PAST MASTERS 223

Otwell Binns
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George Barr McCutcheon
H. G. Wells
Guy de Maupassant
Arthur B. Reeve
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and more

PAST MASTERS 223

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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George Barr McCutcheon

1866-1928

Collected in: *Anderson Crow, Detective*, 1920

IT WASN'T OFTEN that Marshal Crow acknowledged that he was in a quandary. When he *did* find himself in that rare state of mind, he invariably went to Harry Squires, the editor of the *Banner*, for counsel— but never for advice. He had in the course of a protracted career as preserver of the peace and dignity of Tinkletown, found himself confronted by seemingly unsolvable mysteries, but he always had succeeded in unravelling them, one way or another, to his own complete satisfaction. Only the grossest impudence on the part of the present chronicler would permit the tiniest implication to creep into this or any other chapter of his remarkable history that might lead the reader to suspect that he did not solve them to the complete satisfaction of any one else. So, quite obviously, the point is not one to be debated.

Now, as nearly every one knows, Tinkletown is a temperance place. There is no saloon there,— unless, of course, one chooses to be rather nasty about Brubaker's Drugstore. Away back in the Seventies,— soon after the Civil War, in fact,— an enterprising but misguided individual attempted to establish a bar-room at the corner of Main and Sickle Streets. He opened the Sunlight Bar and for one whole day and night revelled in the conviction that he had found a silver mine. The male population of Tinkletown, augmented by a swarm of would-be inebriates from all the farms within a radius of ten miles, flocked to the Sunlight Bar and proceeded to get gloriously and collectively drunk on the contents of the two kegs of lager beer that constituted an experimental stock in trade.

The next morning the women of Tinkletown started in to put the Sunlight Bar out of business. They did not, as you may suspect, hurl stones at the place, neither did they feloniously enter and wreak destruction with axes, hatchets and hoe-handles. Not a bit of it. They were peaceful, law-abiding women, not sanguinary amazons. What they did was perfectly simple.

It is possible, even probable, that they were the pioneer "pickets" of our benighted land. At any rate, bright and early on the second day of the Sunlight Bar, the ladies of Tinkletown brought their knitting and their sewing down to the corner of Main and Sickle streets and sat themselves down in front of the shrinking "silver mine." They came with rocking-chairs, and camp-chairs, and milk-stools, and benches, too, and instead of chanting a doleful lay, they chattered in a blithe and merry fashion. There was no going behind the fact, however, that these smiling, complacent women formed the Death Watch that was to witness the swift, inevitable finish of the Sunlight Bar.

They came in relays, and they stayed until the lights went out in the desolate house of cheer. The next day they were on hand again, and the next, and still the next. Fortunately for them, but most unluckily for the proprietor of the Sunlight Bar, the month was August: they could freeze him out, but he couldn't freeze them out.

Sheepish husbands and sons passed them by, usually on the opposite sidewalk, but not one of them had the hardihood to extend a helping hand to the expiring saloon. At the end of a week, the Sunlight Bar drew its last breath. It died of starvation. The only mourner at its bier was the bewildered saloon-keeper, who engaged a dray to haul the remains to Boggs City, the County seat, and it was he who said, as far back as 1870, that he was in favour of taking the vote away from the men and giving it exclusively to the women.

Tinkletown, according to the sage observations of Uncle Dad Simms, was rarely affected by the unsettling problems of the present day. This talk about "labour unrest" was ridiculous, he said. If the remainder of the world was anything like Tinkletown, labour didn't do much except rest. It was getting so that if a workin'-man had very far to walk to "git" to his job, he had to step along purty lively if he wanted to arrive there in plenty of time to eat his lunch and start back home again. And as for "this here prohibition question," he didn't take any stock in it at all. Tinkletown had got along without liquor for more than a hundred years and he guessed it could get along for another century or two without much trouble, especially as it was only ten miles to Boggs City where you could get all you wanted to drink any day in the week. Besides, he argued, loudly and most violently, being so deaf that he had to strain his own throat in order to hear himself, there wasn't anybody in Tinkletown except Alf Reesling that ever wanted a drink, and even Alf wouldn't take it when you offered it to him.

But in spite of Uncle Dad's sage conclusions, it was this very prohibition question that was disturbing Anderson Crow. He sauntered into the Banner office late one afternoon in May and planked himself down in a chair beside the editor's desk. There was a troubled look in his eyes, which gave way to vexation after he had made three or four fruitless efforts to divert the writer's attention from the sheet of "copy paper" on which he was scribbling furiously.

"How do you spell beverage, Anderson?" inquired Mr. Squires abruptly.

"What kind of beverage?" demanded Mr. Crow.

"Any kind, just so it's intoxicating. Never mind, I'll take a chance and spell it the easiest way. That's the way the dictionary spells it, so I guess it's all right. Well, sir, what's on your mind?— besides your hat, I mean. You look worried."

"I am worried. Have you any idee as to the size of the apple crop in this neighbourhood last summer and fall, Harry?"

"Not the least."

"Well, sir, it was the biggest we've had since 1902, 'specially the fall pickin."

