish with his stick, there being no knocker. After a short interval we heard a bolt withdrawn, the door opened a short distance, and in the interval a black face appeared, looking out at us suspiciously.

"Who are you, and what do you want?" the owner of the face demanded gruffly.

"You are Mr. Kwaku Essien, I think?" said Miller, unostentatiously insinuating his foot into the door opening.

"Yes," was the reply. "But I don't know you. What is your business?"

"I am a police officer," Miller replied, edging his foot in a little farther, "and I hold a warrant to arrest you on the charge of having murdered Mr. Giles Herrington."

Before the superintendent had fairly finished his sentence, the dusky face vanished and the door slammed violently— on to the superintendent's massive foot. That foot was instantly reinforced by a shoulder and for a few moments there was a contest of forces, opposite but not equal. Suddenly the door flew open and the superintendent charged into the room. I had a momentary vision of a flying figure, closely pursued, darting through into an inner room, of the slamming of a second door— once more on an intercepting foot. And then— it all seemed to have happened in a few seconds— a dejected figure, sitting on the edge of a bed, clasping a pair of manacled hands and watching Miller as he drew the elephant's tail out of a drawer in the dressing-chest.

"This— er— article," said Miller, "belonged to Mr. Herrington, and was stolen from his premises on the night of the murder."

Essien shook his head emphatically.

"No," he replied. "You are wrong. I stole nothing, and I did not murder Mr. Herrington. Listen to me and I will tell you all about it."

Miller administered the usual caution and the prisoner continued:

"This elephant-brush is one of many things stolen, years ago, from the king of Bekwè. Some of those things— most of them— have been restored, but this could not be traced for a long time. At last it became known to me that Mr. Herrington had it, and I wrote to him asking him to give it up and telling him who I was— I am the eldest living son of the king's sister, and therefore, according to our law, the heir to the kingdom. But he would not give it up or even sell it. Then, as I am a student of the Inn, I took these chambers above his, intending, when I had an opportunity, to go in and take possession of my uncle's property. The opportunity came that night that you have spoken of. I was coming up the stairs to my chambers when, as I passed his door, I heard loud voices inside as of people quarrelling. I had just reached my own door and opened it when I heard his door open, and then a great uproar and the sound of a struggle. I ran down a little way and looked over the banisters, and then I saw him thrusting a man across the landing and down the lower stairs. As they disappeared, I ran down, and finding his door ajar, I went in to recover my property. It took me a little time to find it, and I had just taken it from the nail and was going out with it when, at the door, I met Mr. Herrington coming in. He was very excited already, and when he saw me he seemed to go mad. I tried to get past him, but he seized me and dragged me back into the room, wrenching the thing out of my hand. He was very violent. I thought he wanted to kill me, and I had to struggle for my life. Suddenly he let go his hold of me, staggered back a few paces, and then fell on the floor. I stooped over him, thinking that he was taken ill, and wondering what I had better do. But soon I saw that he was not ill; he was dead. Then I was very frightened. I picked up the elephant-brush and put it back into its case, and I went out very quietly, shut the door, and ran up to my rooms. That is what happened. There was no robbery and murder."

"WELL," said Miller, as the prisoner and his escort disappeared towards the gate, "I suppose, in a technical sense, it is murder, but they are hardly likely to press the charge."

"I don't think it is even technically," said Thorndyke. "My feeling is that he will be acquitted if he is sent for trial. Meanwhile, I take it that my client, Godfrey Herrington, will be released from custody at once."

"Yes, doctor," replied Miller, "I will see to that now. He has had better luck than he deserved, I suspect, in having his case looked after by you. I don't fancy he would have got an acquittal if he had gone for trial."

Thorndyke's forecast was nearly correct, but there was no acquittal, since there was no trial. The case against Kwaku Essien never got farther than the Grand Jury.

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10: Zania's Day Out

L. C. Douthwaite

Louis Charles Douthwaite 1878-1948

Richmond Guardian (Vic) 1 Sep 1928

AS THE PRINCESS ZANIA sat rather disconsolately in the lavishly decorated drawing-room of the royal coach, the train came to a standstill outside the station of Helmz.

Followed, immediately, a period of bustle. At the far end of the coach her aunt, the Duchess Flavia, with other members of the suite, was receiving a delegation of court officials. It seemed to the princess that for the first time in all the eighteen years of her life there was no one directly watching her.

She was seized with sudden temptation. There was a door close to where she was seated. Just by stretching out a hand and turning a handle she might extend that perfectly splendid feeling for a whole glorious afternoon. She'd be at the Palace by six o'clock, anyway, she promised her protesting conscience.

A moment later she had slipped through the door and dropped lightly, to the ground. Then she sprinted across a field to the nearby road as fast as her slim, silken-clad legs would carry her.

Ten minutes later she found herself in a square, evidently a hub around which the activity of the city revolved. At this noon hour the streets were filled with clerks and shop-assistants on their way to lunch. They were the class she had always envied because they were free and untrammelled. Once their day's work was over they could do what they liked; wear what they fancied, eat and drink what and where they pleased. No starchy officials to bow and scrape and look down their noses if their laughter was a shade too unrestrained or if they uttered a word of slang. They were free to live and— love. And love, which was all in life that mattered, was not for her.

Standing there at the pavement's edge on that day of stolen freedom, Zania heaved a little sigh that did not at all fit in with the glory of the noonday sun. However, there it was; it was silly to spoil her day with thoughts of what couldn't be helped. With quite un-Royal dignity she swung herself on to a passing tramcar. She had no idea where it was going. That, to her, was the whole charm. For the first time in her life she had no idea where she would be in an hour's time.

"Oi, miss!"

She passed on to find a seat. The idea that anyone could address her as "Oi, miss!" never so much as entered her head. Was she not the Princess Zania of Beretsberg?

"Oi, miss— you with the blue 'at!" People about her smiled broadly; one old woman, hugging a basket of apples on a lap that looked as if it could have

accommodated a whole orchard, quivered like a jelly in the excess of her amusement. And then a young man in a blue serge suit, who had swung on to the car immediately behind her, said:

"I think he must mean you; you see, this is a 'pay as you enter' car."

Zania smiled gratefully, but, though she had on a blue cloche hat the Duchess had specially ordered her to wear in case the Prince should meet her at the station, she could not bring herself to realise that even a tram conductor would so far forget himself as to yell "Oi, miss!" to a princess of the Royal House of Beretsberg, particularly a princess of the Royal House of Beretsberg who was so shortly to become the affianced wife of the Reigning Prince of Euralia. Besides, she had no idea what a "pay as you enter" car was. Apparently the young man realised this; he seemed an observant young man altogether, she thought, judging by the keen look in his very blue eyes.

He said:

"You should have dropped your fare into that long box before you left the platform."

"Oh!" said Zania enlightened, and passed down between the seats, fumbling with her bag as she did so. She had no coins, so gave the conductor a note.

"Don't you want any change, miss?" bawled the conductor as she went back to her seat.

"He means you again," explained the pleasant-looking young man, bending down to her.

To her surprise the conductor gave her a large handful of silver, and she wasn't accustomed to carrying anything more, cumbersone than a flower or a parasol. Tram fares must be very cheap, she concluded, particularly for such a very pleasant means of travelling.

Very pleasant indeed. All the way until the car stopped at the terminus, which was in a really beautiful, park-like suburb, the young man chatted so pleasantly and easily that she was quite sorry when the conductor shouted, "All change!" and began to swing the trolley-pole round.

"And where do you go from here?" inquired the pleasant young man as Zania stood rather undecidedly beneath a large tree by the side of the tramlines.

"I haven't anywhere particular in view," Zania confessed frankly. "You see, I'm— I'm— taking a day off."

The young man's eyes lighted as if something very nice indeed had happened to him, and that made him more attractive than ever. If that was what commoners were like, Zania decided, you could keep your Royalty.

"By Jove!" exclaimed the pleasant young man, "how perfectly splendid. I'm taking a day off, too." He looked very interestedly up at the sky for a moment, and it wasn't any bluer than his own eyes, if as blue. "Suppose we take our day

off together, shall we? There's a topping Zoo about a quarter of a mile up the road."

Zania knew she oughtn't. She, a Princess of the Blood Royal, and he— just a pleasant-looking young man in a blue serge suit. It simply wasn't done!

"Rather!" she said. "I love Zoos. Which way do we go?"

The pleasant young man said that the Helmz Zoo was the third best in Europe, and Zania enjoyed it as if it had been rated even more highly than that. She forgot about being of royal blood when she fed the monkeys from a bag of nuts purchased at one of the kiosks, and handed stale buns to the elephants. She rather wondered at this, because it was a fact that never in her whole life before had she been allowed to forget even for a moment She came to the conclusion that that particular young man could have made her forget most things.

It was in the early, afternoon, after they had lynched joyously at a table set beneath a huge chestnut tree, that she became conscious of the first— well— uneasiness. To call her attention to something that happened to interest him, he laid his hand momentarily upon her arm, and the contact thrilled her in a way she had never been thrilled before. Their eyes happened to meet at the moment, and, from what she read in his, she concluded that he felt about the same as she did. After that they were rather quiet for a little while. The only subject they really wanted to talk about seemed to be barred.

Then Zania gave a little jerk to her shoulders like someone trying to get rid of a load. This, she told herself, was simply piffle. She, a Princess of the Blood Royal, going all funny and throbby just because a pleasant young man in a serge suit happened to touch her— and look at her. What if his eyes were blue! They weren't the only blue eyes in the world, were they? Pull yourself together, Zania!

But she found it far easier to tell herself to do so than actually to accomplish it. There was something about the young man that made it rather difficult.

He seemed to be finding it difficult, too. Every time he looked at her he kept going all pinky under his tan; and he seemed to be looking at her quite a lot. Probably she forgot that he wasn't the only one with blue eyes, though hers were more greyish. Greyish, with lashes so long that when she opened her eyes a little wider than usual they touched her cheek.

"Why are those men following us about?"

Zania pointed a small forefinger at three Number One sized gentlemen with protruding jaws and wide chests whom she had noticed first in the street car, and who since had seemed to be in every part of the gardens in which she and the young man happened to find themselves.

Peter— she'd found out his name though she hadn't given her own— flushed. He flushed quite, easily, she noticed. She rather liked it.

"Oh— just friends of mine," he said. "Then— "Why don't they come and speak to you?" Zania inquired. "They look rather nice."

(They didn't, but she wasn't going to let him think she had eyes for no one but himself. Particularly as she hadn't.)

"They know, better!" exclaimed Peter, rather heatedly.

"Then I wish they'd go away," said Zania. She was followed about quite sufficiently at home without being trailed all over the place during her one day of freedom.

"That's all right," said Peter, and made a sign, in response to which the largest man of the three said something in an undertone to his companions, at which they all disappeared around one of the lion houses.

"All done by kindness," said Peter. 'Where shall we go now?"

They had tea about four o'clock, and it was then that Peter took all her breath away.

"What are you doing to-night?" he inquired.

Zania's face fell. Peter had been perfectly charming over tea; so charming that she'd managed to put all thought of the future aside. It would be bad enough when it came, she concluded, without spoiling the day with it now.

"Er— dancing," she said.

His eyes lighted. Then his hand stole across the tablecloth and captured her own. It was by far the most delicious feeling Zania had ever experienced. And with the feeling came a most miraculous thought. If he had made her feel like that just by holding her hand, what would the effect be if he kissed her?

With that a little thrill ran through her, beginning just at the top of her spine, and running out somewhere right down by her toes. For she knew it would be perfectly delicious.

She made up her mind she was going to prove it before he left her— left her for good. Except formally, on the hand, or by her father, the King, it would be the first time she'd been kissed by a man. She felt wickedness personified—but she was going to have that kiss. She knew that the memory of it would help carry her through the dreary years ahead.

"With me?" asked Peter excitedly, his eyes all lighted up. "Are you going to dance with me?"

But she shook her head. Her eyes were troubled— sombre.

"No, not with you," she said quietly. Now it was his turn to look troubled, and he did— very troubled indeed.

"Er— with some other man?" he asked with a little catch to his voice.

"I expect so," returned Zania drearily, for there was to be a State ball In her honor at the Palace that night.

"Are— are you engaged to him— this other man?" Peter demanded quickly with the same catch on breath.

"Not exactly," said Zania. "But— I expect I shall be," she added, thinking it was only fair to let him know the worst.

Peter cast a quick look about him. They were seated under the same tree as where they had lunched. It was an off-day at the Zoo, apparently, for there was no one about; even the waiters had gone back into the serving kiosk.

He left his chair and came round the table. He looked most frightfully determined, and Zania's heart throbbed at such a rate that it seemed to be beating its way right up into her throat, so that, even had she wanted to tell him to stay where he was, she couldn't have done so. And she didn't want to.

When Peter reached her, he knelt .down and put both arms about her waist. "How dare he?" she demanded of herself furiously. She sat a little farther forward for fear the back of the seat would hurt his knuckles.

"Sweetheart," said Peter, "you're not going to be engaged to this man— whoever he is. You're going to marry me. I'll have a priest at my— my rooms to-night, and my mother shall be witness."

The Princess sat perfectly still. The day that had begun so blithely was ending in tragedy.

Yes, tragedy. Because there is no, greater tragedy in the world than for a girl to be forced into marriage with one man when she loves another. For, to cement their two countries into one harmonious whole, wherein old jealousies would be killed and heart-burnings, buried for all time, the Princess Zania had come to Helmz to marry Paul, reigning Prince of Euralia. And she knew with absolute certainty that not only all the love she had to give, which was illimitable, was in the keeping of this pleasant young man in the blue serge suit, but that it was his for all time. Also, and what was equally devastating, she knew that he loved her.

Well, what about it? Here was her chance; the chance for which, all her life, she had been looking and longing; the opportunity, once and for all to cast adrift from all the shackles, golden but iron hard, of a rigid and hide-bound Court, to live free and unrestrained with the man she loved.

Once she was married there would be , no danger of being taken back. Neither the laws of her country nor the outraged dignity of her father the King would permit of that. Once she had taken the step, it would be irrevocable.

Peter drew her to him and kissed her, and that all but did it. It was a kiss such as in all her wildest and tenderest dreams she never had imagined. The only thing to do with a kiss like that'was to return it. Which she did.

And then— reaction. Suddenly and, she had to admit, most distressingly, all the lessons she had been taught over the years came back to her. She was not as other girls. Her life was not her own to do with as she would. Her life belonged to her country. And for the good, the lasting and illimitable good of her country, it was up to her to marry the reigning Prince of Euralia. Well—

she'd had her kiss. They couldn't take that from her, anyway. Very gently she released her self from Peter's encircling arms— stood up.

"I must go," she said drearily. "No don't come with me. It's quite impossible— what you ask. Perhaps— some day— you'll understand why."

His face went rather blank and pitiful— like a child who's been unjustly punished, she thought. And of all things in life she least wanted to hurt Peter.

"You've been— playing with me?" he demanded, coldly.

She cupped his face in her two hands, drew him forward, and kissed him directly on the lips.

"If I have, my dear," she said, "I've lost the game." The next moment she was gone.

There was a great to-do at the Palace when she reached there. She was kept waiting in an anteroom for quite a long time before, after the footman had gone with her message, Aunt Flavia, white-faced and red-eyed, came hurrying in. And though the old Duchess talked for a full quarter of an hour without once pausing to take breath, Zania steadfastly refused to give any explanation of her "extraordinary conduct"

"Well, if you won't, you won't" said Aunt Flavia, who, besides knowing when she was beaten, had the keenest possible desire that Zania should be at her best for the State hall, and knew that nagging and scolding wouldn't help towards that object .The child was looking like nothing on earth already. She decided that she could wait to find out what it was all about until later.

So Zania was shown into a nicely shaded room, and, after a light dinner, which she barely touched, that was served up on the best gold plate, which she barely noticed, told to rest quietly until the Ladies-in-Waiting came to prepare her for the ball.

Rest! Zania smiled bitterly at the very though of. it Her heart was broken, and would stay broken until the end of time. Even when she was a very old woman with scant grey hair and very few teeth she'd still love Peter.... But she fell sound asleep, nevertheless.

Surrounded by uniforms and gold lace and decoration and orders, and to the strains of triumphal music from the band of the King's Bodyguard, she was led to the dais upon which she, was to receive the Reigning Prince.

She had never felt so utterly heartbroken in her life. Here it was all glitter and electric light and formality and pretence. Outside, somewhere among the trees of the forest in which was the Zoo, bathed in the soft light of the summer moon and surrounded by all the sweet indefinable perfume of earth and leaves and growing things, wandered a pleasant-looking young man in a blue serge suit— grieving. Or at least she hoped he was grieving.

And then, following immediately upon a fanfare of silver trumpets that seemed to lift the very curls on her bobbed chestnut head, there, standing

before her, and, she had to admit, looking Quite handsome, was the young man of her thoughts and dreams. Not in the blue serge suit now, though, but in the white and blue and gold of the Imperial Guards.

"Peter!" cried Zania, there in front of all those frocks and uniforms and swords and sashes.

He bent upon one knee and kissed' her hands in the most formal and respectful manner imaginable. He had to do this on account of so many of the ladies— particularly the old ladies— looking so shocked, for only his very special friends addressed Prince Paul by his other name, Peter, and none of them with that gladness in their voice. Then he turned to old Count Orlitz, the Prime Minister.

"We would be alone," he said commandingly, and in another few moments they were.

"I don't believe you were the least little bit surprised to see who I was," Zania complained, after an interval.

Peter threw back his head and laughed—the laugh that" had haunted her ever since she had left him.

"Surprised nothing!" he said, for among other countries he'd visited America. "I knew who you were all the time."

"You did?" exclaimed Zania in surprise.

He nodded.

"Yes. I saw you slip out of the train and wondered what in the world you were up to. I knew it was you by your photograph. So I passed the word to the detectives who'd been detailed to protect you— and followed. Of course I could have stopped you in a minute if I'd wanted to," he added with confidence.

"Why didn't you?" inquired Zania, much intrigued.

"Why should you be the only one to have a day off?" protested His Highness indignantly.

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11: Lives of Men

James Hilton

1900-1954

The Evening Standard June 19 1934

Herald (Melbourne) 8 April 1937

There is another story of this title attributed to James Hilton, set in the pearling trade in the South Seas. Hilton wrote a traditional detective novel "Murder at School", 1931, as by Glen Trevor, and several crime short stories in the later 30s, such as "The Mallet", "From information Received", "The Perfect Plan", and others. This story is consistent with Hilton's writing at the time, while a South Seas pearl-diving adventure is not.

YOU remember the Ericson Murder Trial. I was covering it for the *Planet*, and it was very nearly the last assignment I had for that or for any other newspaper. You know how it is; there are men they get in the dock for murder whom you believe, just looking at them, to have murdered, not only because they had to, but because they wanted to.

Jack Ericson looked like that— cruel and ruthless and contemptuous. There was not one of us in the crowded Press box who did not swear that he'd done it. The evidence was pretty damning, and except for a minor point scored by Sammy Vose (Sir Samuel Arbuthnot Vose, K.C.), it didn't seem that anything could save Ericson from the gallows. When he gave evidence, the Crown chewed him to pieces. His life, at that moment, seemed worth about one week's salary. And this being so, and me having made the acquaintance of a young woman of the best suburbs who was due for cocktails at the hotel before dinner, I saw no reason why for once the *Planet*'s star crime writer should not earn a medal or two for intelligent anticipation.

I wrote the story of his receiving the death sentence, complete with black cap details, while Sammy was making his final speech, with one ear cocked for anything bright Sammy might think up. He didn't do so badly, either, making great play with the element of doubt, which he seemed to notice in the evidence. He said a long piece about the "principles of English justice," and got quite worked up about that small point about the position of the dead man's feet.

I put a bit in about his "magnificent battle," and it was lucky I did so. But the majority of my story was, of course, about the solemn-faced jury, the ashen face of the condemned man, the awful ceremony of the black cap. It was a fine story, though I say it myself. Then, when the jury retired, I retired, too, and phoned the story to the office, with instructions not to go ahead till history had worked out according to plan.

WELL, as everyone knows, history let me down. The solemn-faced jury gave Ericson the verdict. There was no break in the judge's voice as he sentenced him, because he didn't sentence him, and the awful ceremony just might have been awful if it had happened. It was all right, of course, about the story, but not quite so good about the suburban, who didn't get a cocktail because I was busy writing the new story about the principles of English justice. The office didn't like it much, but when I got back it was admitted that Ericson had been lucky in having possibly the only jury in Great Britain that believed every word uttered by Sammy Vose. The dead man's feet had certainly pointed the right way for him. And the good old standby of the "element of doubt" had pulled it off again. If I hadn't just pulled off the best exclusive of the year for the *Planet* the acquittal of Jack Ericson might well have meant my own release from a life of adequately-salaried toil. But I still felt myself justified in anticipating history, in spite of the girl who was the real reason for it.

And when, a year later, I ran across Ericson again, curiosity made me try to find out whether there was really any possibility of him being innocent of the murder of the man who had been his benefactor and employer.

THERE could be no actual benefit, of course, in finding out if the jury had been wrong. Ericson could have written and printed the whole story of how he bumped the old man off, with diagrams and footnotes, without incurring any risk to himself. Once acquitted, always innocent. That's the law. But being interested in men's minds, that being, I suppose, my job, I had often thought about how he felt, whether he had a private laugh about it sometimes, whether he was grateful for the curious accident that had saved his life, or whether he had kidded himself into believing what the twelve good men and true had found to be the truth.

I saw him in a West End pin-table saloon. I was spending a few coins to while away half an hour before a film first night. That was no job for a crime investigator, but a man has to fill in his evenings somehow.

As I went in, I saw a "Yard" man playing the Subway game in a bored kind of way. He couldn't play it, anyway, but there was a mirror on the wall in which he could see the saloon.

"Play for a pint, Joe?" I suggested.

He nodded, and while we played, I tried to get him to say who he was looking for. But he's close, and maybe he wasn't looking for anyone special.

I played after him, and out of the first five balls, sent four down the subway and rang the bell, beating his score with half the balls still down the machine. I might have won a prize of ten cigarettes offered for the night's best, but as it happened I didn't even get the pint of beer.

JOHN ERICSON walked in, alone. He looked different from the last time I saw him, in the dock. He was well-dressed, sure of himself, leisurely. He looked at the two hundred tables casually, not as if he was looking for anyone. He was wasting time, as I was. He watched a man playing, while I pulled another ball and watched him. But I didn't wait to see whether I'd got the 5000 hole, which would have got me the night's prize more than likely.

Ericson went over to a vacant table against the wall and pulled out his money. I was off without playing Joe the return match, or even mentioning that I'd pick up the beer later. I walked straight up to the table next to Ericson's, put in my penny, and began to play.

It was the old game of Corinthian, without flashing lights, buzzers, contact switches or automatic pushers. You just played the game to fill up the traps and shut them, and to my mind it's still the best game of the lot. Why, with these new tables, you don't have to do more thon pull tho trigger, and after that the gadgets and the springs and things play tho game for you. A queer world. Next thing they'll do is to mechanise golf courses, so that when you play into certain bunkers a bell will ring, lights will flash on in the club-house clock, and the ball will be shot out on to the green. That's what things are coming to. I believe that half the troubles of this— but all this has got nothing to do with Ericson.

I played the balls quickly, so as to finish first, counted my score, and announced it loudly. "Sixty-six doubled," I said, as if I could only add aloud. "Thirteen thousand and— er, two hundred,"

ERICSON looked up, as I hoped he would. It gave me the chance to look over at the way he was playing.

unc, one six hundred, two two hundred, three thousand, four, four eight hundred, Ave four hundred, six thousand, six thousand eight hundred," I counted. "Double it and you've beaten me. How many more balls?"

"Two," said Ericson.

"Good," I thought. "We are conversing amicably. In another moment we'll be old friends. Great game, where you can count the other fellow's score."

With the last ball he doubled. We got quite excited together as it trickled back after hitting the spring, just made the grade, stopped a moment on the side-edge, and slid down into the bottom trap.

"Play you for a pint," I said.

"Okay," said Ericson. He seemed a different sort of fellow from the man I'd seen in the dock. Then, he had seemed dumb, stupid, bemused. He had spoken slowly, had asked questions to be repeated to him. He had been dressed differently, too. (Query: How many times has a man's clothes got him off a crime? Or convicted him? Or, for that matter, the clothes of a woman? Do women jurors let clothes influence them more than men? Rouse protested at

appearing in the dock in prison clothes. Dandies in the Dock. Manners makcth Man, but can his clothes convict him? However...)

At the trial, Ericson had looked just like a dumb killer. Now he looked a crafty one. The element of doubt might work with the simpleton; but little benefit is given to the clever gent. This Ericson was clever. Was ne always? Was he above all, clever enough to look dumb? Had Sammy Vose told him to look dumb?

Ericson played first. He had found the range of his trigger, and sent the first ball confidently into the top slot of the groove.

"Shot, I said. "You play as If you've thought it all out."

"No," he said. "I haven't."

Now there was a case in point, showing the difference between the new Ericson and the one in the dock on a charge of murder. He had confidence, assurance. He just said his opinion. In the dock he blithered. The second ball was much too hard.

"I take back, what I said, Ericson," I said. "You haven't."

NOW this is what I admired about him. He had heard me use his name, but he pulled the next ball as if he hadn't been a murderer, as if I didn't know he had killed, as if he didn't know I knew he knew— hell! Anyway, he took no notice, and the third ball went into the groove. Two in, out of three balls. He would double all right. As it slid in and closed the trap, he showed that he had noticed the name.

"*Planet*, aren't you?" he said. "Crime man? I thought so. You fellows get about. But you get surprises, dont' you?"

I looked at him. He was surely cool. "That's what we live on," l said. "Surprises that happen to other people."

"Get some yourselves, sometimes, too?"

"Doesn't everybody?" I said quietly. He didn't answer. He just pulled back the trigger and sent the fourth ball into the groove, The fifth ball was short.

"You can't kid machines," I said. "That's why I wonder at people playing the things. After all, they love kidding other people. They get a kick out of a piece of good luck, like that first ball of your going in there, but they like deceiving their opponents best of all. And you can't deceive the pin-tables much, can you?"

"You don't have to." said Ericson, pulling the fifth ball strong and viciously. "You don't have to live on machines. But you have to live on people. That's why you have to deceive them. Always! Every minute!" He seemed worked up. He pulled the sixth ball hard again, and it ran over the groove, hit the side, careered over the board, slid round the oins, and with a last side-kick into the 1000 hole.

"Lucky!" I said, "Do you always have that luck?"

"Allied," said Ericson, "with forethought. Not always mine. There are people who are paid to think ahead for you..."

Sammy Vose? Was he talking about Sammy? This Ericson had a nerve. Or perhaps he just had to talk about himself, about his murder trial, the same way that some people have to talk about their operations. Thero was no doubt, onyway, ho know ho was on safe ground talking to mc. As I knew what was in his mind. As if— that was it— as if he was delighting in sharing a good joke.

"Ever think," he said as he pulled the seventh ball, "how this game is something like the way we live— like life? I mean. I don't go in for a lot of thinking, but that has struck me, I'll leave the development of the theme to you. Your line, isn't it?"

THE seventh ball rolled strongly up the incline, rushed down the left side, climbed wearily up through the gates. I saw what be meant. It hovered over the groove, where two traps were shut already. Two more balls had to go in before he got the real benefit. That skill that had gone into placing them there— or that luck— might be wasted. The real endeavor came at the end. The ball just hovered there, slid away again, banged against a 400 pin, alid off, skirted the 1000 hole, fell into a 500.

"Luck!" said Ericson. "That's more important than skill, no matter what you say. That's what pulls you through in the end. Why bother, then? You're buffeted about, shouldered out of good billets, come straight for more good ones. Then by the fraction of a millimetre, or maybe because they don't like the parting in your hair, you strike something on the wrong angle...

Click went the eighth ball up to the striker. Strange conversation for a West End pin-table saloon! Queer people round us, crowding the tables. But mostly, laughing, easy-going people, getting fun out of their share of luck or ill-luck. The eighth ball was all right. Down the groove it went into the 1000 hole. One more ball needed to double.

Ericson took trouble, over the last two. He did not follow up his theme. Maybe it was true that he didn't think much. But I bet what thinking he did was good thinking. The ninth ball was In the groove all the way.

"It's seldom I've been like this," said Ericson. "Now I don't mind what happens. I can coast home. I'm all right for this round, anyway. No good for a non-thinking man to look further than that…"

AND to prove his words, he drew back the trigger and let the ball slide round the table fast. But the last gate checked it, and on the return from the spring it sailed confidently down the centre of the groove, dodged the 1000 at the bottom of the shut traps, and jerked into 400.

"There you are!" said Ericson. "That proves something."

We counted the score. If I could, I was resolved to switch the talk back on to life, its surprises, pleasant and otherwise, its kicks and its rare strokes of luck. I pressed in a penny, and the balls rattled down, the traps opened.

"Must be nice," I opened, "to be able to sit pretty, 'coast home,' as you put it. Come into money."

He watched my first ball slide into the groove before he answered. "I was playing for that," he said. And I won. Yes, I can coast home. I've got money. But I played for it."

"Play fair?" I asked. It wasn't a nice question to ask a murderer, and to cover it up I banged up two balls quickly, one after the other like that. The second rolled into the groove. Bin he answered quietly enough. "Fair? No. But I wasn't playing machines. I was playing against men. Do they play fair?"

THE fourth rolled up softly. It looked for a moment as If it would make the groove without hitting the spring at all. But it stopped short. The fifth ball was too hard. I was thinking too much of Ericson. "Playing against men." I said, "you stand to lose a lot. More than a penny, or a pint. Ever think of that?"

The sixth ball clicked out, up and down and into the 1000. The seventh was all right. I had three in the groove. The next it would double.

"I thought of that," said Ericson. "I thought of it a lot. I nearly did lose a lot You know that..."

The eighth ball was no good at all. I found myself trembling.

"But it was worth it?" I said.

"I've told you," said Ericson. "I've got money. I can coast home. I can't be beaten. I took the risk for money— a lot of it."

"And you nearly lost," I said, pulling the ninth, ball too softly, Ericson didn't reply. I bent over the board for the last pull. The ball, sped on, swirled round, topped the groove, wavered, and fell down among the dead men at the bottom.

"Pity," said Ericson. "I thought I'd lost. That ball looked in."

"That's so." I said, as we moved away for the beer. "It looked certain. But there's an clement of doubt."

"You've said it." said Ericson. "Didn't I say those pin-tables were like the way we live?"

I let Ericson go ahead as we left the saloon.

The "Yard" man cocked an eyebrow at me. "It's nothing." I said. "Only a man confessed to murder."

———————

12: A Christmas Garland of Books

Robert Benchley

1889-1945

20,000 Leagues Under the Sea, or *David Copperfield*, 1928

It's a sobering thought that all the books mentioned were real....

AMONG the little bundle of books especially selected for Christmas-Wistmas, perhaps the most pat is *Rubber Hand Stamps and the Manipulation of India Rubber* by T. O'Conor Sloane. Into it Mr. Sloane has put the spirit of Yuletide which all of us must feel, whether we are cynical enough to deny it or not.

Beginning with a short, and very dirty, history of the sources of India Rubber, the author takes us by the hand and leads us into the fairy-land of rubber manipulation. And it is well that he does, for without his guidance we should have made an awful mess of the next rubber-stamp we tried to make. As he says on page 35: "It will be evident from the description to come that it is not advisable for anyone without considerable apparatus to attempt to clean and wash ("to sheet"), to masticate, or to mix india rubber." Even if we had the apparatus, we would probably be content with simply "sheeting" and mixing the india rubber and leave the masticating for other less pernickety people to go through with. We may be an old maid about such things, but it is too late now for us to learn to like new things.

It seems that in the making of rubber stamps a preparation knows as "flong" is necessary. Mr. Sloane assures us that anyone who has watched the stereotyping of a large daily newspaper knows what "flong" is. Perhaps our ignorance is due to the fact that we were on the editorial end of a daily newspaper and went down into the composing-room only when it was necessary to rescue some mistake we had made from the forms. At any rate, we didn't know what "flong" was and we don't want to know. A man must keep certain reticences these days or he will just have no standards left at all.

It is not generally known how simple it is to make things out of rubber. "The writer has obtained excellent results from pieces of an old discarded bicycle tire. The great point is to apply a heavy pressure to the hot material. Many other articles can be thus produced extemporaneously." (Page 78.) This should lend quite a bit of excitement to the manipulation of india rubber. Imagine working along quietly making, let us say, rubber type and then finding that, extemporaneously, you had a rubber Negro doll or balloon on your hands! A man's whole life could be changed by such a fortuitous slip of the rubber.

Not the least of Mr. Sloane's contributions to popular knowledge is his sly insertion, under the very noses of the authorities, of what he calls the "Old Home Receipt" (ostensibly for "roller-composition," but we know better, eh, Mr.

Sloane?). The "Old Home Receipt" specifies "Glue 2 lbs. soaked over night, to New Orleans molasses 1 gallon. Not durable, but excellent while it lasts." We feel sure that we have been served something made from this "Old Home receipt," but would suggest to Mr. Sloane that he try putting in just a dash of absinthe. It makes it more durable.

WE CAN RECOMMEND Laurence Vail Coleman's *Manual for Small Museums* to all those who have received or are about to give small museums for Christmas. Having a small museum on your hands with no manual for it is no joke. It sometimes seems as if a small museum were more bother than a large one, but that is only when one is tired and cross.

From Mr. Coleman's remarkably comprehensive study of small museums, we find that, as is so often the case, income is a very serious problem. In financing special projects for the museum, such as the purchase of bird groups (if it is a museum that *wants* bird groups), there is a great play for ingenuity, and Dr. Abbott of the San Diego Museum of Natural History, tells of how they, in San Diego, met the problem:

The little cases containing bird-groups were offered to tradespeople in the city for display in their windows, the understanding being that the store should pay $50 for the advertising value. Thus, a meadowlark group, representing the male in very bright dress, the female, the nest and eggs, was paid for by a men's and women's clothing store and displayed in its window in the early spring with the slogan: "Take a pointer from the birds. Now is the time for your new spring clothes." A savings-bank took a woodpecker group, showing the storing away of acorns, and a California shrike group (Dr. Abbott ought to know) showing a rather sanguinary example of empaling surplus prey on the spines of a cactus, both displayed under the euphimistic caption "The Saving Instinct" and "Are You Providing for the Future by storing up your dollars [or cadavers] now?" A bush-tit's nest was taken by a real-estate firm and a mockingbird group by a music house. The local lodge of Elks gave $1200 for a case holding four elks (not members) and so, in time, the entire housing of the groups was accomplished and paid for. We are crazy to know what business houses paid for the rabbit and owl exhibits.

In the chapter on "Protection from Pests" we looked for a way of dealing with the man in an alpaca coat who grabs your stick away from you as you enter the museum and the young people who use museums for necking assignations, but they were not specified. A blanket formula is given, however, which ought to cover their cases. "The surest way to get rid of pests is to fumigate with hydrocyanic acid in an airtight compartment, but this is a dangerous procedure which has resulted in a loss of human life. [Why "but"?] Another fumigant that is widely used is carbon bisulphide, but this is highly explosive and has caused

serious accidents." This presents a new problem to museum-visitors and would seem to make the thing one of the major risks of modern civilization. If a person can't be safe from asphyxiation and mutilation while looking at bird-groups, where *is* one to be safe? It would almost be better to let the pests go for a while, at least until the museum gets started.

A COLLECTION of verse entitled *Through the Years with Mother*, compiled by Eva M. Young, makes a nice gift which might perhaps be given to Father. It contains most of the little poems which have been written about mothers and the general tone of the thing is favorable to motherhood. One, entitled "A Bit O' Joy," wears off a little into child-propaganda, but probably would rank as a mother-poem too, for it is presumably the mother who speaks:

Just a Bit-a-Feller,
Lips a bit o' rose,
Puckered sort o' puzzled like,
Wonder if he knows—

There is one more verse explaining what the Bit-a-Feller might possibly know, but we didn't go into that. Another one which we left for reading on the train was entitled: "Muvvers" and begins:

One time, I wuz so very small,
I prit' near wuzn't there at all—

We can not even tell you what the first two lines are of "Mama's Dirl."

THE INTRODUCTION to *Are Mediums Really Witches*? by John P. Touey begins by saying: "The sole purpose of this book, as its title suggests, is to prove the existence of a personal evil force and demon intervention in human affairs." This frightened us right at the start, for we are very susceptible to any argument which presupposes a tough break for ourself. There must be *some* explanation for what happens to us every time we stick our head out doors— or in doors, for that matter.

Mr. Touey begins with witchcraft in ancient times and comes right straight down to the present day. Even though he quoted "no less an authority than Porphyrius" in his earlier chapter, it was not until we got into the examples of modern people having their bed-clothes pulled off and their hats thrown at them that we began to feel uneasy. The story of the terrible time had by the Fox Sisters in Hydesville, N. Y., seemed pretty conclusive to us at the time of reading (2:15 A.M. this morning) and, frankly, we stopped there. And, believe it or not, a

couple of hours later, during our troubled sleep, something pulled the bed-clothes out from the foot of our bed, and we awoke with a nasty head-cold.

We will pay $100 to Mr. Touey or Sir Oliver Lodge or anyone else who can help us locate the personal demon who has been assigned to us. We would just like to talk to him for five minutes, the big bully!

WE CAN QUOTE but one example of the fascinating problems presented in John A. Zangerle's *Principles of Real Estate Appraising* as we are limited in our space assignment, but perhaps from it the reader may get some idea of the charm of the book:

"Mr. Flanagan of New Zealand values this interest on the basis of an annuity using the 5% interest tables. Calculating the value on a 6% basis he would proceed as follows: Lessor receives $6,000 per annum for ten years, the present value of which is 6,000x7.36 equals $44,160; plus the present value of $12,000 per annum for 89 years commencing ten years hence which is 12,000 x 9.254 (16.614 - 7.36) equals $111,048. Lessor is also entitled to receive either possession or rent after 99 years have expired, the reversionary value of which can be taken at $12,000 x 16.667 less 16.614 or .053 equals $636. Thus $111,048 plus $44,160 equals $155,844, the value of the lessor's interest."

How do you mean 16.614, Mr. Flanagan? Aren't you forgetting depreciation?

FOR THOSE who like to browse along lazily with British royalty, we can think of no less charming way than to accompany Helen, Countess-Dowager of Radnor through her 361-page book: *From a Great-Grandmother's Armchair*. We had almost decided not to begin it at all, until we read in the Countess-Dowager's preface: "At the present time I am resting 'on my oars' (or rather, in my Armchair) at my quiet country home, which, amongst those of the third generation, goes by the name of 'Grannie's Peace-pool.' "

This gave us incentive to read further.

And what a treat! "Grannie" certainly has earned her "peace-pool" after the exciting life she has led. Every year of her long career is given here in detail and it must make fascinating reading for the Radnors if only as a record of where the Countess left her umbrella that time in Godalming and who played zither in her "Ladies' String Band and Chorus" in 1879.

Among other things that are cleared up in this volume is the question of what the Countess did during those first hectic weeks of July, 1901.

"A good many engagements were crowded into the first fortnight of July," she writes modestly, "before going back to Venice. Among other things I passed a very pleasant week-end at Wendover Lodge with Alfred and Lizzie Gatty."

But the book does not dwell entirely in the past. Right up to the present day we have disclosures of equal importance. In September, 1920, while visiting in Bath, the following incident occurred:

"One Sunday I started off in the car to go and lunch with Mrs. Knatchbull. When we had gone a few miles, however, the car broke down, a 'rubber-washer' having perished and let the water through! We telephoned for a 'Taxi' which took me back to Bath, and the car was towed back. Later in the afternoon Mrs. Knatchbull sent a car for me to go over to tea, and I flew over hill and dale and reached her place in Babington in half an hour."

So you see, the Countess really *had* intended to lunch with Mrs. Knatchbull!

We neglected to mention that the authoress is by birth a Chaplin; so she probably can get free seats whenever Mary's boy Charlie comes to town in a picture.

13: The Terror of the Twins

Algernon Blackwood

1869-1951

The Westminster Gazette, 6 Nov 1909

Collected in: *The Lost Valley and Other Stories*, 1910

THAT THE MAN'S HOPES had built upon a son to inherit his name and estates— a single son, that is— was to be expected; but no one could have foreseen the depth and bitterness of his disappointment, the cold, implacable fury, when there arrived instead— twins. For, though the elder legally must inherit, that other ran him so deadly close. A daughter would have been a more reasonable defeat. But twins—! To miss his dream by so feeble a device—!

The complete frustration of a hope deeply cherished for years may easily result in strange fevers of the soul, but the violence of the father's hatred, existing as it did side by side with a love he could not deny, was something to set psychologists thinking. More than unnatural, it was positively uncanny. Being a man of rigid selfrcontrol, however, it operated inwardly, and doubtless along some morbid line of weakness little suspected even by those nearest to him, preying upon his thought to such dreadful extent that finally the mind gave way. The suppressed rage and bitterness deprived him, so the family decided, of his reason, and he spent the last years of his life under restraint. He was possessed naturally pf immense forces— of will, feeling, desire; his dynamic value truly tremendous, driving through life like a great engine; and the intensity of this concern ?oj 202 THE TERROR OF THE TWINS trated and buried hatred was guessed by few. The twins themselves, however, knew it. They divined it, at least, for it operated ceaselessly against them side by side with the genuine soft love that occasionally sweetened it, to their great perplexity. They spoke of it only to each other, though.

"At twenty-one," Edward, the elder, would remark sometimes, unhappily, "we shall know more."

"Too much," Ernest would reply, with a rush of unreasoning terror the thought never failed to evoke— in him. "Things father said always happened—in life." And they paled perceptibly.

For the hatred, thus compressed into a veritable bomb of psychic energy, had found at the last a singular expression in the cry of the father's distraught mind. On the occasion of their final visit to the asylum, preceding his death by a few hours only, very calmly, but with an intensity that drove the words into their hearts like points of burning metal, he had spoken. In the presence of the attendant, at the door of the dreadful padded cell, he said it:

"You are not two, but one. I still regard you as one. And at the coming of age, by h——, you shall find it out!"

The lads perhaps had never fully divined that icy hatred which lay so well concealed against them, but that this final sentence was a curse, backed by all the man's terrific force, they quite well realized; and accordingly, almost unknown to each other, they had come to dread the day inexpressibly. On the morning of that twenty-first birthday— their father gone these five years into the Unknown, yet still sometimes so strangely close to them— they shared the same biting, inner terror, just as they shared all other emotions of their life— intimately, without speech. During the daytime they managed to keep it at a distance, but when the dusk fell about the old house they knew the stealthy approach of a kind of panic sense. Their self-respect weakened swiftly... and they persuaded their old friend, and once tutor, the vicar, to sit up with them till midnight.... He had humoured them to that extent, willing to forgo his sleep, and at the same time more than a little interested in their singular belief— that before the day was out, before midnight struck, that is, the curse of that terrible man would somehow come into operation against them.

Festivities over and the guests departed, they sat up in the library, the room usually occupied by their father, and little used since. Mr. Curtice, a robust man of fifty-five, and a firm believer in spiritual principalities and powers, dark as well as good, affected (for their own good) to regard the youths' obsession with a kindly cynicism.

"I do not think it likely for one moment," he said gravely, "that such a thing would be permitted. All spirits are in the hands of God, and the violent ones more especially."

To which Edward made the extraordinary reply: "Even if father does not come himself he will— send!"

And Ernest agreed: "All this time he's been making preparations for this very day. We've both known it for a long time— by odd things that have happened, by our dreams, by nasty little dark hints of various kinds, and by these persistent attacks of terror that come from nowhere, especially of late. Haven't we, Edward?"

Edward assenting with a shudder: "Father has been at us of late with renewed violence. To-night it will be a regular assault upon our lives, or minds, or souls!"

"Strong personalities may possibly leave behind them forces that continue to act," observed Mr. Curtice with caution, while the brothers replied almost in the same breath: "That's exactly what we feel so curiously. Though— nothing has actually happened yet, you know, and it's a good many years idea... now since—"

This was the way the twins sppke of it all. And it was their profound conviction that had touched their old friend's sense of duty. The experiment

should justify itself— and cure them. Meanwhile none of the family knew. Everything was planned secretly.

The library was the quietest room in the house. It had shuttered bow-windows, thick carpets, heavy doors. Books lined the walls, and there was a capacious open fireplace of brick in which the wood-logs blazed and roared, for the autumn night was chilly. Round this the three of them were grouped, the clergyman reading aloud from the *Book of Job* in low tones; Edward and Ernest, in dinner-jackets, occupying deep leather arm-chairs, listening. They looked exactly what they were— Cambridge "undergrads," their faces pale against their dark hair, and alike as two peas. A shaded lamp behind the clergyman threw the rest of the room into shadow. The reading voice was steady, even monotonous, but something in it betrayed an underlying anxiety, and although the eyes rarely left the printed page, they took in every movement of the young men opposite, and noted every change upon their faces. It was his aim to produce an unexciting atmosphere, yet to miss nothing; if anything did occur to see it from the very beginning. Not to be taken by surprise was his main And thus, upon this falsely peaceful scene, the minutes passed the hour of eleven and slipped rapidly along towards midnight. The novel element in his account of this distressing and dreadful occurrence seems to be that what happened— happened without the slightest warning or preparation. There was no gradual presentment of any horror; no strange blast of cold air; no dwindling of heat or light; no shaking of Windows or mysterious tapping upoh furniture. Without preliminaries it fell with its black trappings of terror upon the scene. The clergyman had been reading aloud for some considerable time, one or other of the twins— Ernest usually— making occasional remarks, which proved that his sense of dread was disappearing. As the time grew short and nothing happened they grew more at their ease. Edward, indeed, actually nodded, dozed, and finally fell asleep. It Was a few minutes before midnight. Ernest, slightly yawning, was stretching himself in the big chair. "Nothing's going to happen," he said aloud, in a pause. "Yotif good influence has prevented it." He even laughed now. "What superstitious asses We've been, sir; haven't we?"

Curtice, then, dropping his Bible, looked hard at him under the lamp. For in that second, even while the words sounded, there had come about a most abrupt and dreadful change; and so swiftly that the clergyman, in spite of himself, was taken utterly by surprise and had no time to think. There had swooped down upon the quiet library— so he puts it— an immense hushing silence, so profound that the peace already reigning there seemed clamour by comparison; and out of this enveloping stillness there rose through the space about them a living and abominable Invasion— soft, motionless, terrific. It was as though vast engines, working at full speed and pressure, yet too swift and delicate to be appreciable to any definite sense, had suddenly dropped down

upon them—from nowhere. "It made me think," the vicar used to say afterwards, "of the Mauretafiid machinery compressed into a nutshell, yet losing none of its awful power."

"...haven't we?" repeated Ernest, still laughing. And Curtice, making no audible reply, heard the true answer in his heart: "Because everything *has already happened*— even as you feared."

Yet, to the vicar's supreme astonishment, Ernest still noticed— nothing!

"Look," the boy added, "Eddy's sound asleep— sleeping like a pig. Doesn't say much for your reading, you know, sir! " And he laughed again— lightly, even foolishly. But that laughter jarred, for the clergyman understood now that the sleep of the elder twin was either feigned— or unnatural.

And while the easy words fell so lightly from his lips, the monstrous engines worked and pulsed against him and against his sleeping brother, all their huge energy concentrated down into points fine as Suggestion, delicate as Thought. The Invasion affected everything. The very objects in the room altered incredibly, revealing suddenly behind their witnessed.... normal exteriors horrid little hearts of darkness. It was truly amazing, this vile metamorphosis. Books, chairs, pictures, all yielded up their pleasant aspect, and betrayed, as with silent mocking laughter, their inner soul of blackness— their decay. This is how Curtice tries to body forth in words what he actually And Ernest, yawning, talking lightly, half foolishly— still noticed nothing!

For all this, as described, came about in something like ten seconds; and with it swept into the clergyman's mind, like a blow, the memory of that sinister phrase used more than once by Edward: "If father doesn't come, he will certainly— *send*."

And Curtice understood that he had done both— both sent and come himself.... That violent mind, released from its spell of madness in the body, yet still retaining the old implacable hatred, was now directing the terrible, unseen assault. This silent room, so hushed and still, was charged to the brim. The horror of it, as he said later, "seemed to peel the very skin from my back."... And, while Ernest noticed nothing, Edward slept!... The soul of the clergyman, strong with the desire to help or save, yet realizing that he was alone against a Legion, poured out in wordless prayer to his Deity. The clock just then, whirring before it struck, made itself audible.

"By Jove! It's all right, you see!" exclaimed Ernest, his voice oddly fainter and lower than before. "There's midnight— and nothing's happened. Bally nonsense, all of it! " His voice had dwindled curiously in volume. "I'll get the whisky and soda from the hall."

His relief was great and his manner showed it. But in him somewhere was a singular change. His voice, manner, gestures, his very tread as he moved over the thick carpet towards the door, all showed it. He seemed less *real*, less alive,

reduced somehow to littleness, the voice without timbre or quality, the appearance of him diminished in some fashion quite ghastly. His presence, if not actually shrivelled, was at least impaired. Ernest had suffered a singular and horrible *decrease*...

The clock was still whirring before the strike. One heard the chain running up softly. Then the hammer fell upon the first stroke of midnight.

"I'm off," he laughed faintly from the door; "it's all been pure funk— on my part, at least...!" He passed out of sight into the hall. *The Power that throbbed so mightily about the room followed him out*. Almost at the same moment Edward woke up. But he woke with a tearing and indescribable cry of pain and anguish on his lips:

"Oh, oh, oh ! But it hurts! It hurts! I can't hold you; leave me. It's breaking me asunder "

The clergyman had sprung to his feet, but in the same instant everything had become normal once more— the room as it was before, the horror gone. There was nothing he could do or say, for there was no longer anything to put right, to defend, or to attack. Edward was speaking; his voice, deep and full as it never had been before:

"By Jove, how that sleep has refreshed me! I feel twice the chap I was before— twice the chap. I feel quite splendid. Your voice, sir, must have hypnotized me to sleep."

He crossed the room With great vigour. "Where's— er— where's— Ernie, by the bye?" he asked casually, hesitating— almost searching— for the names And a shadow as of a vanished memory crossed his face and was gone. The tone conveyed the most complete indifference where once the least word or movement of his twin had wakened solicitude* love. "Gone away, I suppose— gone to bed, I mean, of course."

Curtice has never been able to describe the dreadful conviction that overwhelmed him as he stood there staring, his heart in his mouth— the conviction, the positive certainty, that Edward had changed interiorly, had Suifered an incredible accession to his existing personality. But he *knew* it as he watched. His mind, spirit, soul had most wonderfully increased. Something that hitherto the lad had known from the outside only, or by the magic of loving sympathy, had now passed, to be incorporated with his own being. And, being himself, it required no expression. Yet this visible increase was somehow terrible. Curtice shrank back from him. The instinct— he has never grasped the profound psychology of that, nor why it turned his soul dizzy with a kind of nausea— the instinct to strike him where he stood, passed, and a plaintive sound from the hall, stealihg softly into the room between them, sent all that was left to him of self-possession into his feet. He turned and ran. Edward followed him— very leisurely.

They found Ernest, or what had been Ernest, crouching behind the table in the hall, weeping foolishly to himself. On his face lay blackness. The mouth was open, the jaw dropped; he dribbled hopelessly; and from the face had passed all signs of intelligence— of spirit. For a few weeks he lingered on, regaining no sign of spiritual or mental life before the poor body, hopelessly disorganized, released what was left of him, from pure inertia— from complete and utter loss of vitality.

And the horrible thing— so the distressed family thought, at least— was that all those weeks Edward showed an indifference that was singularly brutal and complete. He rarely even went to visit him. I believe, too, it is true that he only once spoke of him by name; and that was when he said—

"Ernie? Oh, but Ernie is much better and happier where he is!"

_____

14: The Key

Peter Cheyney

1896-1951

In: *Making Crime Pay*, 1951

MR. Eustace St. John Maninway stood in front of the mirror and regarded the reflection of his clean-cut and aristocratic profile with eyes that were definitely scared. Eustace realized that he was in a very tight corner.

He walked over to the sideboard and helped himself to a good measure of neat whisky. He felt a little better, a trifle braver.

Then he sat down and read Marella Gallery's letter once more. Eustace, it said:

I've found you out. I realize now that I am just another middle-aged woman with money who's been taken in by a rather clever young man.

You will remember you sent me threcnovels to read two weeks ago. Caught between the pages of one of those books was a piece of very slim platinum pendant chain. I recognized it at once. It was the chain of Veronica's diamond pendant that disappeared so mysteriously at that party she gave three months ago.

When I saw that little piece of metal, it was rather as if I was looking at my own death warrant. I knew that you had stolen Veronica's pendant. That's why I came down here.

When I arrived I got in touch with a firm of private detectives in London. I asked them to find out all about you. They have. It's a pretty sordid story, isn't it, William Stubbings, alias Eustace St. John Maninway?

I am returning to town to-morrow. I shall arrive about five o'clock. I'm going straight to the house, after which I am going round to see Veronica. I shall insist that she prosecutes. I am quite appalled when I think what a fool I've been about you, when I think that only a month ago I altered my will and left you enough to bring you £2,000 a year. This is another thing I shall deal with on my return.

Marella Gallery.

Eustace drank a little more whisky. How the devil was he to have known that when he'd pulled the diamonds off that pendant, a little bit of the chain had fallen between the pages of that book?

After a while he walked to the bureau in the corner and took out a packet—letters he'd received from Marella during the last six months. He began to read through them, his brain vaguely trying to find something that would help.

He found it. It was a letter written by Marella some six months before. She'd been in the country on a round of visits and she'd left him her car to use while she was away. The last paragraph of the letter read:

So you must come down. Do try to be here by lunch, Eustace, because I must have the car. The nearest railway station is seven miles away, and the family car is out of order. So whatever you're doing put it off and come to my rescue, because I can't go on without you.

Love, Marella.

Eustace saw that Marella's letter was written ontwo pages. The second page contained only the words:

I can't go on without you,
Love, Marella.

Some devil in his brain began quietly to tell Eustace of a way out of this tight corner. Marella said she was returning to town to-morrow. There were no servants at the St. John's Wood house. They'd been sent off before Marella went away.

He went and stood by the window and read the note again. *'I can't go on without you, Love, Marella*.' Well, Scotland Yard would know that note had been written months before. But if somebody else saw the note before he destroyed it— Veronica, for instance— they would know it existed. They would know that Marella intended to commit suicide.

Eustace grinned evilly. He'd made his mind up. Here was the way out.

THE next afternoon he went round to see Veronica. His expression— Eustace was a very good actor— denoted intense sadness.

'What's the matter, Eustace?' Veronica asked. 'You're looking glum. You ought to be happy. You'll be a bridegroom next month.'

'That's what I've come to see you about, Veronica,' he said. I'm in the devil of a jam about Marella. During the last three or four weeks I've been thinking about this marriage. I knew it wasn't right. I knew that Marella attracted me a great deal but that I didn't truly love her.

I wouldn't have minded people saying that I'd married her for her money— that wouldn't have mattered to me if I felt that I'd honestly and sincerely loved her.

'Well, three days ago I came to a conclusion. I rang her up and told her that I couldn't go through with it'.

Veronica was silent for a minute. Then: 'Eustace,' she said. I think you've done the right thing. Of course Marella is upset, that's natural, but she'll get over it.'

'I'm afraid it's not as easy as that, Veronica,' he said. 'Yesterday Marella telephoned me. She sounded half mad. She said she didn't care whether I loved her or not, that we'd just got to get married. She said if I didn't go through with it she'd kill herself.

'This morning I got this.'

He handed the single sheet of notepaper to Veronica. She read it, handed it back to him. He crumpled it into a ball and threw it into the fire.

'When is she coming back?' asked Veronica.

'This afternoon,' said Eustace. 'She said she'd be back by four o'clock. I wonder if I ought to go round and see her?' He got up— stood for a moment as if undecided. I think I'll walk round there, Veronica,' he said, 'and wait for her.' Eustace took his hat and went.

IT was ten past five when Veronica's telephone jangled. It was Eustace. His voice was quivering.

'Veronica,' he said, 'she's done it!'

'Done what,' asked Veronica, her spine stiffening.

'She killed herself,' said Eustace.

EUSTACE was having tea with Veronica when the Detective-Inspector arrived.

'I just want to know that I've got this quite right, sir,' said the police officer when Eustace finished telling how he had discovered the tragedy.

'You were about a hundred yards from the house when you saw Mrs. Gallery paying off the cab. Then she went up the steps and opened the door. You're certain about that point, aren't you, sir?' 'Quite certain,' said Eustace.

'I'm stressing the point, sir,' the inspector went on, 'because it seems that some six or seven months ago Mrs. Gallery had an extra key cut for the front door. I believe it was sent to you?'

'That's quite correct,' said Maninway glibly. 'Mrs. Gallery did give me a key. I lost it about two months ago.'

The police officer nodded.

'You were about eighty yards from the house when you saw Mrs. Gallery open the door and go in, and the door was open when you arrived?'

'That's right,' said Eustace. 'That's exactly what happened.'

The inspector looked more gloomy than ever.

'I'm afraid I shall have to ask you to come along with me, sir,' he said. 'I've a Squad car outside.

'You see, Mrs. Gallery saw the stationmaster at Waterloo and borrowed her cab fare home from him. She told him she was going to get into the house by the pantry window at the back. She'd left her handbag with her money and keys in it in Hampshire.'

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15: Blood Lust

Dion Fortune

Violet Mary Firth, 1890-1946
The Royal Magazine May 1922
Collected in: *The Secrets of Dr Taverner*, 1926

The author was an occultist most of her novels and stories reflect this. There were a dozen stories in "The Secrets of Dr Taverner".

I HAVE NEVER BEEN able to make up my mind whether Dr. Taverner should be the hero or the villain of these histories. That he was a man of the most selfless ideals could not be questioned, but in his methods of putting these ideals into practice he was absolutely unscrupulous. He did not evade the law, he merely ignored it, and though the exquisite tenderness with which he handled his cases was an education in itself, yet he would use that wonderful psychological method of his to break a soul to pieces, going to work as quietly and methodically and benevolently as if bent upon the cure of his patient.

The manner of my meeting with this strange man was quite simple. After being gazetted out of the R.A.M.C. I went to a medical agency and inquired what posts were available.

I said: "I have come out of the Army with my nerves shattered. I want some quiet place till I can pull myself together."

"So does everybody else," said the clerk.

He looked at me thoughtfully. "I wonder whether you would care to try a place we have had on our books for some time. We have sent several men down to it but none of them would stop."

He sent me round to one of the tributaries of Harley Street, and there I made the acquaintance of the man who, whether he was good or bad, I have always regarded as the greatest mind I ever met.

Tall and thin, with a parchment-like countenance, he might have been any age from thirty-five to sixty-five. I have seen him look both ages within the hour. He lost no time in coming to the point.

"I want a medical superintendent for my nursing home," he told me. "I understand that you have specialized, as far as the Army permitted you to, in mental cases. I am afraid you will find my methods very different from the orthodox ones. However, as I sometimes succeed where others fail, I consider I am justified in continuing to experiment, which I think, Dr. Rhodes, is all any of my colleagues can claim to do."

The man's cynical manner annoyed me, though I could not deny that mental treatment is not an exact science at the present moment. As if in answer to my thought he continued:

"My chief interest lies in those regions of psychology which orthodox science has not as yet ventured to explore. If you will work with me you will see some queer things, but all I ask of you is, that you should keep an open mind and a shut mouth."

This I undertook to do, for, although I shrank instinctively from the man, yet there was about him such a curious attraction, such a sense of power and adventurous research, that I determined at least to give him the benefit of the doubt and see what it might lead to. His extraordinarily stimulating personality, which seemed to key my brain to concert pitch, made me feel that he might be a good tonic for a man who had lost his grip on life for the I time being.

"Unless you have elaborate packing to do," he said, "I can motor you down to my place. If you will walk over with me to the garage I will drive you round to your lodgings, pick up your things, and we shall get in before dark."

We drove at a pretty high speed down the Portsmouth road till we came to Thursley, and, then, to my surprise, my companion turned off to the right and took the big car by a cart track over the heather.

"This is Thor's Ley or field," he said, as the blighted country unrolled before us. "The old worship is still kept up about here."

"The Catholic faith?" I inquired.

"The Catholic faith, my dear sir, is an innovation. I was referring to the pagan worship. The peasants about here still retain bits of the old ritual; they think that it brings them luck, or some such superstition. They have no knowledge of its inner meaning." He paused a moment, and then turned to me and said with extraordinary emphasis: "Have you ever thought what it would mean if a man who had the Knowledge could piece that ritual together?"

I admitted I had not. I was frankly out of my depth, but he had certainly brought me to the most unchristian spot I had ever been in my life.

His nursing home, however, was in delightful contrast to the wild and barren country that surrounded it. The garden was a mass of colour, and the house, old and rambling and covered with creepers, as charming within as without; it reminded me of the East, it reminded me of the Renaissance, and yet it had no style save that of warm rich colouring and comfort.

I soon settled down to my job, which I found exceedingly interesting. As I have already said, Taverner's work began where ordinary medicine ended, and I have under my care cases such as the ordinary doctor would have referred to the safe keeping of an asylum, as being nothing else but mad. Yet Taverner, by his peculiar methods of work, laid bare causes operating both within the soul and in the shadowy realm where the soul has its dwelling, that threw an entirely new light upon the problem, and often enabled him to rescue a man from the dark influences that were closing in upon him. The affair of the sheep-killing was an interesting example of his methods.

ii

ONE SHOWERY afternoon at the nursing home we had a call from a neighbor— not a very common occurrence, for Taverner and his ways were regarded somewhat askance. Our visitor shed her dripping mackintosh, but declined to loosen the scarf which, warm as the day was, she had twisted tightly round her neck.

"I believe you specialize in mental cases," she said to my colleague. "I should very much like to talk over with you a matter that is troubling me."

Taverner nodded, his keen eyes watching her for symptoms.

"It concerns a friend of mine— in fact, I think I may call him my fiancé, for, although he has asked me to release him from his engagement, I have refused to do so; not because I should wish to hold a man who no longer loved me, but because I am convinced that he still cares for me, and there is something which has come between us that he will not tell me of.

"I have begged him to be frank with me and let us share the trouble together, for the thing that seems an insuperable obstacle to him may not appear in that light to me; but you know what men are when they consider their honour is in question." She looked from one to the other of us smiling. No woman ever believes that her men folk are grown up; perhaps she is right. Then she leant forward and clasped her hands eagerly. "I believe I have found the key to the mystery. I want you to tell me whether it is possible or not."

"Will you give me particulars?" said Taverner.

"We got engaged while Donald was stationed here for his training (that would be nearly five years ago now), and there was always the most perfect harmony between us until he came out of the Army, when we all began to notice a change in him. He came to the house as often as ever, but he always seemed to want to avoid being alone with me.

We used to take long walks over the moors together, but he has absolutely refused to do this recently. Then, without any warning, he wrote and told me he could not marry me and did not wish to see me again, and he put a curious thing in his letter. He said: "Even if I should come to you and ask you to see me, I beg you not to do it.'

"My people thought he had got entangled with some other girl, and were furious with him for jilting me, but I believe there is something more in it than that. I wrote to him, but could get no answer, and I had come to the conclusion that I must try and put the whole thing out of my life, when he suddenly turned up again. Now, this is where the queer part comes in.

"We heard the fowls shrieking one night, and thought a fox was after them. My brothers turned out armed with golf clubs, and I went too. When we got to

the hen-house we found several fowl with their throats torn as if a rat had been at them; but the boys discovered that the hen-house door had been forced open, a thing no rat could do. They said a gypsy must have been trying to steal the birds, and told me to go back to the house. I was returning by way of the shrubberies when someone suddenly stepped out in front of me. It was quite light, for the moon was nearly full, and I recognized Donald. He held out his arms and I went to him, but, instead of kissing me, he suddenly bent his head and— look!"

She drew her scarf from her neck and showed us a semicircle of little blue marks on the skin just under the ear, the unmistakable print of human teeth.

"He was after the jugular," said Taverner; "lucky for you he did not break the skin."

"I said to him: `Donald, what are you doing?' My voice seemed to bring him to himself, and he let me go and tore off through the bushes. The boys chased him but did not catch him, and we have never seen him since."

"You have informed the police, I suppose?" said Taverner.

"Father told them someone had tried to rob the hen-roost, but they do not know who it was. You see, I did not tell them I had seen Donald."

"And you walk about the moors by yourself, knowing that he may be lurking in the neighbourhood?"

She nodded.

"I should advise you not to, Miss Wynter; the man is probably exceedingly dangerous, especially to you. We will send you back in the car."

"You think he has gone mad? That is exactly what I think. I believe he knew he was going mad, and that was why he broke off our engagement. Dr. Taverner, is there nothing that car. be done for him? It seems to me that Donald is not mad in the ordinary way. We had a housemaid once who went off her head, and the whole of her seemed to be insane, if you can understand; but with Donald it seems as if only a little bit of him were crazy, as if his insanity were outside himself. Can you grasp what I mean?"

"It seems to me you have given a very clear description of a case of psychic interference— what was known in scriptural days as `being possessed by a devil,'" said Taverner.

"Can you do anything for him?" the girl inquired eagerly.

"I may be able to do a good deal if you can get him to come to me."

On our next day at the Harley Street consulting-room we found that the butler had booked an appointment for a Captain Donald Craigie. We discovered him to be a personality of singular charm— one of those highly-strung, imaginative men who have the makings of an artist in them. In his normal state he must have been a delightful companion, but as he faced us across the consulting-room desk he was a man under a cloud.

"I may as well make a clean breast of this matter," he said. "I suppose Beryl told you about their chickens?"

"She told us that you tried to bite her."

"Did she tell you I bit the chickens?"

"No."

"Well, I did."

Silence fell for a moment. Then Taverner broke it.

"When did this trouble first start?"

"After I got shell shock. I was blown right out of a trench, and it shook me up pretty badly. I thought I had got off lightly, for I was only in hospital about ten days, but I suppose this is the aftermath."

"Are you one of those people who have a horror of blood?"

"Not especially so. I didn't like it, but I could put up with it. We had to get used to it in the trenches; someone was always getting wounded, even in the quietest times."

"And killed," put in Taverner.

"Yes, and killed," said our patient.

"So you developed a blood hunger?"

"That's about it."

"Underdone meat and all the rest of it, I suppose?"

"No, that is no use to me. It seems a horrible thing to say, but it is fresh blood that attracts me, blood as it comes from the veins of my victim."

"Ah!" said Taverner. "That puts a different complexion on the case."

"I shouldn't have thought it could have been much blacker."

"On the contrary, what you have just told me renders the outlook much more hopeful. You have not so much a blood lust, which might well be an effect of the subconscious mind, as a vitality hunger which is quite a different matter."

Craigie looked up quickly. "That's exactly it. I have never been able to put it into words before, but you have hit the nail on the head."

I saw that my colleague's perspicuity had given him great confidence.

"I should like you to come down to my nursing home for a time and be under my personal observation," said Taverner.

"I should like to very much, but I think there is something further you ought to know before I do so. This thing has begun to affect my character. At first it seemed something outside myself, but now I am responding to it, almost helping, and trying to find out ways of gratifying it without getting myself into trouble. That is why I went for the hens when I came down to the Wynters' house. I was afraid I should lose my self-control and go for Beryl. I did in the end, as it happened, so it was not much use. In fact I think it did more harm than good, for I seemed to get into I much closer touch with `It' after I had yielded to the impulse. I know that the best thing I could do would be to do away with

myself, but I daren't. I feel that after I am dead I should have to meet— whatever it is— face to face."

"You need not be afraid to come down to the nursing home," said Taverner. "We will look after you."

After he had gone Taverner said to me: "Have you ever heard of vampires, Rhodes?"

"Yes, rather," I said. "I used to read myself to sleep with. Dracula once when I had a spell of insomnia."

"That," nodding his head in the direction of the departing man, "is a singularly good specimen."

"Do you mean to say you are going to take a revolting case like that down to Hindhead?"

"Not revolting, Rhodes, a soul in a dungeon. The soul may not be very savoury, but it is a fellow creature. Let it out and it will soon clean itself."

I often used to marvel at the wonderful tolerance and compassion Taverner had for erring humanity.

"The more you see of human nature," he said to me once, "the less you feel inclined to condemn it, for you realize how hard it has struggled. No one does wrong because he likes it, but because it is the lesser of the two evils."

iii

A COUPLE OF days later I was called out of the nursing home office to receive a new patient. It was Craigie. He had got as far as the doormat, and there he had stuck. He seemed so thoroughly ashamed of himself that I had not the heart to administer the judicious bullying which is usual under such circumstances.

"I feel as if I were driving a baulking horse," he said. "I want to come in, but I can't."

I called Taverner and the sight of him seemed to relieve our patient.

"Ah," he said, "you give me confidence. I feel that I can defy `It,'" and he squared his shoulders and crossed the threshold. Once inside, a weight seemed lifted from his mind, and he settled down quite happily to the routine of the place. Beryl Wynter used to walk over almost every afternoon, unknown to her family, and cheer him up; in fact he seemed on the high road to recovery.

One morning I was strolling round the grounds with the head gardener, planning certain small improvements, when he made a remark to me which I had reason to remember later.

"You would think all the German prisoners should have been returned by now, wouldn't you, sir? But they haven't. I passed one the other night in the

lane outside the back door. I never thought that I should see their filthy field-grey again."

I sympathized with his antipathy; he had been a prisoner in their hands, and the memory was not one to fade.

I thought no more of his remark, but a few days later I was reminded of it when one of our patients came to me and said:

"Dr. Rhodes, I think you are exceedingly unpatriotic to employ German prisoners in the garden when so many discharged soldiers cannot get work."

I assured her that we did not do so, no German being likely to survive a day's work under the superintendence of our ex-prisoner head gardener.

"But I distinctly saw the man going round the greenhouses at shutting-up time last night," she declared. "I recognized him by his flat cap and grey uniform."

I mentioned this to Taverner.

"Tell Craigie he is on no account to go out after sundown," he said, "and tell Miss Wynter she had better keep away for the present."

A night or two later, as I was strolling round the grounds smoking an after-dinner cigarette, I met Craigie hurrying through the shrubbery.

"You will have Dr. Taverner on your trail," I called after him.

"I missed the post-bag," he replied, "and I am going down to the pillar-box."

Next evening I again found Craigie in the grounds after dark. I bore down on him.

"Look here, Craigie," I said, "if you come to this place you must keep the rules, and Dr. Taverner wants you to stay indoors after sundown."

Craigie bared his teeth and snarled at me like a dog. I took him by the arm and marched him into the house and reported the incident to Taverner.

"The creature has re-established its influence over him," he said. `We cannot evidently starve it out of existence by keeping it away from him; we shall have to use other methods. Where is Craigie at the present moment?"

"Playing the piano in the drawing-room," I replied. "Then we will go up to his room and unseal it." As I followed Taverner upstairs he said to me: "Did it ever occur to you to wonder why Craigie jibbed on the doorstep?"

"I paid no attention," I said. "Such a thing is common enough with mental cases."

"There is a sphere of influence, a kind of psychic bell jar, over this house to keep out evil entities, what might in popular language be called a `spell.' Craigie's familiar could not come inside, and did not like being left behind. I thought we might be able to tire it out by keeping Craigie away from its influences, but it has got too strong a hold over him, and he deliberately co-operates with it. Evil communications corrupt good manners, and you can't keep

company with a thing like that and not be tainted, especially if you are a sensitive Celt like Craigie."

When we reached the room Taverner went over to the window and passed his hand across the sill, as if sweeping something aside.

"There," he said. "It can come in now and fetch him out, and we will see what it does."

At the doorway he paused again and made a sign on the lintel.

"I don't think it will pass that," he said.

When I returned to the office I found the village policeman waiting to see me.

"I should be glad if you would keep an eye on your dog, sir," he said. `We have been having complaints of sheep-killing lately, and whatever animal is doing it is working in a three-mile radius with this as the centre."

"Our dog is an Airedale," I said. "I should not think he is likely to be guilty. It is usually collies that take to sheep-killing."

At eleven o'clock we turned out the lights and herded our patients off to bed. At Taverner's request I changed into an old suit and rubber-soled tennis shoes and joined him in the smoking-room, which was under Craigie's bedroom. We sat in the darkness awaiting events.

"I don't want you to do anything," said Taverner, "but just to follow and see what happens."

We had not long to wait.

In about a quarter-of-an-hour we heard a rustling in the creepers, and down came Craigie hand over fist, swinging himself along by the great ropes of wisteria that clothed the wall. As he disappeared into the shrubbery I slipped after him, keeping in the shadow of the house.

He moved at a stealthy dog-trot over the heather paths towards Frensham.

At first I ran and ducked, taking advantage of every patch of shadow, but presently I saw that this caution was unnecessary. Craigie was absorbed in his own affairs, and thereupon I drew closer to him, following at a distance of some sixty yards.

He moved at a swinging pace, a kind of loping trot that put me in mind of a bloodhound. The wide, empty levels of that forsaken country stretched out on either side of us, belts of mist filled the hollows, and the heights of Hindhead stood out against the stars. I felt no nervousness; man for man, I reckoned I was a match for Craigie, and, in addition, I was armed with what is technically known as a "soother"— two feet of lead gas-piping inserted in a length of rubber hose-pipe. It is not included in the official equipment of the best asylums, but can frequently be found in a keeper's trouser-leg.

If I had known what I had to deal with I should not have put so much reliance on my "soother." Ignorance is sometimes an excellent substitute for courage.

Suddenly out of the heather ahead of us a sheep got up, and then the chase began. Away went Craigie in pursuit, and away went the terrified wether. A sheep can move remarkably fast for a short distance, but the poor wool-encumbered beast could not keep pace, and Craigie ran it down, working in gradually lessening circles. It stumbled, went to its knees, and he was on it. He pulled its head back, and whether he used a knife or not I could not see, for a cloud passed over the moon, but dimly luminous in the shadow, I saw something that was semitransparent pass between me and the dark, struggling mass among the heather. As the moon cleared the clouds I made out the flat-topped cap and field-grey uniform of the German Army.

I cannot possibly convey the sickening horror of that sight— the creature that was not a man assisting the man who, for the moment, was not human.

Gradually the sheep's struggles weakened and ceased. Craigie straightened his back and stood up; then he set off at his steady lope towards the east, his grey familiar at his heels.

How I made the homeward journey I do not know. I dared not look behind lest I should find a Presence at my elbow; every breath of wind that blew across the heather seemed to be cold fingers on my throat; fir trees reached out long arms to clutch me as I passed under them, and heather bushes rose up and assumed human shapes. I moved like a runner in a nightmare, making prodigious efforts after a receding goal.

At last I tore across the moonlit lawns of the house, regardless who might be looking from the windows, burst into the smoking-room and flung myself face downwards on the sofa.

iv

"TUT, TUT!" said Taverner. "Has it been as bad as all that?"

I could not tell him what I had seen, but he seemed to know.

"Which way did Craigie go after he left you?" he asked.

"Towards the moonrise," I told him.

"And you were on the way to Frensham? He is heading for the Wynters' house. This is very serious, Rhodes. We must go after him; it may be too late as it is. Do you feel equal to coming with me?"

He gave me a stiff glass of brandy, and we went to get the car out of the garage. In Taverner's company I felt secure. I could understand the confidence he inspired in his patients. Whatever that grey shadow might be, I felt he could deal with it and that I would be safe in his hands.

We were not long in approaching our destination.

"I think we will leave the car here," said Taverner, turning into a grass-grown lane. "We do not want to rouse them if we can help it."

We moved cautiously over the dew-soaked grass into the paddock that bounded one side of the Wynters' garden. It was separated from the lawn by a sunk fence, and we could command the whole front of the house and easily gain the terrace if we so desired. In the shadow of a rose pergola we paused. The great trusses of bloom, colourless in the moonlight, seemed a ghastly mockery of our business.

For some time we waited, and then a movement caught my eye.

Out in the meadow behind us something was moving at a slow lope; it followed a wide arc, of which the house formed the focus, and disappeared into a little coppice on the left. It might have been imagination, but I thought I saw a wisp of mist at its heels.

We remained where we were, and presently he came round once more, this time moving in a smaller circle— evidently closing in upon the house. The third time he reappeared more quickly, and this time he was between us and the terrace.

"Quick! Head him off," whispered Taverner. "He will be up the creepers next round."

We scrambled up the sunk fence and dashed across the lawn. As we did so a girl's figure appeared at one of the windows; it was Beryl Wynter. Taverner, plainly visible in the moonlight, laid his finger on his lips and beckoned her to come down.

"I am going to do a very risky thing," he whispered, "but she is a girl of courage, and if her nerve does not fail we shall be able to pull it off."

In a few seconds she slipped out of a side door and joined us, a cloak over her night-dress.

"Are you prepared to undertake an exceedingly unpleasant task?" Taverner asked her. "I can guarantee you will be perfectly safe so long as you keep your head, but if you lose your nerve you will be in grave danger."

"Is it to do with Donald?" she inquired.

"It is," said Taverner. "I hope to be able to rid him of the thing that is overshadowing him and trying to obsess him."

"I have seen it," she said; "it is like a wisp of grey vapour that floats just behind him. It has the most awful face you ever saw. It came up to the window last night, just the face only, while Donald was going round and round the house."

"What did you do?" asked Taverner.

"I didn't do anything. I was afraid that if someone found him he might be put in an asylum, and then we should have no chance of getting him well."

Taverner nodded.

" 'Perfect love casteth out fear,' " he said. "You can do the thing that is required of you."

He placed Miss Wynter on the terrace in full moonlight. "As soon as Craigie sees you," he said, "retreat round the corner of the house into the yard. Rhodes and I will wait for you there."

A narrow doorway led from the terrace to the back premises, and just inside its arch Taverner bade me take my stand.

"Pinion him as he comes past you and hang on for your life," he said. "Only mind he doesn't get his teeth into you; these things are infectious."

We had hardly taken up our positions when we heard the loping trot come round once more, this time on the terrace itself. Evidently he caught sight of Miss Wynter, for the stealthy padding changed to a wild scurry over the gravel, and the girl slipped quickly through the archway and sought refuge behind Taverner. Right on her heels came Craigie. Another yard and he would have had her, but I caught him by the elbows and pinioned him securely. For a moment we swayed and struggled across the dew-drenched flagstones, but I locked him in an old wrestling grip and held him.

"Now," said Taverner, "if you will keep hold of Craigie I will deal with the other. But first of all we must get it away from him, otherwise it will retreat on to him, and he may die of shock. Now, Miss Wynter, are you prepared to play your part?"

"I am prepared to do whatever is necessary," she replied. Taverner took a scalpel out of a pocket case and made a small incision in the skin of her neck, just under the ear. A drop of blood slowly gathered, showing black in the moonlight.

"That is the bait," he said. "Now go close up to Craigie and entice the creature away; get it to follow you and draw it out into the open."

As she approached us Craigie plunged and struggled in my arms like a wild beast, and then something grey and shadowy drew out of the gloom of the wall and hovered for a moment at my elbow. Miss Wynter came nearer, walking almost into it.

"Don't go too close," cried Taverner, and she paused.

Then the grey shape seemed to make up its mind; it drew clear of Craigie and advanced towards her. She retreated towards Taverner, and the Thing came out into the moonlight. We could see it quite clearly from its flat-topped cap to its knee-boots; its high cheekbones and slit eyes pointed its origin to the south-eastern corner of Europe where strange tribes still defy civilization and keep up their still stranger beliefs.

The shadowy form drifted onwards, following the girl across the yard, and when it was some twenty feet from Craigie, Taverner stepped out quickly

behind it, cutting off its retreat. Round it came in a moment, instantly conscious of his presence, and then began a game of "puss-in-the-corner." Taverner was trying to drive it into a kind of psychic killing-pen he had made for its reception. Invisible to me, the lines of psychic force which bounded it were evidently plainly perceptible to the creature we were hunting. This way and that way it slid in its efforts to escape, but Taverner all the time herded it towards the apex of the invisible triangle, where he could give it its coup de grace.

Then the end came. Taverner leapt forward. There was a Sign then a Sound. The grey form commenced to spin like a top. Faster and faster it went, its outlines merging into a whirling spiral of mist; then it broke. Out into space went the particles that had composed its form, and with the almost soundless shriek of supreme speed the soul went to its appointed place.

Then something seemed to lift. From a cold hell of limitless horror the flagged space became a normal back yard, the trees ceased to be tentacled menaces, the gloom of the wall was no longer an ambuscade, and I knew that never again would a grey shadow drift out of the darkness upon its horrible hunting.

I released Craigie, who collapsed in a heap at my feet: Miss Wynter went to rouse her father, while Taverner and I got the insensible man into the house.

WHAT MASTERLY lies Taverner told to the family I have never known, but a couple of months later we received, instead of the conventional fragment of wedding cake, a really substantial chunk, with a note from the bride to say it was to go in the office cupboard, where she knew we kept provisions for those nocturnal meals that Taverner's peculiar habits imposed upon us.

It was during one of these midnight repasts that I questioned Taverner about the strange matter of Craigie and his familiar. For a long time I had not been able to refer to it; the memory of that horrible sheep-killing was a thing that would not bear recalling.

"You have heard of vampires," said Taverner. "That was a typical case. For close on a hundred years they have been practically unknown in Europe— Western Europe that is— but the War has caused a renewed outbreak, and quite a number of cases have been reported.

"When they were first observed— that is to say, when some wretched lad was caught attacking the wounded, they took him behind the lines and shot him, which is not a satisfactory way of dealing with a vampire, unless you also go to the trouble of burning his body, according to the good old-fashioned way of dealing with practitioners of black magic. Then our enlightened generation came to the conclusion that they were not dealing with a crime, but with a disease, and put the unfortunate individual afflicted with this horrible obsession into an asylum, where he did not usually live very long, the supply of his peculiar

nourishment being cut off. But it never struck anybody that they might be dealing with more than one factor— that what they were really contending with was a gruesome partnership between the dead and the living."

"What in the world do you mean?" I asked.

"We have two physical bodies, you know," said Taverner, "the dense material one, with which we are all familiar, and the subtle etheric one, which inhabits it, and acts as the medium of the life forces, whose functioning would explain a very great deal if science would only condescend to investigate it. When a man dies, the etheric body, with his soul in it, draws out of the physical form and drifts about in its neighbourhood for about three days, or until decomposition sets in, and then the soul draws out of the etheric body also, which in turn dies, and the man enters upon the first phase of his post mortem existence, the purgatorial one.

"Now, it is possible to keep the etheric body together almost indefinitely if a supply of vitality is available, but, having no stomach which can digest food and turn it into energy, the thing has to batten on someone who has, and develops into a spirit parasite which we call a vampire.

"There is a pretty good working knowledge of black magic in Eastern Europe. Now, supposing some man who has this knowledge gets shot, he knows that in three days time, at the death of the etheric body, he will have to face his reckoning, and with his record he naturally does not want to do it, so he establishes a connection with the subconscious mind of some other soul that still has a body, provided he can find one suitable for his purposes. A very positive type of character is useless; he has to find one of a negative type, such as the lower class of medium affords. Hence one of the many dangers of mediumship to the untrained. Such a negative condition may be temporarily induced by, say, shell-shock, and it is possible then for such a soul as we are considering to obtain an influence over a being of much higher type— Craigie, for instance— and use him as a means of obtaining its gratification."

"But why did not the creature confine its attentions to Craigie, instead of causing him to attack others?"

"Because Craigie would have been dead in a week if it had done so, and then it would have found itself minus its human feeding bottle. Instead of that it worked through Craigie, getting him to draw extra vitality from others and pass it on to itself; hence it was that Craigie had a vitality hunger rather than a blood hunger, though the fresh blood of a victim was the means of absorbing the vitality."

"Then that German we all saw—?"

"Was merely a corpse who was insufficiently dead."

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16: Home Service

L. C. Douthwaite

1878-1948

The Wireless Weekly (Sydney), 12 Oct 1940

A HUNDRED yards down the lane into where Peter had turned from the road, the man he had noticed lurking by the hedge made a sudden dive through the bushes. When Peter reached the spot and peered through into the field beyond, though the lank figure had disappeared, it was a little time, and then thoughtfully before he continued on his way. A quarter of a mile farther on, the hedge ended in a pair of wrought-iron gates that led to a short, somewhat neglected, drive, and it was into here he turned; then, after a little way, into the garden on the left. There he made a deferential approach to the slim figure kneeling over what once had been a flower bed.

"May I solicit your interest for the undeserving poor?" he inquired. "To the extent," he added, "of providing bread and cheese in return for an hour's work?"

Intent, apparently, on the work in hand, the girl did not straighten. Instead, a small gloved hand holding a trowel extended peremptorily sideways.

"Dig," she said.

Following the direction indicated, Peter saw that, a short distance away, a small lawn had been dug up to some quarter of its extent, and that a spade stood upright at a point where the work had been left. With only an occasional side glance at the absorbed figure of the girl, he set himself to earn his meal. When he had completed more than half the work, her voice hailed him.

"Time," she announced curtly.

Dropping his spade, Peter turned, to see that she, too, was on her feet. Advancing, he found himself looking into eyes so uncompromisingly blue that all the comparisons he had ever read or heard came leaping to his mind—"summer skies," "gentian," "dew-drenched violets," and until he arrived at "corncockle" was not able to decide which was the most fitting. Her unregimented hair was of the color and lustre of old copper; at the corners of the perfectly shaped, unlipsticked mouth, lurked imps of humor that went rather disconcertingly to negative its present sternness.

She, for her part, saw a tall, upright, but collarless, figure, with obstinately kinked hair and steady grey eyes, who was dressed in a pair of deplorable flannel trousers, frayed and stained sports coat, and prodigally ventilated shoes.

"This way," she indicated, moving off after a long inimical glance at him.

A weed-ridden path brought them to a terrace, at the foot of a low, Tudor house, that would have been more impressive if the creeper that partially covered it had been trimmed, and the paint of door and window-frames less

perished. At the end of the facade an archway led through a cobbled stable-yard to the rear premises, and from there to a short passage communicating with a flagged kitchen. Here, a plump, apple cheeked woman was cooking over an open range.

"Lay a meal, please, Bunty," the girl instructed, and after a swift glance at Peter the housekeeper produced cold beef, pickles, and beer. After which she went silently out of The room.

"And now," the girl said determinedly as he ate, "I'd like to know exactly what you're doing here."

Peter speared a pickled onion, examined it critically, and deposited it on his plate. "Looking for work," he said accurately.

She raised fine eyebrows. "In war time?" she demanded coldly.

Peter nodded.

"Fortunately for our national prospects," he pointed out equably, "demand by the fighting services for candidates suffering from my particular disability is comparatively negligible."

The severity of her expression softened slightly.

"And that is?" she questioned.

"Heart," he said gravely, hoping for forgiveness. "Hence," he went on to explain before she had time for comment, "the need for an outdoor life."

She was silent for a moment, considering. "In that case," she said at last, "you'd better get on with your work when you've finished eating. Later, I may have a suggestion to make, but that depends on my father."

"Nothing I'd like better than to stay right here," Peter said warmly, and meant it.

It was as he was spading the last few yards of turf that he heard a step behind him. He turned, to find himself confronted by a little turkey-cock of a man, shabby but immaculate, with a round red face and fierce blue eyes under enormous white eyebrows. Laying his spade aside, Peter stood to something like attention.

"General Pryor, me," the little man barked in an orderly-room voice, scrutinising Peter in an orderly-room way. "Who are you?"

"Peter Ovington Dalmain, sir," Peter told him.

"Huh:" The small keen eyes peered critically into Peter's, and then, not without a certain approval, turned to what once had been his lawn.

"Not too much of a gentleman to turn your hand to a spot of honest work, apparently," he remarked.

"To beg I am ashamed," Peter agreed gravely.

Tufted eyebrows lowered, the little man peered at him more keenly yet. Apparently Peter was something hitherto outside his experience.

"In that case, you won't turn down the offer of a temporary job," he suggested stiffly at last.

"Not," Peter replied, his eyes straying to the neglect everywhere about him, "if it's to do something about this garden."

"My regular gardener died a few months ago, and I haven't been able to replace him," the General explained, and spoke so stiffly that Peter was inclined to attribute the cause less to a shortage of labor than of money. "But we can't go on like this; shockin' state the place's got into. Besides, we've got to grow more vegetables.... Man enough for the job, are you— at a pound a week, your keep, and a room over the garage?"

"I'll do my best to give satisfaction, sir," Peter assured him, his heart leaping at the chance.

"Very good." The General's voice was decisive. "Your wages start from this morning."

In the momentary silence that followed, Peter saw the older man's expression change gradually to harshness. At last he raised his hand to indicate a small building of new red brick, standing well away from the side of the house, that Peter had noticed as he passed up the drive, and from the chimney of where, now, poured a heavy volume of smoke.

"See that place there?" the General demanded curtly.

Peter agreed that he did.

"Good!" There was a parade ground rasp to the General's voice. "That's my work-shop, and I'm the only one allowed inside. That's an order, and I expect it to be obeyed to the letter. Furthermore, if you happen to see anyone snoopin' around there, you're to hold him and bring him to me. Understand?"

"Very good, sir," said Peter expressionlessly, and watched the taut little figure stride back to the house.

As he was on the point of completing his last square yard of digging, the girl reappeared from a shopping expedition to the village. In a high-necked canary jumper and workmanlike Donegal tweed skirt, Peter decided that she looked even more attractive even than she had done earlier in the day.

"My father tells me you're staying on for a time," she said without preliminary, an antagonism latent in her voice, and eyes that, for the life of him, Peter was unable to understand.

"Fortunately, yes," he agreed.

"Then you'd better come along and look at your room," she suggested curtly.

Peter followed her to the terrace and round the side of the house to a garage, substantially built of brick, that faced directly down the drive and to the road. A few yards away, half left from the garage door, was the General's workshop. Peter followed her up the flight of wooden steps to the door that

opened to the upper room, matting-floored, and furnished adequately with a single bed, chairs, table, and book-shelves; a stove, cooking utensils, and a shelf of crockery behind one curtain, with a bath concealed by another.

"You'll be all right here?" she demanded practically.

"A home from home, indeed," Peter assured her.

"You'll go across to the house for meals, of course," she reminded him. "Probably Bunty will make your bed and tidy up generally." She laid a pound note on the table. "Meantime, in case there's anything you happen to need ..."

"That," Peter returned gravely, "is more than thoughtful of you. But how do you know I'll not just clear off with it? After all, you don't know me from a hole in the ground— the way I just walked in on you."

"If I hadn't been prepared to take that risk, you wouldn't be here now," she told him quietly.

He frowned. It was not so much that she treated him as an underling; on the contrary, ignoring his tramp-like appearance, her attitude in general was that of a social equal. But, completely detached and impersonal, as if, apart from the work for which he had been engaged, her only interest in him arose from a hardly suppressed dislike. And, as Peter was very far indeed from returning that aversion, he was not feeling too happy about it.

After he had bought himself a few immediate necessities from the nearby village, and sent a wire from the post office, he returned to the kitchen to find the table spread hospitably for supper.

"Glad you're staying for a while," the apple-cheeked Bunty remarked comfortably over the meal. "As well as, that the garden's all run to ruin, reckon we can do with a man about the place— these times."

Peter raised his eyebrows.

"I thought there was one," he pointed out.

"The General?" Bunty's tone was equally proportioned between affection and disapproval. "Too much taken up with that there workshop, he is."

"What is it he does there?" Peter, inquired conversationally, but Bunty shook her head.

"That I don't know," she said emphatically. "Nor, seemin'ly, does anyone else— though I'm thinkin' there's plenty would like to find out." There was a pause, then she added: "Miss Diana thinks so as well."

Peter filled Bunty's glass and his own from the beer jug that occupied the centre of the table.

"I've an idea she suspects I'm one of them," he suggested easily.

The glance she shot him was so startled he was conscious of having introduced an idea that had not hitherto occurred to her.

"But you're not!" she protested tensely.

"I'm here," Peter stated convincingly, "to work in the garden."

Their eyes met in a long look of mutual appraisement. Gradually Bunty's face cleared. At last she sighed loudly, as if in relief.

"Then that's all right!" she exclaimed, glancing away before turning to him again. "And, while you're busy that way, maybe you'll keep your eyes open for them as isn't so innocently occupied," she suggested.

With a recollection of the General's warning, and the lank figure who had been lurking by the hedge-side as he first approached the house, Peter nodded.

"I'll do just that," he agreed.

In the next few days he was conscious that in whatever part of the garden he happened to be working Diana kept him always within sight; even if he went to the shed for some gardening tool or other, her eyes followed him until he was back again. All the time, she was completely unapproachable, and, from his point of view, what made it worse, was that with every day he found himself becoming more absorbed in her.

The General he saw hardly at all: from first thing in the morning to any hour of the day or night the little man's interest was absorbed by what went on behind the closely-locked door of his workshop where, even in daylight, the windows were obscured.

"He's due for a breakdown, if he don't watch out " Bunty remarked to Peter during their usual exchange of confidences over the evening meal. "Twelve and fourteen hours a day he's at it. The human frame just won't stand it, not at t' master's age."

"What is it he's working at?" Peter demanded, with more interest than grammar, and Bunty shrugged still shapely shoulders.

"You'll have to ask him that," she said grimly, "or Miss Diana. All I know is that it must've cost him every penny he had. Not that he ever was more than comfortably off, but at least there was a pound or two to spend on things that mattered."

Though careful to change the subject Peter knew exactly what that admirable woman intended to convey. Try to hide it as you will, persistent shortage of money will out, and he had never seen either the General or his daughter in any change of costume, the house was crying out for repairs, and— more eloquent still— more than once had seen Diana in low-voiced obviously embarrassed conversation with men who bore all the earmarks of local tradesmen.

It was on his way back from the village that same night when, as he turned from the road into the lane that led to the home he saw that a car was drawn up to the side of the road a little way ahead and that approaching it was a figure, who, in the bright moonlight he had no hesitation in recognising as that of Diana.

There something about the stationary car that didn't look too good to Peter and heart-beat accelerated, he hurried forward. Then, suddenly, footsteps silent on the grass verge, his pace increased to a run.

There was still a couple of hundred yards to cover when Diana drew alongside the car. The door swung open and a man stepped out, lank and ungainly. The next moment, after a quick glance down the road, his arms were about her,. and he was carrying her to the car.

Even had he been working alone, probably the kidnapper's intention of getting her inside and making off before Peter could draw level would have been frustrated by Diana's magnificent fight to break free. As it was, however. Peter was almost within distance when a second man scrambled hurriedly from the driving seat of the car, and in the hand of that man was a long-barrelled automatic.

"Put 'em right up, brother," he ordered Peter in a voice that was as threatening as his weapon.

Faced with a situation that, to put it mildly, was unfavorable for retaliation, Peter's brain worked quickly. He had no illusion that the squarely-built, blue-chinned thug who confronted him would hesitate to shoot if it seemed to him the situation demanded it. Yet, even as his hands went up he decided on his line of action.

Summoning a look of anticipatory triumph, and hoping devoutly the gangsters would not tumble to the oldest escape bluff in existence, he looked, not into that unpleasing face, but over his shoulder.

"Let him have it, sergeant!" Peter cried in a tone that was an artistic blend of triumph and satisfaction.

Even as, startled, the man half-turned, Peter brought to that unprotected jaw a punch a heavyweight champion could not have taken and remained on his feet. The gangster's pistol falling from his hand, the gangster's knees bent from under him and her, too, fell.

Though by this Diana had been thrust urgently into the car, she was keeping her assailant so busy with nails and feet that his back remained still turned to the door.

Whereupon, stepping forward, Peter buried the muzzle of the retrieved automatic by a good half-inch into his spine.

"Out you come!" he ordered, in a tone that told its own story.

There being nothing else for it, the dazed man obeyed. Keeping him covered, but with a wary eye on the still motionless casualty, Peter blew a single call from the whistle he drew from his pocket. A moment later there was the sound of hurrying feet, and two outsized men in blue came galloping through the drive gates.

"Take care of these, Inspector Wood," Peter instructed, indicating his captures. The inspector, a red-faced man with protuberant jaw and small but penetrating eyes, surveyed those crestfallen men with an expression of bland astonishment.

"Well, well, well!" he exclaimed. "If it isn't Skimp Tucker and Chalky Myers." His rubicund face assumed a look of censure.

"Flying a bit high, though, isn't it, for a couple of Tony Morelli's race gang to go in for high treason?"

The lank Chimp Tucker, as the one in a condition to speak, scowled ferociously. Also, as the implication behind the inspector's words sank in, it was obvious that he was very much afraid.

"High treason nothing!" he shouted. "We was hired by..."

Here, however, in obedience to the gangster law of "no squealing," he pulled up abruptly.

"By James Brand, alias Julius Brandt, who's as German as sauerkraut, even if he is naturalised," the inspector informed him conversationally. "You'll be able to explain how he bluffed you into believing he was acting for the Hambledon Engineering Company when he appears for the preliminary hearing at Bow-street to-morrow. Meanwhile," he slipped on the handcuffs and turned to his colleague, who by this had hoisted the now fast-recovering Myers to his feet. "Take 'em along, sergeant; I'll send Constable Weller along to drive the car."

By this Peter had helped Diana out of the car, dishevelled and slightly bruised, but otherwise unhurt.

"We'll get along to the house, shall we?" she suggested quietly, brushing the dust from her skirt.

Half-way down the drive, they were met by the General, breathless and panting. "What's all this?" he demanded agitatedly, with a keen, suspicious glance at the detective. "And who's this fella?"

"Chief Inspector Wood, sir, of the Special Branch, New Scotland Yard," Peter explained. "Here to see that no one steals your new gun-mounting— that practically eliminates recoil. Actually," he added, a hint of severity in his voice, "you only just didn't lose it, not so many minutes ago.... Really, it would have been better to hand it over to the War Office instead of waiting to work out the last final, and, I'm convinced, quite unimportant detail— and at such enormous expense. ..."

"Expense!" the General exclaimed feelingly. "It's cost me almost every penny I owned, I don't mind telling you."

Peter nodded.

"I've the highest authority for promising you generous payment for the idea," he said reassuringly.

"Actually," Diana broke in, before the now somewhat shamefaced but extremely gratified General could reply, "it was Peter himself who saved the situation.... Dashed in and rescued your daughter from a couple of plug-uglies whose idea was to hold her to ransom until you handed over the model."

She glanced inquiringly at Peter. "That was the idea, I take it?" she asked.

He nodded.

"Obviously," he agreed. "Actually, we've known that something of the kind was planned since the General first approached the War Office about his invention. When I say 'we,' I mean the particular branch that deals with enemy espionage, and that has so resolutely opposed any idea of my volunteering for the Army."

He glanced at Diana, but she seemed to avoid his eye.

"It was to prevent the model from falling into wrong hands that I was sent here." He went on. "And, as I decided it might be as well to have a spot of help available— just in case— Inspector Wood and his men were sent as reinforcements."

While the General accompanied the inspector to find the constable who would drive the captives to London, Diana showed Peter into the library. Closing the door behind her, she turned to him purposefully.

"I hope you realise I thought you were here to steal the invention?" she demanded. "Nor, to be fair, do I believe I was frightfully to blame. After all, what else was I to think of a man, supposedly suffering from heart trouble, who was able to dig in heavy ground for eight hours a day and be as fresh as paint at the finish?"

Peter looked very deeply into eyes that even more than usual set his heart to racing.

"And you might like to know," he said gravely, "that actually my heart is affected— with the oldest complaint known to science. What's more," he added, as Diana made no reply, "it's a complaint that in certain cases is liable to become contagious."

Diana met that intent look without flinching.

"I'm awfully open to infection," she admitted softly.

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17: Memories of Anzac

Harold Mercer

1882-1952

The Australian Women's Weekly 28 Apr 1934

Anzac Day, April 25, is the Australian remembrance day for for fallen soldiers. It is the date of the first attack on Gallipoli by the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps in W.W.1. The author, Harold Mercer, who served with the volunteer 1st A.I.F. in WW1, was wounded in action.

THE WOMAN who put flowers on the Cenotaph in the grey morning was not as old as the whitened curls made her appear. She was one of the pilgrimage that makes an impressive sight on Anzac morning.

The world has rolled on since the war; nature has rioted in the green of grass and the joy of bright colors over the graves of the dead; and the scars that wpre left on human hearts have been healed, too. Healed by forgetfulness in many cases; but hither come the people who can never forget; if their grief is mellowed by reverential pride, their tears are as fresh and real as in the days of the first shedding, but with the blood of shock and horror cleansed from them, kind and beautiful. There was something kind and beautiful, too, in the still young face of the woman with the whitened curls as she looked compassionately at the bowed, sob-shakened body of the old woman who stood near. She put her hand on her shoulder in gentle com fort.

"He was your only son?" she asked, softly.

"No; I had seven sons, and five of them went. But he was the one who died; and he was the best of them all! My poor Bert!"

Such shrines did the war give to some. As she turned away a man stood before her, with a quiet ingratiating smile on a pleasant face. A man in middle-age who had seen trouble and borne it well, without bitterness; there were some small ribbons on the breast of his coat.

"You'll excuse me— I saw you here, last year and the year before. I wanted to speak to you; and I've plucked up courage. You don't mind, do you?... It was a brother?"

"A very dear friend," she answered.

"I may have known him," he said. "I was at the Landing myself. It is a matter of comrades unforgotten with me."

It was quite natural that they should find themselves in a coffee shop, his suggestion. The tie of a shared grief made them friends.

"You are one of those who have not forgotten." He spoke in admiration. "So many did, easily. Do you know, when first I noticed you at the Cenotaph, two years ago, I thought I knew you. I know I saw your face somewhere be fore— it was so familiar. But I'm a bashful man.

"Perhaps," he added, "your friend had a photograph; we might have been together at some time, and he would have shown it to me."

"His name was Percy Smith."

"There were two Percy Smiths with our little lot. I remember both. One was about thirty, fair-haired."

"He was only 23, and dark-haired."

"Oh!" The exclamation was noncommittal, but there was an element of surprise in it. He spoke slowly: "I did not know he was killed. I knew him, of course. He looked very fine in his uniform."

"He was splendid! He was splendid all through," she said. Then she spoke impulsively as if her companion was one who drew her confidence.

"But when we began to hear what war was like, I was frightened for Percy. I was frightened that he might fail. He had been so delicately brought up; and he was nervous of many things. The war was a fearful thing to face!"

"We were all frightened, I daresay although there were those who hadcourage to laugh. I felt Inclined to lie on the sands and bury myself in them; but there was so much courage around you, that you could not be coward "

"Isn't that courage— to overcome fear?" she demanded, proudly. "Tha is what Percy did; and he died bravely."

"He died bravely," repeated Arthur Nash.

THE self revelation he had given her was an encouragement to her confidence.

"I was with him," she said almost as if she was only rehearsing her ow memories. "I was only a girl, whe he went away. My sister and I had a flat, which was handy to our work and was in what was a good quarter then, where the boys used to march past on the way to the transports.

"We used to wake up to cheer them as they went by, and, then, we'd cry— thinking of the brave young fellows who would not come back. When Percy told us he was going, too, I thought my heart would break; but then I was proud of him. It was the right thing for him to do, and he was doing it.

"It was after he had gone that I grew really frightened. I wanted Percy to come through safely, but more than that I wanted him to come through bravely. And I remembered that Percy was often afraid to face things."

"Yes; I remember," said Nash, rather grimly.

"But he did face them!" she returned, triumphantly. "Though he is dead, that has given me a memory that will last for ever."

"Although we had been sweethearts almost since we were children, Percy was afraid to tell his parents, when it was arranged between us that we were to be married on his return— we thought it would be only a few months, if he got through safely.

"The fear grew upon me. became almost desperate. I had the haunting picture of Percy failing in the stress of some big moment, branded as a coward amongst his fellows. I wanted to be with him to give him encouragement.

"My father was a great telepathist-telepathy was his hobby and enthusiasm. You may have heard of him— Hector Marlow I remembered his doctrines; and I used to pray at night that l could get Into touch with Percy. I used to seize moments of quietness to concentrate upon that idea."

Nash leaned forward, interested; he beckoned for more coffee.

"I've heard a good deal about telepathy. It has ceased to be an impossible thing since we have learned the wonders of wireless. But, as in wireless, minds have to be in tune to make contact."

"I did make contact!" cried Kathleen Marlow, excitedly. "Several times I woke with a memory of speaking to Percy, which was so clear and definite that it comforted me; but the impression was always vague afterwards. Then there came a time when the impression ceased to be vague, but was intensely definite. When I woke my sister and the other people in the flats were alarmed; they had been unable to waken me. I felt tired, exhausted; but I was glad, although terrified, for I knew my wish had been granted.

"It was terrifying that— that dream. I was on a steamer, where the only light seemed to be from the points of red of cigarettes of the Diggers who huddled about the decks, vague shadows, with the tenseness of waiting over them all. Some, in bravado, were sharpening their bayonets; some were joking; some trying to sleep, and groups spoke softly with sibilant whispers.

"It seemed to me that I had to pick my way among the sprawled forms, until I was drawn by a whimper that was like that of a frightened child. I knelt down beside a man who was squatting with his back against a deckhouse, his arms on his knees, and his head fallen on them. I could feel his terror of the ordeal that was ahead.

" 'Percy, you must have courage!' I whispered. 'You will be laughed at disgraced.' "

" 'You don't care whether I die,' he said bitterly. 'I do care,' I told him, earnestly, 'but it is worse than to die, to be branded as a coward. If you fail, you will die in any case— but in disgrace.'

"A whisper seemed to come along the deck, and translated itself into movement. The Diggers were rising and forming into line, with hissing sighs of strain, here and there.

" 'I could hide somewhere on the boat, and they could not find me,' said Percy, wildly. 'You can't; you must join the line,' I urged.

"It seemed that I had to urge him all the way. And I seemed also to be standing in the line beside him. The movement of the vessel had stopped, and the ghostly shadows of other ships hung almost motionless in the grey mists.

Away further in the mists, too, was a blur that suggested land. The cold, damp air of morning touched like the fingers of death. I could feel that, too."

Nash, his coffee cold before hirn, stared at her. The thought that she was speaking from a knowledge brought by reading passed; there was an earnestness of actual experience in her as she spoke.

"I was beside him, too, in the scramble down to the barges, urging him on, coaxing his courage. The grey became less dark, the vessels we passed more definite in shape, and the coast to which we were moving was plain now, with a streak of silver of the dawn along the crest shining even in the mists.

"I was so much in it personally that I winced when the bullets began to spatter the still, dark water, and the scream of shells sounded overhead. It was a nightmare to me, but I had to keep my own courage to urge Percy to maintain a hold upon his. I could feel him quivering, and hear his sob bing breath."

"This talking is over-exciting you. Don't go on!" Nash said, putting his own hand on her quivering hand. He was shaking as if going again through experiences that had been real.

"No, I want to talk. I have never spoken about this to anybody else. That is strange. But you are one who knows. You were there. You knew Percy, and you knew that he was frightened. You know that he overcame his fear."

"Yes," he assented in a strange tone. "I was frantic to stay with him— to remain there to urge him on. It was a sort of inferno when we reached the beach, but I hardly heard anything but the fear whispers of Percy's heart. Everything was automatic but my desire to, urge him on. It was ghastly, horrible, when men fell beside him.

"Then we were going up the hill, with bullets pouring down with a noise like a scythe sweeping through grass. Oh, the bravery of it— how the men kept on, clutching at tufts of bush and boulders, and swinging themselves higher. But a man just ahead of us gave a gasping cry, and fell backward, rolling a little, and stayed still.

"Percy was flat against the side of the cliff, trying to bury himself in it.

" 'I can't go on; it is death to all of us,' he said.

" 'You mus ! Look how brave they all are! You must be among them!'

"It seemed that I was trying to pull him to his feet, pleading with sobs to him, reminding him of myself, of his family. At last I succeeded. In move ment again, he seemed to lose his terror. At the crest, where ghastly things happened, which sickened me when I saw them, he was as indifferent to danger as the rest. I felt sick and ill, and I knew that the danger I feared had passed, for the surge of triumph was in him.

" 'Darling, I will always be with you,' I said. 'Remember that, and do not fail.'

"I woke. People laughed when I told them that our boys had been in battle— all about my dream, except about Percy being so frightened. They wondered later, when the news came, with that dreadful list of the dead and the wounded.

"I kept my promise to Percy; he would think that it was all a dream, my presence near him, but it would cheer him; and when I next found him he needed me. A further advance was to be made, and he was afraid."

"That would be the attack on—" Nash had begun eagerly; he stopped. "Go on," he said.

"I whispered to him that he had come safely through the other ordeal; I told him that he had won the honor of his companions. Somehow I knew that. I felt that he was gripping himself, but although to be among the ghastly deeds that I had seen before sickened me, I wanted to stay with him, to be his support.

"He was the first to swing out of the trench. I was proud when I realised that.

"Suddenly I was out of touch. He was no longer there. I searched for him, but found nothing. Even before I woke I knew what that meant. I cried my eyes out, and they told me I was foolish.

"But they saw I was right when his name appeared in the casualty list as 'Missing, supposed killed in action.'

"I urged him to his death; yet I am glad— proud and glad. He died bravely," she said, and then she broke down. He took her hands sympathetically and raised her.

"Let us go out into the sun," he said. Its gleam could be seen outside, the morning's drizzle having passed. "You need not be afraid that I will tell your story— about the fears of Percy Smith— to anyone."

He sensed her wish.

"I DON'T know what made me tell you," she said. "To everybody else Percy was brave— brave all through."

"Probably it was because I knew all about it; you had to tell me the truth," he returned. "I must go now, to join in the march. "May we meet again?"

She said they might; he was a link with the hero-worship that had become her whole life. Later she saw him in the march. A Digger who was standing beside her gave a cheering hail as he passed, and it was answered by a recognition that included her.

"You know that gentleman?" she asked the Digger.

"Know him!" echoed the Digger. "I should say! He was one of the best officers in the brigade. M.C., D.C.M., and all sorts of things. Three times wounded. He was a dinkum! There wasn't a chap who had a bad word for Major Arthur Nash."

Her heart smote her about her revelation of the weakness of Percy Smith to this hero of the war; but a memory of his own self-revelation of fear comforted her.

His friendship became a new, surprisingly valuable possession to her. He was glad to meet her; her loyalty to a memory was an appeal to him. She judged him to be a very loyal man himself.

"You have never even thought of marriage?" he said as they sat in the gardens together. "You are young still, and you— you won't mind my saying it— are charming."

"I promised Percy that I would marry no one else, and I was responsible for his death. I always feel that," she said.

"Loyal little woman! It would be no use my asking you, then?" he said gravely.

"I would prefer that we were friends," She answered him with flushed face.

"I hope we would be friends— even if we were married," he laughed.

She was a little surprised at the cynicism. She had learnt that he had been married, but had no children. He did not talk about the marriage. It had been an unhappy one then, and accounted for the look of past trouble that was on his face.

He was a man who would not speak ill of his wife whatever sorrow she had given him; if he had had happiness to remember he would have spoken about it. His reference, once, to the trouble of glamorous, horrid war marriages from which many Diggers suffered may have supplied a key to his own story. He told her that she was the best friend he had ever known, referring with glowing gratitude to the accident of their meeting.

The friendship was even more to her; there was gladness in her heart at every prospect of meeting him.

Yet the ideal of her loyalty stood definitely between them. They both accepted that. He would not destroy a beautiful devotion himself.

"Supposing Percy Smith had not died on Gallipoli?" he asked.

"Why, then,'' she smiled, "we would have been married, Percy and I."

It was a beautiful friendship for both of them, even if it could not be more. In course of time it became a practice for her, if in town, to call at his office to tell him that they might lunch together. He liked such surprises.

He was engaged one day when she arrived. She sat in the waiting-room outside his office until he should be alone. The sound of the voices came over the partition, and she was suddenly interested. For besides his, she recognised the other voice.

"She is living on your memory, supposing that you died on Gallipoli," Nash was saying. "Look here, Smith, you've always been afraid of facing things, but it's

up to you to face this. A woman wasting her life! You might have married that French girl in Egypt, but she's dead now."

Kathleen's heart seemed to be standing still as she listened.

"Have you told her I'm alive— and all the rest?" demanded the other voice.

"Not a word. I would do nothing to spoil the beauty of an ideal. She does not know that you never set foot on Gallipoli; that you dodged draft on the transport, and that is how you came to be posted as missing— until they found you, a deserter. She doesn't know that the influence of your family saved you, and that you were returned to Melbourne so as to avoid anything that might be said."

He spoke in contempt.

"She loves you still— or the memory of you, knowing your weakness, but thinking you had overcome it. All she need know is that the supposition of your death was wrong. You've got to meet her!"

"I won't! I can't face it," said Percy Smith.

It was after Nash had said many hot things to him that he flung out of the office, ruffled and angry.

Kathleen hung her head so that he would not see her; she no longer desired to see him. But directly he was gone she was in the office, facing Nash.

"I heard! You must forgive me, but I heard! And I saw him," she said. "But I can't understand! My dream! He was not on the transport, not on Gallipoli?"

"I don't know, Kath," he answered, "but I was on a transport, feeling a craven, meditating a rush to a hiding place on the vessel to avoid the conflict ahead, when something came to me urging me to be a man— and stayed with me afterwards. Even when I was dug into the side of the cliff, feeling paralysed, as if I could not go another step. It may be your telepathy had mistaken its way and came to the first whimperer," he said with a smile.

All the other feelings she had, the shock, the disillusionment, were lost in her admiration for him, the loyal man who, to his own despite, had kept secret his knowledge of another man's failure— who had shown himself still ready to sacrifice himself for her happiness, if her happiness was with Percy Smith.

He had her hands in his, looking down at her.

"I wanted to tell you before, after I had heard what you said, that it was me you had changed from a coward; I was 'knocked' in the first Lone Pine attack, and was unconscious for hours."

"But why—" she began.

"Perhaps it was that our minds are tuned; there is so much in common between us— that we ought to share," he said.

They went out, happily, into the sunshine, Kathleen wondering strangely why a loyal ideal that had lasted so long should give so little pain in its passing.

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18: A Short Sad Tale of a Legacy

Lennie Lower

1903-1947

Australian Women's Weekly 19 May 1934

Lennie Lower wrote hundreds of short comic stories for newspapers, and for the Women's Weekly, plus one novel: Here's Luck!, *1930. The short stories are all shorter than my arbitrary lower limit of 1,000 words. However, I make the rule so here's 600 or so words of his as a sample.*

OF ALL THE LEGACIES I have received, I think the one from my grandfather, the old Earl, was the most trying.

When the Earl was found hanging from a nail in the banqueting hall, little did the sorrowing villagers think that the new master would be young Lennie, the well-known philanthropist, who has done so much to help struggling bookmakers in the past few years.

COMMONERS cannot understand the difficulties of managing a big estate.

I was changing the water in the moat one morning when one of the villagers approached, and, pulling a piece out of his forelock, said, "I be beggin' pardon, Your Execrableness, but lads of village do be savin' that chapel be on fire. Have you got empty bucket to lend, sir?"

"No, varlet," I said sadly, "I have no empty bucket. The only bucket I have is full of dirty water."

"That do be too bad," he replied.

Just then the under-gardener's secretary came rushing up to me.

"Sire!" he panted, "about two hundred of your polo ponies have broken out of the stables and have already smashed about three acres o' glass-houses."

I just give these two instances to show you what worries wealth can bring.

UNDER the conditions of the old Earl's will I was compelled to marry Lady Diana Montgomery Pomery Cholmondeley (pronounced Miff).

I didn't mind this. The Lady Diana was the toast of the metropolis, probably because she was better bred. But one day while I was oiling the drawbridge she came bowling up to the castle in her phaeton with a chaff-bag.

Hurling the bag at my feet, she said: "Take back your diamonds!"

I was so surprised that my coronet fell off and rolled down the drive.

"What's biting you?" I said, with old-fashioned courtesy.

Waving the phaeton passionately at me, she replied: "I will not be a bird in a gilded cage. All that I want is LOVE! Do you get that? Love, and big slabs of it."

I summoned a handful of lackeys who happened to be loafing around and said "Toss this woman off the premises."

That was the last I saw of her.

I was pretty good at riding to hounds, too, and seldom was there a hunt when I didn't bag at least three hounds.

WELL, anyhow, after this my solicitors, Promly, Jackson, Meed, Promly, Jackson, Meed and Meed, wrote to me saying that the terms of the will were not being fulfilled, and what about it?

I was trout fishing at the time, using a dry fly, one of those flies you drink with when there's no one around. I said to the servant who was holding the rod for me, "Tell the man who is winding the line in to tell the man who is taking the trout off the hook that I have finished fishing."

The word was passed down the line, and I wended my way back to the castle.

I had one last look at the portraits of those long-forgotten Lowers, cast a wistful glance over the castle, to the great astonishment of the butler, who was unaware that I won the inter-Varsity glance-casting championship with a cast of 285 feet 11 inches, and left the scene, never to return.

That, ladies and gentlemen, is my story, and I'm sticking to it.

I still retain my title as ths thirteenth Earl, but I'd prefer that you just call me Lenny.

Or, if you're waking, call me Early.

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19: The Blue Costume

E. Mary Gurney

1900-1938

The Australian Woman's Mirror, 2 Nov 1937

DELLA OLDFIELD stood before the window of the second-hand shop and looked at the blue costume.

Marked down to a guinea, it was exactly the shade that most became her; a dark, powdered violet of the same hue as her eyes. When you have only two guineas in the world a guinea is a great deal of money lo spend on a frock, especially a second-hand one, but when you have arrived at the stage of being so shabby that you are beginning to develop an inferiority feeling it is time to do something about it.

Three years is not such a very long time, but a lot can happen in it, as Della had discovered to her cost.

Della's mother had never been like yours or mine. She was very beautiful, like diamonds or Winter sun. She glittered, and captured Della's father when he was a rising young engineer; but she would not follow him to the strange places that lead young engineers on to fortune.

When Della was eighteen her father slipped off one of his bridges into an icy Canadian river, and because Della was beginning to understand a great deal about life she never quite forgave her lovely mother.

Cameron Oldfield's income died with him; wives like Maida Oldfield make that inevitable.

For a year mother and daughter lived precariously, while Della matured to a beauty less classically perfect but infinitely more warm than her mother's.

Naturally she had a great number of suitors, but though there was nothing unsophisticated about her she still believed in love; something warm and enduring that gave a meaning to life; endowed mortals with the right to live it.

The fat, elderly and rather charming American tourist with a million dollars in real estate did not in the least appeal to Della. This infuriated her mother, who married him herself and took him off round and round the fashionable places of the world, leaving Della to sink or swim.

In a little while the girl discovered without bitterness that she had many acquaintances and a few friends.

The friends did what they could for her, but she was inclined to be independent. She gradually withdrew herself, determined in spite of the depression to carve her own way or go under.

She could of course have married quite brilliantly, but in the beginning she did not see the necessity, and in the end she lacked the courage.

It is not hard to lose one's illusions on the reality of love, but when one is very young and very lovely and almost destitute it is even easier to lose one's illusions about the chivalry of man.

Because she was a courageous young thing Della learned shorthand and typewriting. It was not until she was proficient that she realised how many proficient shorthand typists there are out of a job; nor how very hard it is for an extra pretty one to stay in a job when she has found it.

On the evening of her twenty-second birthday she lost a poorly-paid position as secretary to an aspiring woman author for no particular reason than that she was young and lovely. The authoress was neither.

With her chin up and fighting back the sense of dismay that threatened to overwhelm her Della made a round of the employment agencies, and so engrossed was she on her urgent need that she scarcely heeded the screech of the passing fire-engine.

When she returned to her lodgings it was to find them razed to the ground. Every stitch of clothing she possessed was burnt to cinders.

It was, though Della was far too valiant to admit it, the beginning of the end. With five pounds in her purse she found a tiny room in a back street. Once she almost got a temporary job, but lost it at the last moment to a plain but well-dressed rival.

It was then that she realised for the first time how shabby she was.

Her once expensively tailored costume was worn until it was shiny at the seams and bagging at the elbows. Her shoes were going over at the heels, and her one unladdered pair of silk stockings was furry. She. wore her little felt hat with an air, but it too belonged to a style of yesterday.

So she stood now staring at the blue costume with eyes that were growing too big for her face.

A guinea was a lot of money, and yet... With that frock and a pair of shoes, if they had a pair that would fit her, she could start again, recover something of her old courage and confidence... Hanging on to those two soiled notes was merely postponing the inevitable.

Della shivered and remembered the friends who had been— who would be— so good to her. Friends, she told herself, warming her heart at old fires, were people you turned to in need.

When you were destitute, discouraged, hungry... When for days you had eaten only bread.

The curtains that backed the shop window stirred and a woman looked out stealthily. She had a pale oval face and peculiar eyes that reminded Della of a cat's; but there was something strange behind the stillness of her face, as though pain waited the unguarded minute.

Della threw indecision aside and went into the pawnshop.

As the woman of the shop came to the counter Della saw that under the careful enamelling of her face it was lined and seamed, less with years than with adversity. She stood with a sort of frozen immobility waiting for Della to speak. The sound of her voice was startlingly loud in the silence of the shop.

"There is a blue costume in the window," said Della, painfully. "I should like to try it on."

Without answering the woman got it out of the window and led the way into a tiny curtained recess. The costume fitted. The woman went away and returned with a hat, shoes and scarf to match.

"I'll make them six shillings for you."

Della bit her lip.

It would leave her exactly two weeks rent for her room and six shillings for her food.

"I'll take them," said Della steadily, "if they fit."

Like the frock the shoes and gloves did fit. "I'll keep them on," said Della.

The woman wrapped her shabby costume and, as Della turned away, spoke again.

"If you're out of work go to this address."

Mechanically Della took the card held out to her.

"Ask no questions," said the woman.

Della went out, her eyes fixed on the card, and a man in a grey suit jostled her, knocking the parcel out of her hand.

"Why, Mavis!" he exclaimed, and then flushed apologetically. "It was the frock," he explained, stooping to retrieve the parcel. "I'm awfully sorry!"

Because he was young, with one of those plain faces that can be so very attractive, she was betrayed into a wan smile that was unconsciously appealing.

"Accidents do happen," she forgave him, and moved on.

The young man stood looking after her, his steady eyes a trifle puzzled. Then he saw the little square of card on the pavement, and his face changed and took on a look that was almost grim.

Picking up the card, he turned to look at the shop out of which Della had emerged, then he followed her down the street. It was not until she turned into one of the better-known restaurants that Della missed the card, but the address was etched on her memory, so it did not really matter.

Not, she thought, ordering flounder, with roast chicken to follow, that it would have mattered in any case, because no person in their sane senses would have anything to do with an address come-by under such suspicious circumstances. But necessity knows no law.

Her dinner, the first decent meal she had eaten for months, cost her three shillings, the rent for her room was five shillings, so by the end of the week she would be penniless.

Leaving the restaurant she noticed the man in the grey suit rise from a corner table. She did not know that he followed her.

Well fed and decently clothed once more she began to feel a hundred-per-cent valiant, and set out again on the search that must end in a job.

In the blue costume she was doubly attractive. Had she but known it, the men she interviewed were afraid of her. Beauty's other name spells trouble. Women not half so lovely have changed the destinies of empires.

The women she interviewed were afraid too. Jealously afraid.

At the end of the week, though she would not admit it even to herself, Della knew that she was beaten; that she must turn to her friends. Unless—

The alternative she knew was impossible, yet the following day found her deliberately seeking Hyacinthe's Beauty Salon.

To save tram fares she walked, going by the shortest route through devious back streets that began to fill her with dismay, so deserted they were yet so full of unseen, watching eyes.

Once or twice she encountered policemen who looked at her suspiciously as though half-minded to accost her. On the second occasion she scurried past the man in blue, hoping against hope that she did not look so furtive as she felt.

But the Hyacinthe's street itself when she reached it was not so unnerving as she had imagined it would be. It was a wideish thoroughfare of almost respectable-looking shops, going up steeply to a residential area that had a look of prosperous gentility.

Hyacinthe's Beauty Salon was near the top of the street.

A Parisienne head in a blonde wig stood in the green-curtained window, but the impressive plate-glass door was closed. Della knocked, but even before she did so she knew that it was useless. The place had the closed and secret look that comes to empty places.

Standing in the dusty street Della knew panic.

Stranded, she must once more accept the charity of her friends; return to them admitting defeat, as one unfitted to cope with the battle of life; marry one of them perhaps and despise herself for ever.

A woman passing looked at her curiously and spoke.

" 'Tain't no good a-knocking, Miss! Place is closed up; for good, I guess. Cops raided it yesterdee. Took 'em all off in the van— and a good riddance to 'em. Up to no good, they were. Drugs, if it wasn't worse"

Della leaned against the door-jamb. Realising what she had escaped she felt physically sick.

Hunger will demoralise the most valiant spirit, and Della had been living on courage and little else for many weeks.

The woman stood with her hands on her hips staring brazenly.

''You look all in, my girl! Don't know where to go for it, eh? Or was you one of their agents?"

Della did not answer, and a car came round the top of the street, ran down swiftly and pulled up against the kerb.

There was a poker-faced inspector of police at the wheel.

"Coo lumme!" gasped the woman. "Perlice!"

Precipitately she fled, but Della stayed weakly where she was. What did it matter, anyway! No one but an abject fool would have come there, and if the police gathered her in, at least she would have a roof over her head and food worthy the name to fill the aching void that threatened to bring about her complete collapse.

A tall man in a grey suit got out of the big black car and crossed to her, the man who, bumping into her as she came out of the second-hand clothes shop, had called her Mavis.

Della looked up at him dumbly, and miraculously her head ceased to reel. His eyes were very blue, very quiet and compelling. Meeting them Della felt suddenly steadied and reassured, restored to sanity, and a new courage and hope. He stood in complete repose looking down at her. He spoke quietly, as though it was the most natural thing in the world that he should address her.

"I'm so sorry, Miss Oldfield, that we didn't realise sooner that you were coming here."

Della stood away from the door-jamb.

"We?"

Her question was very low, but he heard.

"The police." His eyes were suddenly guarded and remote. "It's too long a story to tell here. Besides which I haven't lunched. Will you permit me?"

I have been all sorts of a fool, Della thought, but only a fool would not trust him. Besides which, the driver of the car was so obviously police. So she got into the car and sat without speaking or looking at him while it glided silently away.

Presently he spoke.

"I'm Jerrard Gallant of the plainclothes branch. I—we've had our eye on you ever since the day I bumped into you. It's part of our job."

Della looked at him then.

"Part of your job?"

"To keep an eye on girls who look— as if they might be driven to answer doubtful advertisements or call at addresses queerly come-by."

The car drew up suddenly before the entrance to the restaurant where Della had dined, not wisely but well, on that day on which she had bought the blue costume As they descended to the pavement the driver of the car grinned at Della and saluted.

"By and large," he assured her, "we're a decent crowd doing a thankless job! You can trust that nit-wit!"

He drove away.

"Our Chief," explained Gallant dryly. "I'm aiming to do him out of his job!"

They went into the restaurant, where without consulting her Gallant selected a meal more in the nature of a dinner than a lunch—soup, oysters, breast of chicken and a soufflé; also something that the waiter promised to send out for.

"In the meantime," said Gallant, "black coffee."

The waiter scurried away and Jerrard turned to Della.

"Brevity is the soul of wit and the heart of narrative. To cut a long story short, the day I ran into you I thought you were someone I knew owing to the blue frock. In the collision you dropped a card that gave me the clue to something that's been puzzling me a long time.

"I followed you to get a good look at you, then took the card back to the shop. The woman there told me what I wanted to know. She was a decent sort, driven by sheer desperation into a rotten job.

"She sent girls like you to that address, where they were used for the distribution of dope. Very few of them stayed long— they got suspicious and were discharged or left."

The waiter came with the coffee.

"But you followed me ?" Della said.

"You were out of a job and finances were obviously at a pretty low ebb, otherwise why was a girl like you buying a second-hand frock?"

"You're very— astute," said Della. Looking up she met his eyes, and in that moment she knew that though keeping an eye on lonely women might be part of his job, in her case at least there had been and still was something more to it than that.

"I thought you were too shrewd to go to that address," said Jerrard. "I didn't realise quite how bad things were, so we weren't quite so careful watching you. It wasn't until we got a ring from one of the constables on the east side that we knew you'd gone."

The waiter came again, with steaming soup.

"I must have been crazy," Della said.

"It's the heart-breaking part of our job," said Jerrard sombrely. "The crazy things people do when they get a bad break— through fear or hate or hunger. We can't watch all of the people all of the time!"

He gave her a crooked smile, and her heart missed a beat, so whimsically sad he looked.

"But that's sentiment! And policemen can't afford to be sentimental!"

She sighed a little.

"I suppose not," she agreed with unconscious wistfulness.

He shot her a sharp look.

"Your bad break's over, of course," he assured her. "My cousin Mavis, who writes very bad novels in more senses than one, is again in need of a companion-secretary. The last one laughed in the wrong place. So it is a position requiring fortitude and humor."

He paused to offer her a cigarette.

"It doesn't sound very attractive perhaps, and perhaps it won't lead anywhere much, but it'll give you security and independence until you have had time to consider things."

Della looked at him steadily; at his quiet eyes and ugly, attractive, dependable face. Her lips curved suddenly into a tremulous smile that was as suddenly firm and content, for in that brief second she knew that, no matter how trying the position might seem, it was going to lead her a very long way indeed.

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20: "Lot 45"

Radcliffe Martin

1873-1947

Mercury (Hobart) 26 March 1938

J. R. GLADWIN was in high spirits. He had just sold a decidedly unsound horse at a decidedly sound price and the gold jingled in his pocket. He wandered round the market-place in search of amusement, and soon found himself one of a throng wedged in an auction saleroom.

"Any advance on 4 shillings and 9 pence, gentlemen. Going, going! At 4s.9d. to this gentleman, William." And the puzzled-looking farmer found himself the reluctant possessor of six soiled fire-screens and three gross of pink paper ham-frills.

"There, gentlemen," said the auctioneer. "I told, you that this stationer's stock was to be sold absolutely without reserve. The prices prove it. Now, I am about to ofter you the opportunity of the day. Lot 45— (Er— what is Lot 45, William?). Lot 45, gentlemen, is an assortment of greeting cards— Christmas, New Year, and birthday. Here is a chance for anyone of an economical turn of mind. At retail prices there must be well over £2 worth of cards here. Who will bid sovereign for the lot?"

The inhabitants of Pottlebury did not seem to appreciate the advantages of purchasing their Christmas cards In February. For all they knew they might need funeral cards instead of Christmas cards before the year was over.

"Anyone bid me 10 shillings, 10 shillings only, gentlemen, for hundreds of kindly messages and loving greetings?"

"Two shillin'," said Mr. Gladwin, humorously winking at a friend in the crowd.

"I am offered 2s." said the auctioneers; "any advance on 2s.? Anyone say 2s. 3d.? Gentlemen, where is your enterprise? Going at 2s. Gone. This gentleman, William; get the money and give him the parcel."

" 'Ere I was only jokin'," began Mr. Gladwin.

"The next lot," said the auctioneer, raising his voice to drown Mr. Gladwin's protests, "consists of 48 coloured calenders for the current year."

Reluctantly Mr. Gladwin produced his 2s. and received a bulky parcel in exchange. He took it across to the tavern where he usually put up, and examined his purchase whilst his horse was being harnessed.

"All for kids," grumbled Mr. Gladwin; "teddy-bears and such like. I don't send no kids Christmas cards. I'll give this lot to my 'ousekeeper an' tell 'er that I always meant givin' 'er somethin' at Christmas. 'Ello, what's this?"

At the bottom of the parcel were five Valentines— all precisely the same. A youth, who from the elegant curling of his locks, must have been a barber, knelt

before a golden-haired beauty, who seemed to be something between an angel and a ballet-dancer. The maiden was coyly turning her head away whilst the youth pressed a bunch of violets into her hand. A border of turtle-doves surrounded this interesting scene, and beneath it were the touching lines:

"Lovely malden, take, I pray,
Love's sweet token on this'day.
Let your heart and hand be mine,
Dainty little Valentine."

"That's tricky," exclaimed Mr. Gladwin. "I'll keep these an' give the cards to Mrs. Dobson. I can see a bit o' fun out o' this. It's Valentine's Day on Friday."

THE following evening his house keeper went out, and Mr. Gladwin resolved to take the opportunity of working off his Jest.

"Let me see," he meditated, as he sat down to the table: "'Oo is there in the village that ain't never likely to get married? Widder Bunce, Widder Tomkins, Miss Adams, and Widdy Oxley— I-must 'ave 'er, for she's 18 stone, an' it'd cheer 'er to be called a 'dainty little Valentine,' an', let me see— ah, ah, Miss Moggridge. Now, 'ow am I to send ,'em so they don't know 'oo's done it. Blessed it I don't print the envelopes in capitals."

Mr. Gladwin set. to work, chuckling heartily as he completed each envelope.

"Let me see," he continued, when they were all complete. "I'd better not post these i' the village. Someone might see me shovin' them all i' the box. No, I'd better post 'em i' the letter-box by the vicarage, that's quieter."

He went down the deserted country road towards the vicarage, dropped his letters into the box, and slipped away with a smile of anticipation on his face. The joke was complete, and no one could prove that he had had anything to do with it. However, as he strutted cheerfully away down the road the village postman turned the corner, and just sighted his portly figure leaving the letter-box.

"Sam Gladwin'll 'ave been writin' for more cattle food," meditated Silas Potter as he went to the box to clear it;

He opened the letter-box, and, taking out the few letters it contained, glanced over them with interested eyes.

"Ah, 'shoulder of mutton, not so fat as the last'— they'll be changing their butcher at the vicarage before long. Letter to young Mr. Buckley, at Oxford. Happen the vicar'll have been giving him a bit of advice. Bit of a prodigal 'e is; must be 'ard on the vicar to keep 'im there. Letters for Mrs. Bunce, Mrs. Tomkins, Mrs. Oxley— why, what's all these in big print? Let me see, where's the

letter Mr. Gladwin posted? There ain't one— why, 'e must 'ave sent all these. But what's 'e wrltln' to Widder Bunce for? Couldn't 'e 'ave shouted over the garden fence to 'er? And Widder Tomkins, 'oo lives next door but one! Whatever can Sam Gladwin be up to? There ought to be a reggilatton order on us to open suspicious letters."

Mr. Potter placed the letters in his bag and tramped away, consoling himself with the knowledge that very possibly he could find out about the mysterious letters in the morning.

AT eight o'clock the following morning he tapped at Widder Bunce's door.

"Mornin", Mrs. Bunce— letter for you."

Mrs. Bunce took the letter cautiously. "It'll be from them people that advertised that free rheumatic cure," she said. "I writ to 'em, an' they said the cure'd be sent, if I sent 'em 3s 6d. to pay for packing and postage. They've kep' writin' ever since, but 3s 6d is a lot o' money."

"No, lt ain't from them. See, the postmark tells you it was posted 'ere."

"So lt does. You're a terrible learned man, Mr. Potter. But 'oo'd be writin' to me?"

"Better open lt an' see."

Mrs. Bunce tore the envelope open, glanced at its contents and flushed suddenly. Mr. Potter tactfully bent down to tie up a bootlace that had not come untied.

"Do you know 'oo's writin' that is?" said Mrs. Bunce pleasantly, holding out the envelope.

"There's not much tellln' from envelopes," said Mr. Potter, sagely. "Now, if I'd a look at the letter inside I could tell you. Folks don't write nateral on envelopes."

"It's a Valentine," said Mrs. Bunce hesitatingly.

"Sam Gladwin sent you a Valentine," said the postman, snatching it out of her hand. "Well, If I'd not 'ave seen 'im postin' it last night I'd never'ave believed it."

"lt's very kind o' him to send it, o' course, I don't want it talked, about, Mr. Potter. I've not 'ad one for years. 'E's a shy man is Mr, Gladwin', but well-meanin."

The postman looked at Mrs. Bunce's pleased face. "Look 'ere, Mrs. Bunce, you're a good sort, an'. I'll tell you somethin'. Gladwin posted four more letters like this last night. Mrs. Tomkins,. Mrs, Oxley, Miss Adams, and Miss Moggridge'll 'ave letters like this unless I'm making a big mistake. See, I've got'em'ere. It's just one o'Gladwin's jokes. Don't you take no notice o' 'im."

Mrs. Bunce's face clouded over. "It's one o' his jokes, is it— sending Valene tines to respectable folk. Just you tell them others what I've got, Mr. Potter, an' say I'll be round to see.'em directly I've cleared my breakfast things away."

THAT morning Mr. Gladwin drove away in his trap with a smiling face. He had business at a distant market town, and his lourney was enlivened by thoughts or five elderly ladies in the thrills of a romance.

"They'll put it down to old Abraham Tucker," he thought. "'E 'avin' nothin" to do, an' no wife to worry 'im, 's always' trotting round clackin' with females."

His business completed, he drove eagerly home, anxious to hear if any rumours of the .Valentines had spread in the village. He was passing the vicarage on his way to the village when the vicar appeared at the gate.

"Ah, Mr. Gladwin," exclaimed the vicar.

Mr. Gladwin pulled up his horse. The vicar looked at him with just the susicion of a twinkle in his eye.

"I congratulate you heartily, Gladwin. Miss Moggridge is indeed an excellent person. You will be most happy, I am sure. She will add the much-needed element, stability, to your character, let me know when the banns are to be put up."

"Me marryin' Miss Moggridge," exclaimed Mr. Gladwin.

"Better late than never," said the vicar; "but I'm late for the choir practice. Excuse me—"

And the vicar sped down the road.

"What's put that in 'is silly old head," murmured Mr. Gladwin disrepectfully, as his horse jogged on. "It can't be that Valentine; they don't know I sent it, and I'll swear I didn't any'ow."

His horse, being acquainted with Mr. Gladwin's habits, drew up automatically at the White Lion. Mr. Gladwin jumped down and entered the bar.

Young Jim Rogers, who had married Mrs. Oxley's only daughter, beamed on him as he entered.

" 'Ello, pa," he cried. "You're a good plucked 'un, you are. Why, Mrs. Oxley's a worse tongue than her daughter. You'll not be calling 'er a 'your dainty little Valentine' when you've been tied up to 'er a month."

"Talk a. blt o' sense," said Mr. Glad-win sternly. "You're drunk or dream-ing." '

"I've got the Valentine you sent 'er in my pocket. Postman Potter saw you post it 'er. I've bin readin' it to all friends 'ere, an' very touchin' lt was: 'Let your hand and heart be mine, Dainty little Valentine.'

"She went round this afternoon to your 'ouse to tell you it was all right. She nearly broke down when she found you out. But I s'pose you'll be running round to kiss 'er 'Good-night' "

There was a roar of laughter.

"I'm not staying 'ere with a pack o' drunken fools," said Mr. Gladwin, jumping to his feet and slamming the door as he wont out.

HE reached hls.house and found his housekeeper, Mrs. Dobson, waiting for him in a sombre mood. His supper was ready, and though he chatted all the time to his housekeeper he could only get curt monosyllabic replies.

When he had finished his meal she said severely, "I wish to give you a' week's notice to leave, Mr. Gladwin."

"Bless me, whatever do you want to 'ook it for?"

"I prefer not to give my reasons, Mr, Gladwin."

"Look, 'ere, Mrs. Dobson, .lt don't stand to sense that I should let a woman go 'oo can make a rabbit-pie like that tonight. What's botherin'.you?"

"Well, I can stand some things, Mr. Gladwin. I never did. object to you comin', 'ome a' bit merry o' market nichts, but I can't-stay in'the 'ouse of a Mormon or a Turk. There's bin two Widders an' three single wimmln 'ere to-day. There's that Mrs, Bunce 'oo came in an' lectured me about airin' your linen, an', if I'd,let 'er, she'd 'ave taken 'ome your things to go through an' mend: Then Widder Oxley came in an give me notice right away, sayin' she knew what Widders was, and that she wasn't goln' to 'ave 'em round 'er promised 'usband. And Miss Moggridge came an' worried the life out o' me to know 'ow. she was to keep you from the drink when she married you. She was the best o' the lot, though; all the others give me notice. As for that Miss Adams and Widder Tomkins, the questions they put was painful. Widder Tomkins started, arrangin' the sitting-room furniture accordin' to 'er taste, till I pushed 'er' out. I don't know which one you'll marry, Mr. Gladwin, but you'll 'ave my 'earty sympathy 'oo-ever it is."

"Get out, it was only a bit of a joke of mine. They can't think I'm going to marry 'em."

"I don't know what they can do, or what they won't dd; but I'm not going to stop in a house with such goings on, so if you'll provide yourself within a week, Mr. Gladwin, I'll be obliged. And I'll say 'good-night' now, as I'm to wash up these dirty things in the scullery."

MR. GLADWIN sat by the fire and groaned. Life would become in-tolerable if he were perpetually harassed by old maids and widows. He thought of Mrs. Dobson pushing Mrs. Tomkins out of the house, and felt that such a.protector would be a blessing to him.

"Mrs: Dobson," he shouted, "would you stay on for another shilling a week?"

"No, Mr. Gladwin." came the ready reply.

Mr. Gladwin groaned as he lit his pipe. He, thought of the widows ami old maids. Then lie thought of Mrs. Dobson's rabbit-pie.

A sudden impulse came to him.

"Mrs. Dobson," he shouted to the scullery.

"Yes, sir."

"If I drives over for a special licence tomorrer, an' marries you as soon as can be, will you stay?"

"Yes, Samuel," said a softened voice from the scullery.

And so it came about that Mr. Gladwin married the only elderly husbandless lady in Buckeridge that he had not sent a Valentine to.

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21: The Burglar's Story

W. S. Gilbert

William Schwenk Gilbert, 1836-1911

Holly Leaves 8 Dec 1883

Collected in: *Foggerty's Fairy and Other Tales*, 1890

Yes, the W. S. Gilbert of Gilbert and Sullivan fame.

WHEN I BECAME eighteen years of age, my father, a distinguished begging-letter impostor, said to me, "Reginald, I think it is time that you began to think about choosing a profession."

These were ominous words. Since I left Eton, nearly a year before, I had spent my time very pleasantly, and very idly, and I was sorry to see my long holiday drawing to a close. My father had hoped to have sent me to Cambridge (Cambridge was a tradition in our family), but business had been very depressed of late, and a sentence of six months' hard labour had considerably straitened my poor father's resources.

It was necessary— highly necessary— that I should choose a calling. With a sigh of resignation, I admitted as much.

"If you like," said my father, "I will take you in hand, and teach you my profession, and, in a few years perhaps, I may take you into partnership; but, to be candid with you, I doubt whether it is a satisfactory calling for an athletic young fellow like you."

"I don't seem to care about it, particularly," said I.

"I'm glad to hear it," said my father; " it's a poor calling for a young man of spirit. Besides, you have to grow grey in the service before people will listen to you. It's all very well as a refuge in old age; but a young fellow is likely to make but a poor hand at it. Now, I should like to consult your own tastes on so important a matter as the choice of a profession. What do you say? The Army?"

"No, I didn't care for the army."

"Forgery? The Bar? Cornish Wrecking?"

"Father," said I, "I should like to be a forger, but I write such an infernal hand."

"A regular Eton hand," said he. "Not plastic enough for forgery; but you could have a writing-master."

"It's as much as I can do to forge my own name. I don't believe I should ever be able to forge anybody else's."

"Anybody's else, you should say, not 'anybody else's.' It's a dreadful barbarism. Eton English."

"No," said I, " I should never make a fortune at it. As to wrecking— why you know how sea-sick I am."

"You might get over that. Besides, you would deal with wrecks ashore, not wrecks at sea."

"Most of it done in small boats, I'm told. A deal of small boat work. No, I won't be a wrecker. I think I should like to be a burglar."

"Yes," said my father, considering the subject. "Yes, it's a fine manly profession; but it's dangerous, it's highly dangerous."

"Just dangerous enough to be exciting, no more."

"Well," said my father, " if you've a distinct taste for burglary I'll see what can be done."

My dear father was always prompt with pen and ink. That evening he wrote to his old friend Ferdinand Stoneleigh, a burglar of the very highest professional standing, and in a week I was duly and formally articled to him, with a view to ultimate partnership.

I had to work hard under Mr. Stoneleigh.

"Burglary is a jealous mistress," said he. "She will tolerate no rivals. She exacts the undivided devotion of her worshippers."

And so I found it. Every morning at ten o'clock I had to present myself at Stoneleigh's chambers in New Square, Lincoln's Inn, and until twelve I assisted his clerk with the correspondence. At twelve I had to go out prospecting with Stoneleigh, and from two to four I had to devote to finding out all particulars necessary to a scientific burglar in any given house. At first I did this merely for practice, and with no view to an actual attempt. He would tell me off to a house of which he knew all the particulars, and order me to ascertain all about the house and its inmates— their coming and going, the number of their servants, whether any of them were men, and, if so, whether they slept on the basement or not, and other details necessary to be known before a burglary could be safely attempted. Then he would compare my information with his own facts, and compliment or blame me, as I might deserve. He was a strict master, but always kind, just, and courteous, as became a highly polished gentleman of the old school. He was one of the last men who habitually wore hessians.

After a year's probation, I accompanied him on several expeditions, and had the happiness to believe that I was of some little use to him. I shot him eventually in the stomach, mistaking him for the master of a house into which we were breaking (I had mislaid my dark lantern), and he died on the grand piano. His dying wish was that his compliments might be conveyed to me. I now set up on my own account, and engaged his poor old clerk, who nearly broke his heart at his late master's funeral. Stoneleigh left no family. His money— about £12,000, invested for the most part in American railways— he left to the Society for Providing More Bishops; and his ledgers, daybooks, memoranda, and papers generally he bequeathed to me.

As the chambers required furnishing, I lost no time in commencing my professional duties. I looked through his books for a suitable house to begin upon, and found the following attractive entry: —

Thurloe Square.— No. 102.
House.— Medium.
Occupant.— John Davis, bachelor.
Occupation.— Designer of Dados.
Age.— 86.
Physical Peculiarities.— Very feeble; eccentric; drinks; Evangelical; snores.
Servants.— Two housemaids, one cook.
Sex.— All female.
Particulars of Servants.— Pretty housemaid called Rachel; Jewess; open to attentions. Goes out for beer at 9 p.m.; snores. Ugly housemaid, called Bella; Presbyterian. Open to attentions; snores. Elderly cook; Primitive Methodist. Open to attentions; snores.
Fastenings.— Chubb's look on street door, chain, and bolts. Bars to all basement windows. Practicable approach from third room, ground floor, which is shuttered and barred, but bar has no catch, and can be raised with table knife.
Valuable Contents of House.— Presentation plate from grateful aesthetes. Gold repeater. Mulready envelope. Two diamond rings. Complete edition of "*Bradshaw*," from 1834 to present time, 588 volumes, bound in limp calf.
General,— Mr. Davis sleeps second floor front; servants on third floor. Davis goes to bed at ten. No one on basement. Swarms with beetles; otherwise excellent house for purpose.

This seemed to me to be a capital house to try singlehanded. 'At twelve o'clock that very night I pocketed two crowbars, a bunch of skeleton keys, a centre-bit, a dark lantern, a box of silent matches, some putty, a lifepreserver, and a knife; and I set off at once for Thurloe Square. I remember that it snowed heavily. There was at least a foot of snow on the ground, and there was more to come. Poor Stoneleigh's particulars were exact in every detail. I got into the third room on the ground floor without any difficulty, and made my way into the dining-room. There was the presentation plate, sure enough— about 800 ounces, as I reckoned. I collected this, and tied it up so that I could carry it without attracting attention.

Just as I had finished, I heard a slight cough behind me. I turned and saw a dear old silver-haired gentleman in a dressing-gown standing in the doorway. The venerable gentleman covered me with a revolver.

My first impulse was to rush at and brain him with my life-preserver.

"Don't move," said he, "or you're a dead man."

A rather silly remark occurred to me to the effect that if I did move it would rather prove that I was a live man, but I dismissed it at once as unsuited to the business character of the interview.

"You're a burglar?" said he.

"I have that honour," said I, making for my pistol-pocket.

"Don't move," said he; "I have often wished to have the pleasure of encountering a burglar, in order to be able to test a favourite theory of mine as to how persons of that class should be dealt with. But you mustn't move."

I replied that I should be happy to assist him, if I could do so consistently with a due regard to my own safety.

"Promise me," said I, "that you will allow me to leave the house unmolested when your experiment is at an end?"

"If you will obey me promptly, you shall be at perfect liberty to leave the house."

"You will neither give me into custody, nor take any steps to pursue me."

"On my honour as a Designer of Dados," said he.

"Good," said I; "good. "

"Stand up," said he, "and stretch out your arms at right angles to your body."

"Suppose I don't?" said I.

"I send a bullet through your left ear," said he.

"But permit me to observe—" said I.

Bang! A ball cut off the lobe of my left ear.

The ear smarted, and I should have liked to attend to it, but under the circumstances I thought it better to comply with the whimsical old gentleman's wishes.

"Very good," said he. "Now do as I tell you, promptly and without a moment's hesitation, or I cut off the lobe of your right ear. Throw me that lifepreserver."

"But—"

"Ah, would you?" said he, cocking the revolver.

The "click" decided me. Besides, the old gentleman's eccentricity amused me, and I was curious to see how far it would carry him. So I tossed my lifepreserver to him. He caught it neatly.

"Now take off your coat and throw it to me."

I took off my coat, and threw it diagonally across the room.

"Now the waistcoat."

I threw the waistcoat to him.

"Boots," said he.

"They are shoes," said I, in some trepidation lest he should take offence when no offence was really intended.

"Shoes then," said he.

I threw my shoes to him.

"Trousers," said he.

"Come, come; I say," exclaimed I.

Bang ! The lobe of the other ear came off. With all his eccentricity the old gentleman was a man of his word. He had the trousers, and with them my revolver, which happened to be in the right-hand pocket.

"Now the rest of your drapery."

I threw him the rest of my drapery. He tied up my clothes in the table-cloth; and, telling me that he wouldn't detain me any longer, made for the door with the bundle under his arm.

"Stop," said I. "What is to become of me?"

"Really, I hardly know," said he.

"You promised me my liberty," said I.

"Certainly," said he. "Don't let me trespass any further on your time. You will find the street door open; or, if from force of habit you prefer the window, you will have no difficulty in clearing the area railings."

"But I can't go like this! Won't you give me something to put on?"

"No," said he, "nothing at all. Good night."

The quaint old man left the room with my bundle. I went after him, but I found that he had locked an inner door that led up stairs. The position was really a difficult one to deal with. I couldn't possibly go into the street as I was, and if I remained I should certainly be given into custody in the morning. For some time I looked in vain for something to cover myself with. The hats and great coats were no doubt in the inner hall, at all events they were not accessible under the circumstances. There was a carpet on the floor, but it was fitted to the recesses of the room, and, moreover, a heavy sideboard stood upon it.

"However, there were twelve chairs in the room, and it was with no little pleasure I found on the back of each an antimacassar. Twelve antimacassars would go a long way towards covering me, and that was something.

I did my best with the antimacassars, but on reflection I came to the conclusion that they would not help me very much. They certainly covered me, but a gentleman walking through South Kensington at 3 a.m. dressed in nothing whatever but antimacassars, with the snow two feet deep on the ground, would be sure to attract attention. I might pretend that I was doing it for a wager, but who would believe me ?

I grew very cold.

I looked out of window, and presently saw the bulls-eye of a policeman who was wearily plodding through the snow. I felt that my only course was to surrender to him.

"Policeman," said I, from the window, " one word."

"Anything wrong, sir?" said he.

"I have been committing a burglary in this house, and shall feel deeply obliged to you if you will kindly take me into custody."

"Nonsense, sir," said he; "you'd better go to bed."

"There is nothing I should like better, but I live in Lincoln's Inn, and I have nothing on but antimacassars; I am almost frozen. Pray take me into custody."

"The street door's open," said he.

"Yes," said I. "Come in."

He came in. I explained the circumstances to him, and with great difficulty I convinced him that I was in earnest. The good fellow put his own great coat over me, and lent me his own handcuffs. In ten minutes I was thawing myself in Walton Street police station. In ten days I was convicted at the Old Bailey. In ten years I returned from penal servitude.

I found that poor Mr. Davis had gone to his long home in Brompton Cemetery.

For many years I never passed his house without a shudder at the terrible hours I spent in it as his guest. I have often tried to forget the incident I have been relating, and for a long time I tried in vain. Perseverance, however, met with its reward. I continued to try. Gradually one detail after another slipped from memory, and one lovely evening last May I found, to my intense delight, that I had absolutely forgotten all about it.

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22: Rival Musicians

Val Jameson

Western Mail (Perth) 29 Feb 1908

All I can discover with certainty is that Valerie Jameson married in Kalgoorlie, Western Australia, in 1898, during the Gold Rush period; she and her husband sold their gold mine, Jameson's Reward, c. 1900, and left for the Eastern states. She wrote a long stream of short, cheerful yarns set in the Kalgoorlie gold rush days, published from c. 1901 to the early 1920s, obviously the happiest days of her life; and aso writing Australian folk songs known as the Magpie Ballads. She was last reported in 1938, when a short item in Smith's Weekly *noted that she was "in poor health".*

BRIGGS was absurdly proud of his phonograph— an antiquated Edison and it's repertoire of scratched records. In a camp of music-lovers, isolated in the monotonous bush, any instrument of sweet sounds, however imperfect, is a welcome acquisition. We accorded the consequential proprietor his meed of gratitude and applause on favoured occasions of entertainment. For Briggs was a cross-grained savage at times and when in a grumpy mood deprived us of musical consolation. His conceit in the achievements of his box of voices was amusing. No hand was permitted to touch the mechanism of his treasure, A feeler was usually extended by one of the group foregathered at dusk in the circle of light by the camp-fire. "How's the orchestra, Tom?"

All eyes would turn to the proprietor's face spelling permission or rejection on its wizened index. Tom was given to lengthy reflection before committing himself by speech. "Give the durn orchestra a chance!" was as absolute as the decree of Caesar.

If in gracious mood, he would walk leisurely to his camp, returning with the box of voices tucked lovingly under his arm. Then, with the important air of a concert-promoter, he would cast a careless glance at the audience, "What's yer choice?"

The limited scratched records were familiar to all.

"Tosti's Good-bye," "Overchoor," "Madame Seraphine," "Pussy-cat Quartette," clamoured the company.

"'Ere, 'old on! 'old on!" checked the proprietor, "You can't git the lot in a chunk! Give us er show! We'll commence our programme wid a overchoor by Madame Melba!"

Briggs invariably mixed his performers, but no one complained, as the stage manager in the funnel usually corrected him. Puffing his black-stemmed pipeo and shooting occasional jets of saliva into the heart of the fire, with the instrument between his knees, Briggs affected modest embarrassment at the concluding applause.

Tosti's "Good-bye"was a general favourite, though the singer's top-notes were scratched and staggered miserably. Generous allowance for defective notes was accorded to Briggs, who assured the company "it 'ud cost 'em a guinea a seat to hear the lady on a concert-platform." Criticism, humorous or hostile, was carefully suppressed, for the promoter claimed the privilege of closing the performance at any moment.

"Give 'er a lozenge, Tommy," blurted by a thoughtless new-chum, banished our concert for a whole week, and incidentally fractured the new-chum's front teeth, as Pat Doolan had petitioned the "Dear Little Shamrock,'' and it was very hard to see this gem of irish melody condemned to indefinite oblivion by an egregrious new-chum.

Donald Stewart, a long-legged Highlander, introduced a new class of music that would have been decidedly unpopular but for the smarts of long suffering endured on Briggs's account. For the fun of "narking" vainglorious Briggs we each developed a passion for Scotch airs and a raw-boned inner.

Briggs and Iiis musical-box were alotted a back seat, as we implored Donald to get into his kilties and parade around the camp-fire to the accompaniment of "Bonnie Dundee" and other Scotch airs. At first the Edison performer feigned indifference as cleverly as we feigned to enjoy the weird and plaintive bleating of the pipes, but his chronic irritability soon came to the surface, and the first squeal of the bagpipes sent him fleeing to the bush to escape "that divil an' his pig-whustle!"

When this entertainment palled we missed the old favourite, and requested Donald to shelve his "Bonnie Dundee" for a season in favour of "the orchestra." This was a musical triumph for Briggs.

Donald affected a magnanimous spirit, smote his palms approvingly and cried "Thet's guid" or "Splendid" after each item. He laughed uproariously at the comic songs, and encored each performance enthusiastically. Such generous retaliation on the part of a rival would melt a stonier heart than Briggs'. He proposed to share the honours of the evening, and asked for "Bonnie Dundee." Winks were exchanged across the camp-fire. Pat Doolan said, "We'll wet its head," meaning th a reconciliation, and collected contributions in his cap. The programme was adjourned till a sackful of clinking wherewithals arrived from the hotel.

Anxious to eclipse his rival in generosity, Briggs applauded Donald's efforts vociferously, but the contortions of his whimsical face and the squirming of his whole body during the performance proved his appreciation a polite deceit. During the encore Briggs, pretending to replenish his pipe, plugged his ears with shredded tobacco.

After an interval devoted to the clinkers someone requested a duet. The Highlander obligingly offered to pipe "Aunie Laurie" to the same tune by the

Edison record. The wheeze and the blare kissed the air together with disastrous effect. Briggs exploded.

"Put 'em down! Put 'em down! Yer windbag's out of choon!"

But Donald's cheeks swelled with increased energy; he knew his native air better than a caged voice.

"If ye don't throttle that pig-whistle I'll make yez!" stormed Briggs.

The Highlander's eye was steadily fixed on"his infuriated rival, but his lips were glued to the piper. The men on either side of Briggs seized and held him dowu till the awful discord ended. But there was red anarchy in camp when mischievous Pat requested the Highlander to play "Little Shamrock." The Edison musician danced with rage and shook his fists alternately at Pat and the piper.

"Ye're no Irishman, Pat Doolan, worrthy o' th' name to plant the swate little shamrock in a pig-whistle. If ye murrdher that shamrock, Shanko, I'll land ye wan on the beak!"

"Professional jealousy!" explained Pat. "It's the sign av a grreat artist! Kape yure seat, Briggs. Th' Caledonian hould's th' flure!"

With the assistance of five strong men, Briggs kept his seat, and the wail of the pipes proceeded. At the finish he grabbed his beloved Edison and fled. Far into the night we could hear him taking consolation from his little brass funnel.

Next day the Highlander was missing. We searched his camp. The bag-pipes had vanished. Other property remained. Suspecting foul play, we avoided Briggs and searched all the old abandoned shafts in the neighbourhood. We journeyed for miles through the bush expecting gruesome revelations. In consultation it was agreed that Briggs wore a guilty look since the disappearance. Creepy, sensations beset us at night time, and we camped in a batch. Briggs consoled himself in isolation with his internal music.

Baffled in our search we were driven by anxiety and suspense to report the disappearance at the nearest police-station. News arrived next day that the missing piper was engaged carting slimes on the "Try an' Win" battery, three miles distant. The thrill of an expected sensation was over. The victim of an imaginary tragedy fell in a trice to the level of commonplace humanity. lt was decided to pursue him and demand the reason for his conduct. To desert his employer and mates and forfeit half-a-week's pay without a word of explanation was criminal, to say the least of it.

But Brigg! Our hearts rebuked us for our vile suspicious. We were seized with a simultaneous desire to test the weight of his hand. He blinked at us suspiciously, and couldn't understand. We dared not explain, but kept on shaking hands turn about.

"What's the game?" said Briggs at last, and commenced cutting tobacco to give his hand a rest.

"How's the orchestra?" faltered Pat.

"Middlin', jus' middlin'!" says Briggs. "Annie Laurie's scratched another note."

"We'd rather have scratches than squeals," asserted Pat, and we backed him up with an effective "Rather!"

Briggs lost his features in an expansive grin.

When Donald was interviewed be confessed: "It was that box o' horrors what gied me the nightmaire. Wee red demons danced on ma chist, so I oop wi' my pipes an' cam' awa to MacGrigger! MacGrigger's my countrymon, ye ken!"

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23: The Key to Grief

Robert W. Chambers

1865-1933

In: *The Mystery of Choice*, Appleton, 1897

The wild hawk to the wind-swept sky
The deer to the wholesome wold,
And the heart of a man to the heart of a maid,
As it was in the days of old.
—Kipling

THEY WERE doing their work very badly. They got the rope around his neck, and tied his wrists with moose-bush withes, but again he fell, sprawling, turning, twisting over the leaves, tearing up everything around him like a trapped panther.

He got the rope away from them; he clung to it with bleeding fists; he set his white teeth in it, until the jute strands relaxed, unravelled, and snapped, gnawed through by his white teeth.

Twice Tully struck him with a gum hook. The dull blows fell on flesh rigid as stone.

Panting, foul with forest mould and rotten leaves, hands and face smeared with blood, he sat up on the ground, glaring at the circle of men around him.

"Shoot him!" gasped Tully, dashing the sweat from his bronzed brow; and Bates, breathing heavily, sat down on a log and dragged a revolver from his rear pocket. The man on the ground watched him; there was froth in the corners of his mouth.

"Git back!" whispered Bates, but his voice and hand trembled. "Kent," he stammered, "won't ye hang?"

The man on the ground glared.

"Ye've got to die, Kent," he urged; "they all say so. Ask Lefty Sawyer; ask Dyce; ask Carrots.— He's got to swing fur it— ain't he, Tully?— Kent, fur God's sake, swing fur these here gents!"

The man on the ground panted; his bright eyes never moved.

After a moment Tully sprang on him again. There was a flurry of leaves, a crackle, a gasp and a grunt, then the thumping and thrashing of two bodies writhing in the brush. Dyce and Carrots jumped on the prostrate men. Lefty Sawyer caught the rope again, but the jute strands gave way and he stumbled. Tully began to scream, "He's chokin' me!" Dyce staggered out into the open, moaning over a broken wrist.

"Shoot!" shouted Lefty Sawyer, and dragged Tully aside. "Shoot, Jim Bates! Shoot straight, b' God!"

"Git back!" gasped Bates, rising from the fallen log.

The crowd parted right and left; a quick report rang out— another— another. Then from the whirl of smoke a tall form staggered, dealing blows— blows that sounded sharp as the crack of a whip.

"He's off! Shoot straight!" they cried.

There was a gallop of heavy boots in the woods. Bates, faint and dazed, turned his head.

"Shoot!" shrieked Tully.

But Bates was sick; his smoking revolver fell to the ground; his white face and pale eyes contracted. It lasted only a moment; he started after the others, plunging, wallowing through thickets of osier and hemlock underbrush.

Far ahead he heard Kent crashing on like a young moose in November, and he knew he was making for the shore. The others knew too. Already the grey gleam of the sea cut a straight line along the forest edge; already the soft clash of the surf on the rocks broke faintly through the forest silence.

"He's got a canoe there!" bawled Tully. "He'll be into it!"

And he was into it, kneeling in the bow, driving his paddle to the handle. The rising sun gleamed like red lightning on the flashing blade; the canoe shot to the crest of a wave, hung, bows dripping in the wind, dropped into the depths, glided, tipped, rolled, shot up again, staggered, and plunged on.

Tully ran straight out into the cove surf; the water broke against his chest, bare and wet with sweat. Bates sat down on a worn black rock and watched the canoe listlessly.

The canoe dwindled to a speck of grey and silver; and when Carrots, who had run back to the gum camp for a rifle, returned, the speck on the water might have been easier to hit than a loon's head at twilight. So Carrots, being thrifty by nature, fired once, and was satisfied to save the other cartridges. The canoe was still visible, making for the open sea. Somewhere beyond the horizon lay the keys, a string of rocks bare as skulls, black and slimy where the sea cut their base, white on the crests with the excrement of sea birds.

"He's makin' fur the Key to Grief!" whispered Bates to Dyce.

Dyce, moaning, and nursing his broken wrist, turned a sick face out to sea.

The last rock seaward was the Key to Grief, a splintered pinnacle polished by the sea. From the Key to Grief, seaward a day's paddle, if a man dared, lay the long wooded island in the ocean known as Grief on the charts of the bleak coast.

In the history of the coast, two men had made the voyage to the Key to Grief, and from there to the island. One of these was a rum-crazed pelt hunter, who lived to come back; the other was a college youth; they found his battered canoe at sea, and a day later his battered body was flung up in the cove.

So, when Bates whispered to Dyce, and when Dyce called to the others, they knew that the end was not far off for Kent and his canoe; and they turned away

into the forest, sullen, but satisfied that Kent would get his dues when the devil got his.

Lefty spoke vaguely of the wages of sin. Carrots, with an eye to thrift, suggested a plan for an equitable division of Kent's property.

When they reached the gum camp they piled Kent's personal effects on a blanket.

Carrots took the inventory: a revolver, two gum hooks, a fur cap, a nickel-plated watch, a pipe, a pack of new cards, a gum sack, forty pounds of spruce gum, and a frying pan.

Carrots shuffled the cards, picked out the joker, and flipped it pensively into the fire. Then he dealt cold decks all around.

When the goods and chattels of their late companion had been divided by chance— for there was no chance to cheat— somebody remembered Tully.

"He's down there on the coast, starin' after the canoe," said Bates huskily.

He rose and walked toward a heap on the ground covered by a blanket. He started to lift the blanket, hesitated, and finally turned away. Under the blanket lay Tully's brother, shot the night before by Kent.

"Guess we'd better wait till Tully comes," said Carrots uneasily. Bates and Kent had been campmates. An hour later Tully walked into camp.

He spoke to no one that day. In the morning Bates found him down on the coast digging, and said: "Hello, Tully! Guess we ain't much hell on lynchin'!"

"Naw," said Tully. "Git a spade."

"Goin' to plant him there?"

"Yep."

"Where he kin hear them waves?"

"Yep."

"Purty spot."

"Yep."

"Which way will he face?"

"Where he kin watch fur that damned canoe!" cried Tully fiercely.

"He— he can't see," ventured Bates uneasily. "He's dead, ain't he?"

"He'll heave up that there sand when the canoe comes back! An' it's a-comin'! An' Bud Kent'll be in it, dead or alive! Git a spade!"

The pale light of superstition flickered in Bates's eyes. He hesitated.

"The— the dead can't see," he began; "kin they?"

Tully turned a distorted face toward him.

"Yer lie!" he roared. "My brother kin see, dead or livin'! An' he'll see the hangin' of Bud Kent! An' he'll git up outer the grave fur to see it, Bill Bates! I'm tellin' ye! I'm tellin' ye! Deep as I'll plant him, he'll heave that there sand and call to me, when the canoe comes in! I'll hear him; I'll be here! An' we'll live to see the hangin' of Bud Kent!"

About sundown they planted Tully's brother, face to the sea.

ii

ON THE KEY TO GRIEF the green waves rub all day. White at the summit, black at the base, the shafted rocks rear splintered pinnacles, slanting like channel buoys. On the polished pillars sea birds brood— white-winged, bright-eyed sea birds, that nestle and preen and flap and clatter their orange-coloured beaks when the sifted spray drives and drifts across the reef.

As the sun rose, painting crimson streaks criss-cross over the waters, the sea birds sidled together, huddling row on row, steeped in downy drowse.

Where the sun of noon burnished the sea, an opal wave washed, listless, noiseless; a sea bird stretched one listless wing.

And into the silence of the waters a canoe glided, bronzed by the sunlight, jeweled by the salt drops stringing from prow to thwart, seaweed a-trail in the diamond-flashing wake, and in the bow a man dripping with sweat.

Up rose the gulls, sweeping in circles, turning, turning over rock and sea, and their clamour filled the sky, starting little rippling echoes among the rocks.

The canoe grated on a shelf of ebony; the seaweed rocked and washed; the little sea crabs sheered sideways, down, down into limpid depths of greenest shadows. Such was the coming of Bud Kent to the Key to Grief.

He drew the canoe halfway up the shelf of rock and sat down, breathing heavily, one brown arm across the bow. For an hour he sat there. The sweat dried under his eyes. The sea birds came back, filling the air with soft querulous notes.

There was a livid mark around his neck, a red, raw circle. The salt wind stung it; the sun burned it into his flesh like a collar of red-hot steel. He touched it at times; once he washed it with cold salt water.

Far in the north a curtain of mist hung on the sea, dense, motionless as the fog on the Grand Banks. He never moved his eyes from it; he knew what it was. Behind it lay the Island of Grief.

All the year round the Island of Grief is hidden by the banks of mist, ramparts of dead white fog encircling it on every side. Ships give it wide berth. Some speak of warm springs on the island whose waters flow far out to sea, rising in steam eternally.

The pelt hunter had come back with tales of forests and deer and flowers everywhere; but he had been drinking much, and much was forgiven him.

The body of the college youth tossed up in the cove on the mainland was battered out of recognition, but some said, when found, one hand clutched a crimson blossom half wilted, but broad as a sap pan.

So Kent lay motionless beside his canoe, burned with thirst, every nerve vibrating, thinking of all these things. It was not fear that whitened the firm flesh under the tan; it was the fear of fear. He must not think— he must throttle dread; his eyes must never falter, his head never turn from that wall of mist across the sea. With set teeth he crushed back terror; with glittering eyes he looked into the hollow eyes of fright. And so he conquered fear.

He rose. The sea birds whirled up into the sky, pitching, tossing, screaming, till the sharp flapping of their pinions set the snapping echoes flying among the rocks.

Under the canoe's sharp prow the kelp bobbed and dipped and parted; the sunlit waves ran out ahead, glittering, dancing. Splash! splash! bow and stern! And now he knelt again, and the polished paddle swung and dipped, and swept and swung and dipped again.

Far behind, the clamour of the sea birds lingered in his ears, till the mellow dip of the paddle drowned all sound and the sea was a sea of silence.

No wind came to cool the hot sweat on cheek and breast. The sun blazed a path of flame before him, and he followed out into the waste of waters. The still ocean divided under the bows and rippled innocently away on either side, tinkling, foaming, sparkling like the current in a woodland brook. He looked around at the world of flattened water, and the fear of fear rose up and gripped his throat again. Then he lowered his head, like a tortured bull, and shook the fear of fear from his throat, and drove the paddle into the sea as a butcher stabs, to the hilt.

So at last he came to the wall of mist. It was thin at first, thin and cool, but it thickened and grew warmer, and the fear of fear dragged at his head, but he would not look behind.

Into the fog the canoe shot; the grey water ran by, high as the gunwales, oily, silent. Shapes flickered across the bows, pillars of mist that rode the waters, robed in films of tattered shadows. Gigantic forms towered to dizzy heights above him, shaking out shredded shrouds of cloud. The vast draperies of the fog swayed and hung and trembled as he brushed them; the white twilight deepened to a sombre gloom. And now it grew thinner; the fog became a mist, and the mist a haze, and the haze floated away and vanished into the blue of the heavens.

All around lay a sea of pearl and sapphire, lapping, lapping on a silver shoal.

So he came to the Island of Grief.

iii

ON THE SILVER SHOAL the waves washed and washed, breaking like crushed opals where the sands sang with the humming froth.

Troops of little shore birds, wading on the shoal, tossed their sun-tipped wings and scuttled inland, where, dappled with shadow from the fringing forest, the white beach of the island stretched.

The water all around was shallow, limpid as crystal, and he saw the ribbed sand shining on the bottom, where purple seaweed floated, and delicate sea creatures darted and swarmed and scattered again at the dip of his paddle.

Like velvet rubbed on velvet the canoe brushed across the sand. He staggered to his feet, stumbled out, dragged the canoe high up under the trees, turned it bottom upward, and sank beside it, face downward in the sand. Sleep came to drive away the fear of fear, but hunger, thirst, and fever fought with sleep, and he dreamed— dreamed of a rope that sawed his neck, of the fight in the woods, and the shots. He dreamed, too, of the camp, of his forty pounds of spruce gum, of Tully, and of Bates. He dreamed of the fire and the smoke-scorched kettle, of the foul odor of musty bedding, of the greasy cards, and of his own new pack, hoarded for weeks to please the others. All this he dreamed, lying there face downward in the sand; but he did not dream of the face of the dead.

The shadows of the leaves moved on his blonde head, crisp with clipped curls. A butterfly flitted around him, alighting now on his legs, now on the back of his bronzed hands. All the afternoon the bees hung droning among the wildwood blossoms; the leaves above scarcely rustled; the shore birds brooded along the water's edge; the thin tide, sleeping on the sand, mirrored the sky.

Twilight paled the zenith; a breeze moved in the deeper woods; a star glimmered, went out, glimmered again, faded, and glimmered.

Night came. A moth darted to and fro under the trees; a beetle hummed around a heap of seaweed and fell scrambling in the sand. Somewhere among the trees a sound had become distinct, the song of a little brook, melodious, interminable. He heard it in his dream; it threaded all his dreams like a needle of silver, and like a needle it pricked him— pricked his dry throat and cracked lips. It could not awake him; the cool night swathed him head and foot.

Toward dawn a bird woke up and piped. Other birds stirred, restless, half awakened; a gull spread a cramped wing on the shore, preened its feathers, scratched its tufted neck, and took two drowsy steps toward the sea.

The sea breeze stirred out behind the mist bank; it raised the feathers on the sleeping gulls; it set the leaves whispering. A twig snapped, broke off, and fell. Kent stirred, sighed, trembled, and awoke.

The first thing he heard was the song of the brook, and he stumbled straight into the woods. There it lay, a thin, deep stream in the grey morning light, and he stretched himself beside it and laid his cheek in it. A bird drank in the pool, too— a little fluffy bird, bright-eyed and fearless.

His knees were firmer when at last he rose, heedless of the drops that beaded lips and chin. With his knife he dug and scraped at some white roots that hung half meshed in the bank of the brook, and when he had cleaned them in the pool he ate them.

The sun stained the sky when he went down to the canoe, but the eternal curtain of fog, far out at sea, hid it as yet from sight.

He lifted the canoe, bottom upwards, to his head, and, paddle and pole in either hand, carried it into the forest.

After he had set it down he stood a moment, opening and shutting his knife. Then he looked up into the trees. There were birds there, if he could get at them. He looked at the brook. There were the prints of his fingers in the sand; there, too, was the print of something else— a deer's pointed hoof.

He had nothing but his knife. He opened it again and looked at it.

That day he dug for clams and ate them raw. He waded out into the shallows, too, and jabbed at fish with his setting pole, but hit nothing except a yellow crab.

Fire was what he wanted. He hacked and chipped at flinty-looking pebbles, and scraped tinder from a stick of sun-dried driftwood. His knuckles bled, but no fire came.

That night he heard deer in the woods, and could not sleep for thinking, until the dawn came up behind the wall of mist, and he rose with it to drink his fill at the brook and tear raw clams with his white teeth. Again he fought for fire, craving it as he had never craved water, but his knuckles bled, and the knife scraped on the flint in vain.

His mind, perhaps, had suffered somewhat. The white beach seemed to rise and fall like a white carpet on a gusty hearth. The birds, too, that ran along the sand, seemed big and juicy, like partridges; and he chased them, hurling shells and bits of driftwood at them till he could scarcely keep his feet for the rising, plunging beach— or carpet, whichever it was. That night the deer aroused him at intervals. He heard them splashing and grunting and crackling along the brook. Once he arose and stole after them, knife in hand, till a false step into the brook awoke him to his folly, and he felt his way back to the canoe, trembling.

Morning came, and again he drank at the brook, lying on the sand where countless heart-shaped hoofs had passed leaving clean imprints; and again he ripped the raw clams from their shells and swallowed them, whimpering.

All day long the white beach rose and fell and heaved and flattened under his bright dry eyes. He chased the shore birds at times, till the unsteady beach tripped him up and he fell full length in the sand. Then he would rise moaning, and creep into the shadow of the wood, and watch the little songbirds in the branches, moaning, always moaning.

His hands, sticky with blood, hacked steel and flint together, but so feebly that now even the cold sparks no longer came.

He began to fear the advancing night; he dreaded to hear the big warm deer among the thickets. Fear clutched him suddenly, and he lowered his head and set his teeth and shook fear from his throat again.

Then he started aimlessly into the woods, crowding past bushes, scraping trees, treading on moss and twig and mouldy stump, his bruised hands swinging, always swinging.

The sun set in the mist as he came out of the woods on to another beach— a warm, soft beach, crimsoned by the glow in the evening clouds.

And on the sand at his feet lay a young girl asleep, swathed in the silken garment of her own black hair, round limbed, brown, smooth as the bloom on the tawny beach.

A gull flapped overhead, screaming. Her eyes, deeper than night, unclosed. Then her lips parted in a cry, soft with sleep, "Ihó!"

She rose, rubbing her velvet eyes. "Ihó!" she cried in wonder; "Inâh!"

The gilded sand settled around her little feet. Her cheeks crimsoned.

"E-hó! E-hó!" she whispered, and hid her face in her hair.

iv

THE BRIDGE OF THE STARS spans the sky seas; the sun and the moon are the travellers who pass over it. This was also known in the lodges of the Isantee, hundreds of years ago. Chaské told it to Hârpam, and when Hârpam knew he told it to Hapéda; and so the knowledge spread to Hârka, and from Winona to Wehârka, up and down, across and ever across, woof and web, until it came to the Island of Grief. And how? God knows!

Wehârka, prattling in the tules, may have told Ne-kâ; and Ne-kâ, high in the November clouds, may have told Kay-óshk, who told it to Shinge-bis, who told it to Skeé-skah, who told it to Sé-só-Kah.

Ihó! Inâh! Behold the wonder of it! And this is the fate of all knowledge that comes to the Island of Grief.

AS the red glow died in the sky, and the sand swam in shadows, the girl parted the silken curtains of her hair and looked at him.

"Ehó!" she whispered again in soft delight.

For now it was plain to her that he was the sun! He had crossed the bridge of stars in the blue twilight; he had come!

"E-tó!"

She stepped nearer, shivering, faint with the ecstasy of this holy miracle wrought before her.

He was the Sun! His blood streaked the sky at dawn; his blood stained the clouds at even. In his eyes the blue of the sky still lingered, smothering two blue stars; and his body was as white as the breast of the Moon.

She opened both arms, hands timidly stretched, palm upward. Her face was raised to his, her eyes slowly closed; the deep-fringed lids trembled.

Like a young priestess she stood, motionless save for the sudden quiver of a limb, a quick pulse-flutter in the rounded throat. And so she worshipped, naked and unashamed, even after he, reeling, fell heavily forward on his face; even when the evening breeze stealing over the sands stirred the hair on his head, as winds stir the fur of a dead animal in the dust.

WHEN the morning sun peered over the wall of mist, and she saw it was the sun, and she saw him, flung on the sand at her feet, then she knew that he was a man, only a man, pallid as death and smeared with blood.

And yet— miracle of miracles!— the divine wonder in her eyes deepened, and her body seemed to swoon, and fall a-trembling, and swoon again.

For, although it was but a man who lay at her feet, it had been easier for her to look upon a god.

He dreamed that he breathed fire— fire, that he craved as he had never craved water. Mad with delirium, he knelt before the flames, rubbing his torn hands, washing them in the crimson-scented flames. He had water, too, cool scented water, that sprayed his burning flesh, that washed in his eyes, his hair, his throat. After that came hunger, a fierce rending agony, that scorched and clutched and tore at his entrails; but that, too, died away, and he dreamed that he had eaten and all his flesh was warm. Then he dreamed that he slept; and when he slept he dreamed no more.

One day he awoke and found her stretched beside him, soft palms tightly closed, smiling, asleep.

v

NOW THE DAYS began to run more swiftly than the tide along the tawny beach; and the nights, star-dusted and blue, came and vanished and returned, only to exhale at dawn like perfume from a violet.

They counted hours as they counted the golden bubbles, winking with a million eyes along the foam-flecked shore; and the hours ended, and began, and glimmered, iridescent, and ended as bubbles end in a tiny rainbow haze.

There was still fire in the world; it flashed up at her touch and where she chose. A bow strung with the silk of her own hair, an arrow winged like a sea bird and tipped with shell, a line from the silver tendon of a deer, a hook of

polished bone— these were the mysteries he learned, and learned them laughing, her silken head bent close to his.

The first night that the bow was wrought and the glossy string attuned, she stole into the moonlit forest to the brook; and there they stood, whispering, listening, and whispering, though neither understood the voice they loved.

In the deeper woods, Kaug, the porcupine, scraped and snuffed. They heard Wabóse, the rabbit, pit-a-pat, pit-a-pat, loping across dead leaves in the moonlight. Skeé-skah, the wood-duck, sailed past, noiseless, gorgeous as a floating blossom.

Out on the ocean's placid silver, Shinge-bis, the diver, shook the scented silence with his idle laughter, till Kay-óshk, the grey gull, stirred in his slumber. There came a sudden ripple in the stream, a mellow splash, a soft sound on the sand.

"Ihó! Behold!"

"I see nothing."

The beloved voice was only a wordless melody to her.

"Ihó! Ta-hinca, the red deer! E-hó! The buck will follow!"

"Ta-hinca," he repeated, notching the arrow.

"E-tó! Ta-mdóka!"

So he drew the arrow to the head, and the grey gull feathers brushed his ear, and the darkness hummed with the harmony of the singing string.

Thus died Ta-mdóka, the buck deer of seven prongs.

VI

As an apple tossed spinning into the air, so spun the world above the hand that tossed it into space.

And one day in early spring, Sé-só-Kah, the robin, awoke at dawn, and saw a girl at the foot of the blossoming tree holding a babe cradled in the silken sheets of her hair.

At its feeble cry, Kaug, the porcupine, raised his quilled head. Wabóse, the rabbit, sat still with palpitating sides. Kay-óshk, the grey gull, tiptoed along the beach.

Kent knelt with one bronzed arm around them both.

"Ihó! Inâh!" whispered the girl, and held the babe up in the rosy flames of dawn.

But Kent trembled as he looked, and his eyes filled. On the pale green moss their shadows lay— three shadows. But the shadow of the babe was white as froth.

Because it was the first-born son, they named it Chaské; and the girl sang as she cradled it there in the silken vestments of her hair; all day long in the sunshine she sang:

"Wâ-wa, wâ-wa, wâ-we— yeá;
Kah-wéen, nee-zhéka Ke-diaus-âi,
Ke-gâh nau-wâi, ne-mé-go S'weén,
Ne-bâun, ne-bâun, ne-dâun-is âis.
E-we wâ-wa, wâ-we— yeá;
E-we wâ-wa, wâ-we— yeá."

Out in the calm ocean, Shinge-bis, the diver, listened, preening his satin breast in silence. In the forest, Ta-hinca, the red deer, turned her delicate head to the wind.

That night Kent thought of the dead, for the first time since he had come to the Key of Grief.

"Aké-u! aké-u!" chirped Sé-só-Kah, the robin. But the dead never come again.

"Beloved, sit close to us," whispered the girl, watching his troubled eyes. "Ma-cânte maséca."

But he looked at the babe and its white shadow on the moss, and he only sighed: "Ma-cânte maséca, beloved! Death sits watching us across the sea."

Now for the first time he knew more than the fear of fear; he knew fear. And with fear came grief.

He never before knew that grief lay hidden there in the forest. Now he knew it. Still, that happiness, eternally reborn when two small hands reached up around his neck, when feeble fingers clutched his hand— that happiness that Sé-só-Kah understood, chirping to his brooding mate— that Ta-mdóka knew, licking his dappled fawns— that happiness gave him heart to meet grief calmly, in dreams or in the forest depths, and it helped him to look into the hollow eyes of fear.

He often thought of the camp now; of Bates, his blanket mate; of Dyce, whose wrist he had broken with a blow; of Tully, whose brother he had shot. He even seemed to hear the shot, the sudden report among the hemlocks; again he saw the haze of smoke, he caught a glimpse of a tall form falling through the bushes.

He remembered every minute incident of the trial: Bates's hand laid on his shoulder; Tully, red-bearded and wild-eyed, demanding his death; while Dyce spat and spat and smoked and kicked at the blackened log-ends projecting from the fire. He remembered, too, the verdict, and Tully's terrible laugh; and the new jute rope that they stripped off the market-sealed gum packs.

He thought of these things, sometimes wading out on the shoals, shell-tipped fish spear poised: at such times he would miss his fish. He thought of it sometimes when he knelt by the forest stream listening for Ta-hinca's splash among the cresses: at such moments the feathered shaft whistled far from the mark, and Ta-mdóka stamped and snorted till even the white fisher, stretched

on a rotting log, flattened his whiskers and stole away into the forest's blackest depths.

When the child was a year old, hour for hour notched at sunset and sunrise, it prattled with the birds, and called to Ne-Kâ, the wild goose, who called again to the child from the sky: "Northward! northward, beloved!"

When winter came— there is no frost on the Island of Grief— Ne-Kâ, the wild goose, passing high in the clouds, called: "Southward! southward, beloved!" And the child answered in a soft whisper of an unknown tongue, till the mother shivered, and covered it with her silken hair.

"O beloved!" said the girl, "Chaské calls to all things living— to Kaug, the porcupine, to Wabóse, to Kay-óshk, the grey gull— he calls, and they understand."

Kent bent and looked into her eyes.

"Hush, beloved; it is not *that* I fear."

"Then what, beloved?"

"His shadow. It is white as surf foam. And at night— I— I have seen—"

"Oh, what?"

"The air about him aglow like a pale rose."

"Ma cânté maséca. The earth alone lasts. I speak as one dying— I know, O beloved!"

Her voice died away like a summer wind.

"Beloved!" he cried.

But there before him she was changing; the air grew misty, and her hair wavered like shreds of fog, and her slender form swayed, and faded, and swerved, like the mist above a pond.

In her arms the babe was a figure of mist, rosy, vague as a breath on a mirror.

"The earth alone lasts. Inâh! It is the end, O beloved!"

The words came from the mist— a mist as formless as the ether— a mist that drove in and crowded him, that came from the sea, from the clouds, from the earth at his feet. Faint with terror, he staggered forward calling, "Beloved! And thou, Chaské, O beloved! Aké u! Aké u!"

Far out at sea a rosy star glimmered an instant in the mist and went out.

A sea bird screamed, soaring over the waste of fog-smothered waters. Again he saw the rosy star; it came nearer; its reflection glimmered in the water.

"Chaské!" he cried.

He heard a voice, dull in the choking mist.

"O beloved, I am here!" he called again.

There was a sound on the shoal, a flicker in the fog, the flare of a torch, a face white, livid, terrible— the face of the dead.

He fell upon his knees; he closed his eyes and opened them. Tully stood beside him with a coil of rope.

IHÓ! Behold the end! The earth alone lasts. The sand, the opal wave on the golden beach, the sea of sapphire, the dusted starlight, the wind, and love, shall die. Death also shall die, and lie on the shores of the skies like the bleached skull there on the Key to Grief, polished, empty, with its teeth embedded in the sand.

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24: The House

Katherine Mansfield

Kathleen Mansfield Beauchamp, 1888-1923

Hearth and Home, 28 Nov 1912

RAIN CAME SUDDENLY from a swollen sky and with it a cold, whipping wind blowing in her face. She buttoned her coat collar, thrust her hands into her pockets, and head bent, battled on.

Another day ended! Darkness was pouring into the world like grey fluid into a greyer cup— no amethyst twilight this, no dropping of a chiffon scarf— no trailing of a starbroidered mantle… a sense of smudging over— that was all. Fallen leaves spattered the pavement. Still over wall and house-front the Virginia creeper draggled her tousled tresses. And the cold wind was full of the shuddering breath of winter.

Rain fell faster— a downpour now. She had no umbrella… remembered leaving it behind the office door… so stupid— careless. With a hat, too, that 'spotted[72]'!

And then, looking up, she saw an iron gate swinging idly on its hinges leading to a stone house placarded 'To be Let or Sold', with a wide, empty porch covered in by a creeping plant and a little glass partition. She decided to wait there a moment to see if the weather showed any signs of passing over. Also she was suddenly and unaccountably tired… to sit on that top step just a moment… the wind seemed to take all your breath— and so cold, to eat into your bones.

What a piece of luck! An old basket chair in one corner of the porch! She sat down, felt the bottom of her skirt, soaked already, lifted up her foot and made a little grimace at the burst shoe, half laughing. Her veil was sticking to her face— there was no more abominable sensation— and this parcel was pretty— madeira cake sodging through the brown paper— oh, very pretty indeed.

She stripped off her gloves and sat, hands folded in her lap, looking up at the green blistered door, and a little octagonal lamp hanging over the doorway. Found herself staring at the lamp… now where had she seen it before? What trick of memory… had she seen it? She remembered so well hearing a girl saying 'An octagonal lamp over the doorway— that settles the question!' …

Too tired to remember. Rain seemed to be falling now so violently that it must wear itself out in a moment, she decided, leaning her head against the wall. …

Quick, light steps down the street, the iron gate swung open, a man strode up the gravel walk, up the steps, taking a key from his pocket. A tall thin man in a fur coat, with an immense umbrella hooked over one arm, flowers in his hand, and a long oddly shaped box.

She sat up hastily, the basket chair creaking. What could he be doing there at this hour— a House Agent— a purchaser? And at the sound of the basket chair he wheeled round.

'Good heavens, you ridiculous child,' he said, peering through the gloom. 'Marion, we're too old to play "hide and seek"— no, not too old, darling, but too cold. Or have you lost the last key and Alice has gone stone-deaf, or…' his laughing voice ended in real laughter; he caught hold of her hand, 'Ups-a-daisy, Honey, and I want my tea.' A rose colour sweetened her tired face into bloom.

'I was just waiting,' she faltered, 'such a strange effect in the darkness— and autumn rain and falling leaves in the hollow darkness— you know?'

He put his arm round her, together they crossed the threshold.

The hall was full of firelight with a lovely scent of logs burning. The flames seemed to leap up to meet them— to show them again that fascinating hall— to light the pictures— the pottery— old oak settles— their "Bruges" brass and the standard rose-tree and its green tub.

The grandfather clock struck six.

'We're late,' said the man laconically, taking up a pile of visiting-cards, handing them to her, 'Testifying to your youth and beauty, my child. Do ask Alice to hurry tea; I've got caverns and wet feet and all sorts of horrors. Will you take long to change?'

She was unbuttoning her coat when she suddenly remembered with thankfulness that she had left the 'madeira' cake on the veranda.

'Five minutes,' she said, pushing a bell, then, as the maid appeared, 'tea in the library, please, and we would like some toasted buns.'

'Yes, Madam.'

The maid stepped forward, taking their wet coats. Marion sat down and the girl removed her rubbers. 'I lighted the fire in your bedroom at five o'clock, Madam.'

When she had gone Marion stood up and looked across at the man who stood before the fire kicking a piece of wood into place with his boot, sending up a little shower of sparks.

'Don't do that, darling,' she said, 'be good and go and take off your wet things'— she caught him by the arm— 'this coat's quite damp, and, my child, look at the mud on your trousers.'

He looked down.

'Do you mean to say I've to change before tea,' he protested.

'Right away, now,' she slipped her arm through his. Together they slowly walked up the broad stairs. How beautiful the faded tones of the Japanese prints lining the staircase wall, in this faded light! And how mysterious the great Buddha on the half-landing, set about the creeping plant they called 'orchidaceous'.

A fire, too, on the landing, showing on warm rugs, low couch and little flat Persian pillows; from their room she saw a reflected brightness.

She paused just a moment— her lip quivering— John led her in.

'What a fire,' he cried, 'if Alice wasn't such an angel you'd be bound to think she had an intimate acquaintance with the place where angels do truly fear to tread.'

Marion went on to the oval mirror, unpinning her hat and veil, threw them down on a chair and looked around, smiling.

'Do run away like a good boy and get ready!'

'Oh, I feel I haven't seen you for a thousand years,' he came up behind her, drawing her head on to his shoulder, putting his arms round her neck, and catching her hands.

'Look at yourself, you beautiful woman,' and then, suddenly whispering, 'When I look in the mirror, so, and see you— know that this is no dream, that through the years, I have but to look to find you, always there, my darling, and every time it seems to me, more beautiful— more adorable, I wonder what I can have done… why this is my portion— this life with you. Baby,' he cried, suddenly laughing, and pulling the pins from her hair, 'you don't look more than sixteen! You ought to be ashamed of yourself and you— the …'

She turned round, slipped her arms round his neck and buried her face on his shoulder.

'Oh, John, when I am away from you, my body aches for this, its resting place— for the pillow of your heart. I never feel safe further from you than this; you hold the anchor to this drifting being. In the security of your arms, dearest, I am— ' her voice suddenly broke a little, 'such a willing prisoner.'

He held her to him, trembling.

'I cannot hold you close enough,' he said, 'I shall never make you feel my love which grows in the giving— a Faery purse, the more I give— the more I have to give— and all that is mine so all yours— just mine that it may the more truly belong to you.'

'Oh, husband,' she suddenly laughed, releasing herself, 'and people question miracles… fly along, dear.'

'Well,' he said, reluctantly, 'can I leave the door open[75]?'

'Yes of course. Do go.'

His dressing-room led from their bedroom. When he was gone she pushed back the loosened masses of her hair, and looked round her. At the great bed, the heavy rugs, and curtains drawn across the windows and patterned with pomegranate trees. The low mantlepiece was covered in photographs— Roger, Frank, Virginia, Otto, Valerie[77] with her new baby.

She glanced at the shelf of books just above their bed, bound in white leather, with the 'Crane' design, and everywhere flowers and a confusion of fascinating perfumes— jars and little odd-shaped cases on her dressing-table.

'Marion,' John's voice from the next room— she heard him pouring water into a basin. 'I've had such a day.'

'Have you, dear,' brushing her long hair, and gazing tremulously at the flushed girlish face that smiled back at her.

'Yes. Do you know the sort of day when everybody seems a bore, and yourself the greatest.'

'Oh, I know… horrid.'

'And then I had no lunch… just tore round the corner and bolted something.'

'I do wish you would not over-work like that.'

He was speaking between splashes.

'But two new people came in this evening, darling, and asked for the benefit of your humble servant's genius.'

'Goody-o— that's fine, John. Did you see anything of Roger?'

'No; he 'phoned me, though; he's coming round this evening to play with …'

'Oh, I'm glad,' she cried, quickly interrupting; her fingers trembled with the fastenings of her grey chiffon gown.

'And, Marion— Oh, the Lord! I've lost a slipper again; the brute's hiding under the bed— darling, we must ask two more people to that dinner; we'd forgotten— the Simpsons!'

'My dear— so we had.'

Mechanically she opened a little box and took out a long silver chain set with opals.

'What a blessing you remembered; we'd have been in their black books for ever.'

'I know— how about the work today?'

'Finished, finished— I'll read you some after dinner. Don't ask my opinion; I'm still at the cackling stage, the successfully-laid-for-all-the-world-to-see stage. Are you ready?'

'Yes. May I come in?'

'Do, Boy dear.'

He had changed into a lounge coat, and on his feet he wore extraordinary Japanese stork-embroidered slippers. He sat on the edge of the bed, swinging one foot and whistling. A low clear note struck from downstairs.

Standing on the landing this time she noticed a little gate at the foot of the next flight of stairs, and the walls were covered in brilliant posters— French, Belgian, English, Italian, and, too, a little picture of a boy in blue trousers standing in a daisy field.

John paused.

'Shall we go up a minute,' he said.

'Oh, afterwards,' she answered, hurriedly.

Each time he mentioned the… each time she felt he was going to speak of their… she had a terrible, suffocating sensation of fear. If that should prove untrue, if that should prove its dream origin— and at the thought something within her cried out and trembled.

'Oh, well' he said, 'later. Perhaps it's better not to disturb …'

'Much better,' said Marion.

In the library a rose-coloured lamp lighted the round table holding the tray with its delicate china and silver. The soft sound of the kettle, the great leather chairs— yes even the smell of the toasted buns— every moment created in her a greater happiness.

'One small lump of sugar,' carefully selecting it for his cup. 'Did you remember to bring home cigarettes?'

'In the hall with my flowers for you. I brought a surprise for…'

'Bring the flowers, dear. I'm just greedy for them this weather. Um— how good the tea is.'

They sat almost silently, one on either side of the table, drinking their tea— eating— occasionally looking up, smiling, and then looking into the fire— each occupied with thoughts, perfectly content— rested after the long day.

'Why does lamplight shed such peace?' he said, in a low tone: 'it so shuts us in together; I love a lamp.'

And again, as she leaned forward to light her cigarette at the little silver fire-breathing 'Devil's Head'— 'Marion.'

'Yes, John.'

'What makes me almost laugh, times, is that the novelty never ceases. I feel each day is our first day together.'

'Oh, it is the sense of "home" which is so precious to me— it is the wonderful sense of peace— of the rooms sanctified— of the quiet permanence— it is that which is so precious after—'

In the silence she heard the sweet sound of the rain against the window.

John put down his cup and lighted a cigarette.

'Let's go up. I'll race you to the top of the house.'

'I can't run in this long gown.'

'Well, wait a minute— my parcel.'

He brought from the hall the oddly shaped box.

'I won't undo the string— half the excitement gone—'

So again they went up the stairs, and together, and this time through the little gate.

Her heart was beating in her throat— her hands were cold— a curious sensation in her breast and arms— but the fear vanished when she saw the old nurse at the top of the stairs putting away linen into a green cupboard.

'Yes, sir, he's in the day nursery.'

John opened the door and Marion, swaying forward, saw the child banging the wooden head of a Dutch doll on the floor, and singing to himself. He wore a blue pinafore, tan socks and black patent leather slippers fastened with a strap and button.

'Darling,' she cried, swooping down upon him. 'Little son!'

The child cried 'Mummy, Mummy,' and clung to her dress. She sat in a low rocking-chair and held him on her lap. Oh, the comfortable feeling of the child in her arms, against her breast! John was explaining something marvellous about the odd-shaped box. She twined one of his curls round her finger— felt the little neck-band of his pinafore— a tiny frown between her brows— to see if it were too tight— he moved his head as though it was not quite comfortable, and then, out of the box came another bear, a black one with a white nose! The child slipped off her lap, and went over to the toy-cupboard to show his treasure to the rest of the 'Teddy family.'

'An' you've got to shake hands, an' you've got to give him a nice kiss, an' you've got to say "thank you, dear Daddy", I never did see such a nice daddy.'

The man looked over at the woman, she was rocking to and fro, a sweet brightness in her eyes.

'Sometimes,' she whispered, 'I think my heart will break for joy.'

'Oh, Daddy— do be a gallopin' pony.'

John went down on hands and knees— the child clambered on to his back.

'I don't know which is the younger of you,' she cried. 'John, I'll have to knit you a little pair of kneecaps …'

Suddenly as she watched them, she heard her name being called from the lower part of the house. Whose voice was that? What, what was he doing there— yes, it was he. Something within her seemed to crash and give way— she went white to the lips. Oh, please God, they would not hear until she had silenced that voice.

'I'll be back in a minute.'

But they were almost too gay to notice.

'Marion… Marion… Marion!'

Please God, she could stop that voice.

Down the stairs she ran into the hall. Where was it coming from— calling and calling she wrung her hands. Once listening, she heard the high, laughing voice of the child.

'Marion… Marion… Marion!'

From the porch. Yes, it came from the porch. She pulled the heavy door open— wind and rain rushed in upon her— out into the porch she stepped— and the door banged to behind her. It was dark and cold… and… silent… cold.

'I SEEN 'ER come up 'ere last evening— thinkin' she was a friend of your missus.'

'What she come to front door for then— with the airy steps. Look out, wot's in that bag, Take care, you leave that bag alone… there'll be a clue there… Bags and things, they always let the cat out.'

'Go on; it's a madeiry cake and all sodgin' through the paper… Why don't they 'urry-up?'

'They'll be here soon… ain't she young, too… Look 'ere, 'er veil's slipping off.'

'You leave 'er alone— you'll ketch it when they know.'

'Oh, Lord, it's fallen off… Oh, Lord, I seen 'er before. I remember 'er face as pline as yestiday. She come with a young feller to look over this 'ouse. I'll bet you anythink yer like it's 'er. It's 'er alright— Thet's 'er face; she gave me 'arf a crown and they stayed foolin' round and me 'anging on their 'eels and listening to them fixin' up nurseries and rose-trees and turkeys carpets, 'er 'anging on 'is arm.'

'You'd better look out what yer say. It'll go down.'

'I can't 'elp it; people ain't got no right to go round dyin' as if they owned the 'ole plice. It'll be called 'aunted now. Oh, Lord, it's 'er, straight, the names they called me too. St Peter and H'Eros and 'Yman— it's like yestiday. And when 'e'd gone, she comes back, laughin', and says— "We ain't got enough money to furnish a cottage," she says, "we're just dreamin' true," she says, "and 'eres half a crown, Peter dear." I never 'eard people laugh the way they did— and she, so set on this 'ere lamp …'

'It'll always be empty now.'

'Yes, always empty now… 'ere They come!'

———————

25: Matches

Beatrice Redpath

1886-1937

MacLean's, 1 Nov 1922

Canadian short story writer and poet.

"HE'S FOREVER getting hurt," Paul Hastings sneered, "we don't want that kind of man in the North West. What other man but Niel Baker would stumble into one of his own traps. Just like him, though. I wish you joy of him. But he's so damned careless that some of these days he'll he careless once too often."

Ann Hastings held back the words which she would have uttered, had she not learned lately to suppress her anger, to listen and be silent. She did not even glance towards her step-brother, who was putting on his heavy snow boots, his sullen face half hidden as he struggled with a refractory lace. She went on with her sewing, but bent lower over her needle, to hide the anger that narrowed her gray eyes.

She never grew accustomed to the endless repetition. Not a day passed in which Paul did not sneer at Niel, scarcely an hour seemed to go by without some remark. Paul could not conceal, did not try to hide the anger that burned in him, the fire of sullen resentment that smouldered within.

The very fact that she had made him so comfortable, cooked for him, worked for him, slaved for him, since the moment she had entered his house, now caused him to vent his anger on the man who was robbing him of this comfort. He had referred to Niel Baker as his best friend, his only friend in the district, when Ann had first come out to the West; that was before he had had any idea that Niel would ever want to marry her.

She had realized, before she had been many days on her step-brother's ranch, just why Paul had written such kind letters after her father's death, telling her that she must make her future home with him. She remembered how kind and warm those letters had seemed to her, left penniless and alone, and coming from a man who was a complete stranger to her.

She had come out with such a desire to do all that lay in her power to show her gratitude for this kindness, but the gratitude had died swiftly. Paul Hastings had not even bothered to keep up any sort of pretense after she had arrived. He had been brutally frank.

"I guess it's a good bargain all around," he had said, soon after her arrival, "a housekeeper wants such high wages these days, and I could never be bothered with a wife. That means babies and doctor's bills. Not for me. You'll have a home and it's not likely that you will be marrying at your age. A man wants something younger when he's looking for a wife. I considered that before I paid your fare

out here," he had added with a short laugh, apparently taking pride in his frank speech. "I guess it's an arrangement that suits us both."

ANN would have returned to the East if she had had the money to do so. She was nothing more than a servant, and a servant without a wage. And then, soon after her arrival, she had met Niel Baker. Here was someone so different. Niel's frank face and honest eyes became for her the only light in the drear round of days. After she knew him she decided that she could make the best of things, since his ranch was only six miles away.

Paul's astonishment had been only equalled by his anger, when she had informed him that she and Niel were to be married in the Spring. He had never suspected such a thing. If he had been looking for a wife himself, he would have desired a different sort. More life, he would have said, more animation. Ann did not appeal to him in any way whatever except in the way of service. There, she suited him. He had never been as comfortable as he had been since she had come to the ranch. He had congratulated himself continually on the expenditure which he had at first considered foolhardy. But it had been a good investment. He had never made a better one. He liked his comfort and he liked his food. Ann's cooking was of the best. He could not bear the thought of returning to haphazard cooking when he could have such comfort at no expense.

His anger at the thought of her marriage and his fierce resentment against Niel, frightened her at times. It made her fear for Niel's safety. But Niel himself had only laughed at her fears.

"What could he do?" Niel had laughed. "I'm a bigger man than he is. He had better look out if he tries any funny business with me. Only I wish you were out of his house. Sometimes I think it would be best to marry right away. After all, what is there to wait for?"

"I gave him my promise that I'd stay with him a year," she had said in reply. "I don't want him to feel that I didn't keep my word. By then I shall have paid him in full for all it cost him to bring me out here. After all, I owe him that."

"I'll pay him your fare, if that's all," Niel had answered promptly, but she had refused the offer. Paul would not be able to find anyone at this season to take her place. No, she would keep her word and wait for the Spring.

But Spring seemed long in coming, and sometimes she grew afraid. She laughed at her own fears, and told herself that it was simply nervousness. Paul would not do anything to harm Niel, would not dare to do anything. He was a coward at heart. It was only that she was alone so much, had so much time for absurd ideas to enter her head. Her common sense told her that it was nonsense. And yet, even so, she could not kill her fear.

She looked up from her sewing now, as Paul paused before going out to look after the horses. He stood with his hand on the knob of the door, looking down at her.

"I don't want you to go out," he said, "there's going to be a blizzard. The glass has been falling all day. It will be the devil of a night."

"I wasn't thinking of going out," she replied, and then as she glanced carelessly at him, suddenly her eyes became fixed and attentive. There was a curious smile on Paul's thick lips, a gleam of satisfaction in his mean eyes. She thought, looking at him, that triumph was expressed by that smile.

In another moment he had turned towards the door and opened it. A cold gust of air swept into the room. The door slammed behind him, shaking the light frame house.

SHE did not pick up the sewing which had fallen into her lap. She sat staring before her, wondering... wondering why Paul had smiled like that. What could it mean? What had occurred to please him? Why... that triumphant smile?

There was only one thing that she could think of that would please him these days. She could imagine his looking just like that if some danger threatened Niel. That would bring that very expression into his face. His entire mind was occupied with his hatred. There was nothing else that seemed to enter his thoughts lately. She could think of nothing that would satisfy him so completely as disaster to Niel.

Danger to Niel! She started forward and jumped to her feet. She stood, thinking hard. Paul had been over at Niel's ranch only that morning. He had gone to borrow some tools. A cold horror froze her heart. Niel, with his injured foot, would be an easy victim.

Oh, but Paul would never dare to do Niel any bodily harm. The consequences of anything of the sort would be too swift and too sure. It would be laid at once at his door. If he did anything to harm Niel it would have to be something crafty, something that could be hidden. That thought frightened her the more. Her brain raced, trying to probe the meaning of Paul's expression, wondering what he could have done.

That smile had some meaning. Of that only, she was sure. There was nothing for her lo do but to go and find out the meaning. She took a swift glance towards the window, remembering what Paul had said about the blizzard. It had been intensely cold all day. She had noticed, looking out of the window earlier, the deep purple shadow flung by the spruce trees, sharp and defined on the glistening crystals of the snow. The trees black and motionless and the sky vivid turquoise. Now the sky was clouded over, the panes were thick with spirals of white frost feathers, but out of one corner, where the frost had melted from the heat of the mom, she could see flakes blown against the window.

She thought of the six miles of rough road to Niel's ranch and her heart sank. The sun set so early these winter days, and the dark came so quickly after sunset. There would scarcely be more than an hour of daylight left to her. There would be no stars to guide her, and the blizzard would be an impenetrable veil. She had never been out in a blizzard, but she had heard Paul speak of them very often. She knew the danger of losing herself, of falling from exhaustion, but the other danger loomed up before her, more terrifying, more awful than anything else in the world. That smile on Paul's face frightened her more than the terror of the snow. There was something hideously wrong at that ranch six miles away. She knew that she must go at all costs. She would go mad if she stopped here with that terror devouring her.

If she only knew what it was that threatened Niel. But she could not imagine what Paul could do to harm him. But there was danger... that she knew.

SHE WENT to her room to wrap herself in her thickest and lightest clothes. She laced on her moccasins with quick trembling fingers, pulled the scarlet tuque down over her brown hair and changed her skirt for a pair of homespun knickers. The snow would be too deep, if it came as Paul had forecast, for her to be impeded with skirts.

The wind struck at her like a knife as she opened the door. There was a thin driving snow that felt like particles of steel against her face. She pulled her scarf higher about her face and turned in the direction of Niel's ranch. The wind bit through the wool of her sweaters, but she only walked faster, moving lightly and easily in her soft moccasins, over the snow that was like sand, frozen into tiny particles with the intense cold. It was better this way than damp and clogging, she told herself, and felt encouraged and hopeful of reaching Niel's ranch before the blizzard broke with full fury.

The sky was like dull gray metal, flecked with the tiny flakes. There was the long, long whistle of the wind, but the rest was silence, mile after mile of that aching silence, broken only by the drone of the wind. The exercise kept her warm until her clothing seemed almost a burden. She wished that she was more accustomed to walking, that she had not shut herself in so much over household tasks. She was strong enough except when it came to great physical strain. To that she was not accustomed.

She told herself that six miles was nothing, but the muscles in the backs of her legs were beginning to ache with the strain. The snow was so heavy. In some places there were drifts clear across the road, and she had to struggle through them, which left her breathless and trembling with exhaustion. It was growing darker and she went faster. She must get to the spruce woods before it was quite dark. They cut across the country in a belt. There was a path through them, but it would be difficult to make it out were it dark before she got there.

THE SNOW was sweeping across her path more heavily now. Each flake so light, so evanescent a thing, collectively all powerful, strong as death. She was ploughing through it now, and it was like ploughing through deep shifting sand. It would have been better if she had brought her snow shoes. But she had never learned to use them. They always tripped her up. She had been afraid of twisting her ankle by wearing them. But she had had no idea that the snow would be so deep.

Now and then she paused to take her breath, staring ahead, striving to estimate how far she had gone, how far she had still to go. There were no landmarks until she came to the woods. After the woods it was only one mile more. But she was taking longer than she had expected.

The world was blotted out by the snow that was getting thicker. It stung her cheeks and froze on her eye-lids, and swirled in eddies on the wind. There was nothing anywhere but the snow, the shifting icy particles of the snow.

She gave a sigh of relief when she came to the woods. The spruce trees seemed to hold out friendly arms to her, protecting, and kindly, holding off the fierce fury of the wind. Her spirits rose as she went more quickly along the path that was almost entirely obliterated; she could only make her way by the opening through the trees. Above her head the trees swayed and the wind whistled and moaned through the topmost branches, but the lower boughs were still. They brushed her cheeks and clung to her hair. There was no sound but the eerie moaning of the wind except when a branch snapped sharply with the weight of the snow. The sound startled her over-strung nerves, and she would lean for a moment, trembling in every nerve, peering behind her through the dusk.

A new terror was rising in her heart. She was afraid that Paul, finding her gone, would follow her and force her to go back. He would know where she was gone. He would be on the alert if he had harmed Niel. Every moment she fancied she would look over her shoulder and find him there, his evil face leering at her, that smile on his lips.

The thought spurred her to further exertion. She must not stop to rest for a moment. A log fallen across the path brought her to her knees. She struggled up, brushing the snow away from her face, the hair out of her eyes. She longed to be through the woods, out into the clear spaces again. She could do without their protection... they were filled with terror for her.

It was getting so dark she had to feel her way now. Would she ever get through the woods? Would she ever reach Niel... and when she got to the ranch... what would she find?

That thought sent her racing forward, careless of the branches that slapped in her face, but the increased speed only exhausted her, left her breathless and

gasping. She must go at her steady pace, not faster or slower. Only that way would she ever reach the ranch.

At last it grew lighter... the end of the woods was reached, and she gave a great sigh of relief as the darkness fell behind her like a dropped cloak. But here, in the open, the wind had increased to fury, the snow was driving forward, it was like beating up against an impenetrable wall of white driving particles. It caught her breath, it whirled her slight body round. She steadied herself and steeled her body to receive the impact of this terrific force. And then as she stood for an instant, helpless before the frightful drive of the wind, she heard a shout behind her. She gave one terrified glance back over her shoulder and then plunged forward into the wind, struggling and gasping.

PAUL... it was Paul... she was beaten... defeated... it was the end. She closed her eyes and stumbled on, but she could not go any faster... he would be upon her in a moment. She gave one desperate plunge forward through the drift, stumbled and fell forward on her face.

BUT THE voice that broke upon her, above the whistle of the wind, was not Paul's voice. The slurring Irish tones were kind and familiar. She lay, too startled by the swiftness of her relief to move.

"Whatever are you doing out here in this storm? Why, it's Ann Hastings!"

She felt arms lifting her, brushing away the snow that caked her face. It was Mike Gallagher, Niel's neighbor, whose ranch was half a mile to the north, through the woods. She caught at his arm with a fierce eagerness.

"Have you come from Niel's?"

"No. Why?"

She hesitated for a moment. How could she tell him of her fear? Looking into his kind friendly face, it seemed to her for an instant that all her terror was a childish obsession. She had been simply absurd to have imagined danger. She had been nervous and overwrought.

She did not like to tell him just why she had come. He would laugh at her. But the memory of that expression on Paul's face brought fear back.

"I think there is something wrong over at Niel's ranch," she said slowly.

"Wrong? How do you mean? What makes you think so? He was all right early this morning. His foot was getting along splendidly. I left him tucked up in bed for the day. Why... what do you think has happened?"

"I'm going to find out," she said, ignoring his direct question.

She was almost shouting against the wind while he held her arm, steadying her. He shook his head.

"You can't get to Niel's to-night," he said, "you'll come back to my ranch. It's only a piece through the woods. There's no walking in the open to-night in that blizzard. You'd have to beat dead against it every inch of the way."

But she resisted when he tried to lead her back into the shelter of the woods.

"No... no... I must go on," she cried. "Niel is in danger... I know he is."

Mike Gallagher looked at her puzzled.

"There's no danger that could come to Niel," he said, "but there is every danger to you if you try to get to Niel's ranch through that. It can't be done."

"It's got to be done," she said wildly, frantic in her anguished terror. "Please let me get on," she said. "I can't stay here talking... every minute counts."

"IF THERE were any reason," he said slowly, and she broke in upon him, remembering his Irish blood.

"Don't you ever have presentiments?"

"Not on a night like this," he said with a grim smile, but he took her arm more firmly and turned with her towards Niel's ranch. "Lean all you can," he said, "we'll beat our way through... we'll get there if I have to carry you. You must be near the end of your tether... I don't see how you ever managed to get this far."

She looked at him gratefully and tried to thank him for coming with her, but he stopped her at once.

"Don't talk," he said, "we'll need all our breath before we get through this."

But in spite of the torrential force of the wind that beat them back at every step, it did not seem so bad to Ann as before. She no longer had any fear of Paul catching up with her. Mike Gallagher's huge frame protected her from that danger, and he was half carrying her along, pulling her, helping her with all his strength. She shut her eyes to the blinding particles of snow that cut her face, and bent her head, careless now of direction since Mike Gallagher was directing the course. Her limbs moved mechanically as though they did so without any direction from her brain... merely through habit. Now and then they paused and turned their backs to the gale for a breathing space, and then plodded on again without a word spoken.

The wind seemed to her like a great invisible beast, roaring angrily down upon them through the black night that was like a fathomless pit. It seemed to Ann that for hours and hours they struggled on, weary to exhaustion, but finding somehow the needed strength to carry them on. Weariness was weighing her down, like some vast hand pulling her, down, down, down. She was leaning her entire weight now, and Mike Gallagher was practically carrying her on his arm.

"We should be able to see Niel's lights," he said at length, peering ahead. "That's queer," he said half to himself, and Ann said quickly.

"What... what?"

"Oh, nothing," he said slowly. "We're just there. I thought we should see the lights... but this snow is too thick I guess to see through it."

"You're sure we are really on the right track... that we are really there?" she said, doubting that that journey could really be ended at last.

"Oh yes, we're all right. Come on and make a last spurt for it. It's only a few more yards... you're dead beat."

SHE STRUGGLED on with hope now. They had really got through. She heard Gallagher mutter something to himself, but this time she was too weary to inquire what it was... almost she was too spent to feel any more fear, any terror, to feel anything whatever but deadly, deadly exhaustion.

Then his voice penetrated that terrible nothingness into which she felt herself descending.

"There are no lights," and his voice was deep and anxious. "I guess you were right... there's something wrong."

She turned to Mike Gallagher sharply.

"What... what... oh, what?"

"We'll see in a minute or so," he replied. "Do you think you can stand alone while I look for some matches? I had some in my pocket. Here they are. I'll go in first," and he went on before her while she stumbled after him, half surprised to find that they were so near to the house. It was terribly dark and silent. She felt sick and shaken with fear.

Mike Gallagher turned the handle of the door and it opened easily. He struck a match and it flared in the darkness, then the wind blew it out. He turned and led her into the house and shut the door before he struck another. She heard Niel's voice... but so strange... so curiously strange... coming out of the darkness. Relief swept through her in a flood. Whatever had happened, Niel was alive.

She held to the back of a chair while Gallagher felt for the lamp. As the light burned she saw Niel, huddled on a chair beside the stove, beneath blankets and rugs. He was shaking convulsively. She could hear his teeth chattering from where she stood. And then she noticed that the stove was black.... the room was deadly col deep and anxious. "I guess you were right... there's something wrong."

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She saw Mike Gallagher go quickly towards the stove and put a match to the fire that was ready laid. Then he turned and put his hand on Niel's shaking shoulders.

"Get close to that blaze... you're nearly frozen to death... what's the matter?... why didn't you have a fire?"

Niel's lips could scarcely form the words.

"Matches," he stammered... "there were no matches... the stove... went out."

Gallagher exclaimed.

"Matches! Why, you had a stock of them only this morning. I helped myself to a handful."

SO THAT was it! Now Ann understood. She came forward slowly. "Paul stole them," she said clearly. "I knew there was something." And then to her own amazement, now that the long, the terrible strain, was over, she burst out into long choking sobs.

Gallagher crossed to her and led her to the couch beside the stove.

"She's absolutely done out," he said, turning to Niel while she tried to choke back her sobs of relief. "I came upon her at the edge of the woods... she was on her way here... thought you were in danger... had a presentiment... the presentiment was right. What you both need is a drink... I have something here in a flask."

"What sort of a presentiment, dear?" Niel inquired, somewhat warmed by the drink. He got up and came over to the couch and sat down beside Ann. She struggled with the sobs that were still choking her.

"Paul looked so queer... he smiled... he looked so triumphant... I knew something was wrong... to make him look like that."

"And so you came through that blizzard... because Paul smiled!" Niel said in wonder.

"If he hadn't... I never would have known... until it was too late."

Niel's hand closed over hers and then he turned to Gallagher.

"He must have put out the fire... when I heard him at it. He told me he was filling the stove. When the place began to get cold I came in... there wasn't a spark. I laid a new fire... and tried to strike a spark in the old way... but it wouldn't work. I started to go over to your ranch... but my foot was too bad. I had to come back. If you hadn't come...." and he paused and his hand tightened on Ann's.

"And he would have got away with it too," Mike Gallagher said grimly, as he put more wood into the blazing stove, "all that would have been said was that you were careless letting yourself run out of matches. It was clever enough. He's always been going on about your carelessness. So that's Paul Hastings. It's a good thing to know."

"And you're here... for good," Niel said, smiling at Ann's white face, while an expression of unutterable content came into his own.

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26: The Spider

Vernon Ralston

fl 1907-1921

Evening Journal (Adelaide) 18 Sep 1908

Table Talk (Melbourne) 24 Sep 1908

MR. ANTHONY MOLYNEUX— the real name with which he began life in Poland is unspellable and unpronounceable— sat at the window of his Piccadilly chambers. It was a brisk afternoon, he had lunched well. and consequently he was in his most amiable mood. He gazed genially down on the passers-by. Every now and then he noticed some client, and smiled to himself. It may be questioned if the clients had looked up to the window and seen Mr. Molyneux whether they would have smiled in return.

"Most of these young clubmen come to me sooner or later," thought Mr. Molyneux. "The flies can't keep out of the old spider's web, and then he bleeds them dry, dry!"

He gave a chuckle of enjoyment, and then leant back in his chair for his after-luncheon doze.

Suddenly there came a knock at the outer office door, and Mr. Molyneux was on the alert at once. He heard his clerk answer to the knock. In another moment he brought a card in to Mr. Molyneux.

"A Mr. Cartwright to see you, sir."

"He's a new customer, isn't he, Mr. Smith?"

"I think so, sir."

"What's he like?"

"Young, and a trifle green, sir."

"Oh, tell him I'm engaged at present, but that I'll see him in ten minutes."

Mr. Molyneux believed in keeping his customers waiting. It was his idea that if a client cooled his heels in the outer office for ten minutes he would get afraid that no money would be advanced, and consequently would not be quite so particular about the terms of advance.

Mr. Molyneux sat in his chair for ten minutes; then arranged a few letters on his desk to give the appearance of occupation, and rang loudly for his clerk.

"Make out that cheque, Mr. Smith, payable to the Marquis, and bring it to me for signature. Have those mortgage deeds in connection with the Villiers estate ready this afternoon for my inspection. And, by the way, show in that gentleman. Let me see, didn't you say it was Mr. Cartwright?"

"Yes; well, show him in here."

Mr. Smith replied gravely. "I will see to those matters at once."

No one would judge from the tone that he was told to make out the cheque for the Marquis two or three times a day. This was merely one of Sir. Molyneux's methods of impressing clients.

The next minute a young man was shown into the private office. He was well dressed and looked gentlemanly. Mr. Molyneux's quick eye noted these details. It also noted the dark circles under the client's eyes, and the rather puffy, bloated face. Mr. Molyneux was not a moralist; his mental comment was. "Been going the pace a bit— that's the sort of young fellow like to have here."

"Well. Mr. Carter"— the money lender made a point of forgetting clients' names to impress them with a sense of their unimportance— "what can I have the pleasure of doing for you? Take that armchair; you'll find it a good one."

"Cartwright, if you please, Mr. Molyneux. I understand that you lend money."

"You come at an unfortunate time, Mr. Cartwright, I let a client of mine, the Duke of— I beg pardon, I was nearly indiscreet enough to let a name slip— well, I let him have almost all my spare cash this morning; but still, state your business. If we can't do it to-day we may to able to manage it a bit later."

This was another of Mr. Molynenx's stock speeches. The fact that the Duke had drained him dry always justified him in charging a client another 10 per cent.

"Well, perhaps, Mr. Molyneux, my is familiar to you. My uncle, Charles Cartwright, is the well-known North Country Steel King; he is a bachelor; I am his only nephew, and he has always treated me as son."

"Half a minute, my dear sir. I must just slip out and sign a cheque for my clerk to post."

Mr Molyneux glided into the outer office and turned up two or three books of reference. Until he had gleaned the essential facts about Mr Charles Cartwright.

"Sorry to interrupt you," he said, when he returned. 'You were saying that your uncle a bachelor, and regarded you as son. But bachelor uncles may marry or they may alter their wills. If you required a small advance from me I should want more security than your expectations from an uncle. Now, if you could induce your uncle to back a bill for you, I could advance any amount m reason on his signature. Just bring it me and we can do good business."

The money leader liked to emphasize to young men the value of wealthy relatives' signatures. Some of his most profitable deals had resulted from this. If the signature were all right— good— he could recover in case of default from a wealthy person. If there were anything wrong about the signature, it was better still— he had found that the rich relatives were often very willing to pay up handsomely to check a nasty family scandal. In this case, however, his wiles were futile. His client shook his head.

"My uncle would as soon think of flying as of backing anyone's bill. He never gave a bill in his life, and if he heard that had given one all my hopes of getting is money would vanish. You see he only allows me two hundred and fifty a year, and it's absolutely impossible for a fellow to live on that in London."

"Pooh!" said the money lender with a wicked leer. "It wouldn't pay for a man about town's little suppers at a restaurant. This is a voluntary allowance, Mr. Cartwright; there's nothing settled on you?"

"No, not a penny. Now, a generous man would have let me have something of my own."

"I can't advance anything on the security of a voluntary allowance. Why, if he heard that you had been trying to borrow he might stop it."

"He would," said the young man emphatically.

"Well, give me security— his signature, say— and we can do business. Otherwise. I mustn't waste your time."

"Oh, the security I've got to offer you is good enough. My old uncle's a curious fellow. I've overrun my allowance once or twice .and he's squared things up for me. Now, when he paid me my half-year's allowance in December, he played a low-down trick on me. He said. 'Arnold, my boy, you don't know how to keep money— now I'll put you to the test. Here's your half-year's allowance; in addition to it I'm giving you 30 £50-notes: show me these identical notes next quarter day and I'll double them. You shall have a couple of thousand for yourself. But if you spent one of them then that thousand's the last money you'll ever get from me.' He means it, too; he old fellow never goes back from his word. So here am I— of course my allowance went in a month— with a thousand pounds in good notes that I daren't spend. Here, look at them."

He tossed a roll of notes across the table to the money lender. Mr. Molyneux examined them minutely, and saw that they were perfectly genuine.

"Well, my dear sir, what do you want me to do?"

"Why, I want to know what you'll advance me on the security of those notes, you giving me a guarantee to return them for my use on quarter-day."

Mr. Molyneux's face brightened. He saw the prospect of a bargain.

"Ah, as it's you, Mr. Cartwright, I could advance as much as a couple of hundred, if you'll give me a bill for five hundred payable the day after quarter-day."

"Two hundred; that's no good. Why, I owe nearly that. No; I want five hundred at least. If you can't lend me five hundred pounds on the security of a thousand— well, I'm going to somebody who can."

"I'm very short of ready money at present. Mr. Cartwright; the Duke took eight thousand only this morning. Then, you know, though I have the security. I shan't be able to use it. If your uncle took the numbers of the notes you'll want

those identical notes back again. They'll have to stay in my safe all the time earning nothing. I shall really have to charge you a little extra for that."

"But you'll be making money out of what you lend me."

"Ah, you don't understand the feelings of a business man. Mr. Cartwright—the aggravation of having capital you can't use."

"Well what will you charge me for a loan of five hundred, you giving me a guarantee that you will produce those identical notes for my use next quarter-day?"

Mr. Molyneux solemnly scribbled some figures on his blotting pad.

"I shall have to overdraw at my bankers," he replied, "and the bank rate is exceptionally high mow. But I've taken to you as I seldom do to a client. I fear I sometimes let my personal feelings influence me too much in business. Suppose that you give me a bill for £1,300, payable the day after quarter-day."

"Thirteen hundred pounds!"

"Yes; your uncle might die in the meantime."

"If he did you'd collar my thousand."

"That would mean a loss of three hundred pounds to me," said the money lender. "No, Mr Cartwright. I'm helping you to make two thousand pounds for yourself. Don't I deserve a little bit of the profit?"

"Thirteen hundred for the use of five hundred for two months, with ample security!"

"Then go somewhere else, Mr. Cartwright. Get into the hands of some of these foreign moneylenders, and see how they rob you. It has always been motto. "Treat clients well, and they'll come again.' Give me small profits from regular clients. I may say that I'm just a little pained. I put myself to considerable financial inconvenience to oblige you, and you seem to think that I'm robbing you."

As he concluded this speech Molyneux turned to his safe and carelessly pushed the door to.

The sight of the closing door seemed to overcome his client's reluctance.

"I'll take it. Will you make out the bill and the guarantee to return, to me those identical notes for use on quarter-day. But you must guarantee to forfeit two thousand pounds if you don't produce them."

"There'll be a little extra charge for that," said the money lender. "I must keep those notes at the safe deposit, not in my office. We'll make the bill for thirteen hundred and twenty-five pounds."

Mr. Cartwright grumbled a surly assent to this exceedingly reasonable proposal.

In ten minutes the documents were prepared, the notes placed in Mr. Molyneux s safe, and Mr. Cartwright left with an open cheque for five hundred pounds.

When he had gone the money lender leant back in his chair and laughed.

"Eight hundred and twenty-five pounds profit on absolute security, the young fool. And he'll have to pay the bill when it falls due, or I can ruin him with his uncle. Another fly in the spider's web— a juicy one this time. I hope I shall do more business with young Mr. Cartwright— the more the merrier."

And Mr. Molyneux drank a glass of wine and settled himself for his afternoon nap. He felt that he had earned his repose.

When quarter-day came round Mr. Molyneux waited all day in his office for his new client, but Mr. Cartwright never came.

"Then," said Mr. Molyneux, "the notes are forfeited, and the bill— well, I'll pay that into the bank for collection. I'll sue him on the bill; I might get something. Ten to one the young idiot won't be able to produce the document showing that I have a thousand of his."

He paid the bill and the notes into his bank next morning.

THE NEXT day, as he left his office, a plainclothes officer stopped him at the door.

"Mr. Anthony Molyneux?"

"Yes."

"I have a warrant for your arrest. Unlawful possession of 20 £50 notes stolen from the North-Eastern Bank last May. Anything you may say may he brought in evidence against you."

"Good heavens!" cried the moneylender. "And I advanced five hundred on them. Why, if I'd known they'd been stolen, do you think I'd have given him more than a hundred?"

A clever counsel contrived to get Mr. Molyneux acquitted when the trial came, although the Judge commented severely on his methods of doing business. The disgrace was nothing to the money lender— the loss he could make up from his other clients; but the mortification of having been swindled was a bitter blow to him.

It rankled in his mind that for once the fly had bled the spider.

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