"What's the idea? Do you want me to put something in the Banner about Bramble County's bumper crop of pippins?"

"No. I just want to ask you if there's anything in this new prohibition amendment against apple cider?"

"Not that I'm aware of."

"Well, do you know it's impossible to buy a good eatin' or cookin' apple in this town today, Harry Squires?"

"You don't say so! In spite of the big crop last fall?"

"You could buy all you wanted last week, by the bushel or peck or barrel,— finest, juiciest apples you ever laid your eyes on."

"Well, I don't like apples anyway, so it doesn't mean much in my life."

Anderson was silent for a moment or two, contemplating his foot with singular intentness.

"Was you ever drunk on hard cider?" he inquired at last,— transferring his gaze to the rapidly moving hand that held the pencil.

The reporter jabbed a period,— or "full stop," as they call it in a certain form of literature,— in the middle of a sentence, and looked up with sudden interest.

"Yes," he said, with considerable force. "I'll never forget it. You can get tighter on hard cider than anything else I know of."

"Well, there you are," exclaimed the Marshal, banging his gnarled fist on the arm of the chair. "And as far as I c'n make out, there ain't no law ag'inst cider stayin' in the barrel long enough to get good and hard, an' what's more, there ain't no law ag'ainst sellin' cider, hard or sweet, is there?"

"I get your point, Anderson. And I also get your deductions concerning the mysterious disappearance of all the apples in Tinkletown. Apparently we are to have a shortage of dried apples this year, with an overflow of hard cider instead. By George, it's interesting, to say the least. Looks as though an apple orchard is likely to prove more valuable than a gold mine, doesn't it?"

"Yes, sir! 'Specially if you've got trees that bear in the fall. Fall apples make the best cider. They ain't so mushy. And as fer the feller that owns a cider-press, why, dog-gone it, he ought to be as rich as Crowsis."

"I seem to recall that you have a cider-press on your farm on Crow's Mountain,— and a whacking good orchard, too. Are you thinking of resigning as Marshal of Tinkletown?"

"What say?"

"I see you're not," went on Harry. "Of course you understand you can't very well manufacture hard cider and sell it and still retain your untarnished reputation as a defender of the law."

"I'm not figurin' on makin' hard cider," said Anderson, with some irritation. "You don't make hard cider, Harry. It makes itself. All you do is to rack the apple

juice off into a barrel, or something, with a little yeast added, and then leave it to do the work. It ferments an' then, if you want to, you rack it off again an' bottle it an'— well, gee whiz, how tight you c'n get on it if you ain't got sense enough to let it alone. But I ain't thinkin' about what I'm goin' to do, 'cause I ain't to do anything but make applebutter out of my orchard,— an' maybe a little cider-vinegar fer home consumption. What's worryin' me is what to do about all these other people around here. If they all take to makin' cider this fall,— or even sooner,— an' if they bottle or cask it proper,— we'll have enough hard cider in this township to give the whole state of New York the delirium trimmins."

"I don't see that you can do anything, Anderson," said Squires, leaning back in his chair and puffing at his pipe. "You can't keep people from making cider, you know. And you can't keep 'em from drinking it. Besides, who's going to take the trouble to ascertain whether it contains one-half of one percent alcohol? What interests me more than anything else is the possibility of this township becoming 'wet' in spite of itself,— an' to my certain knowledge, it has been up to now the barrenest desert on God's green earth."

"People are so all-fired contrary," Anderson complained. "For the last fifty years the citizens of this town and its suburbs have been so dead set ag'inst liquor that if a man went up to Boggs City an' got a little tipsy he had to run all the way home so's he'd be out of breath when he got there. Nobody ever kept a bottle of whiskey in his house, 'cause nobody wanted it an' it would only be in the way. But now look at 'em! The minute the Government says they can't have it, they begin movin' things around in their cellars so's to make room fer the barrels they're going to put in. An' any day you want to drive out in the country you c'n see farmers an' hired men treatin' the apple-trees as if they was the tenderest plants a-growin'. I heard this mornin' that Henry Wimpelmeyer is to put in a cider-press at his tanyard, an' old man Smock's turnin' his grist mill into an apple-mill. An' everybody is hoardin' apples, Harry. It beats the Dutch."

"It's up to you to frustrate their nefarious schemes, Mr. Hawkshaw. The fair name of the Commonwealth must be preserved. I use the word advisedly. It sounds a great deal better than 'pickled.' Now, do you want me to begin a campaign in the Banner against the indiscriminate and mendacious hardening of apple-cider, or am I to leave the situation entirely in your hands?"

Marshal Crow arose. The fire of determination was in his ancient eye.

"You leave it to me," said he, and strode majestically from the room.

Encountering Deacon Rank in front of the Banner office, he chanced this somewhat offensive remark:

"Say, Deacon, what's this I hear about you?"

The deacon looked distinctly uneasy.

"You can always hear a lot of things about me that aren't true," he said.

"I ain't so sure about that," said Anderson, eyeing him narrowly. "Hold on! What's your hurry?"

"I— I got to step in here and pay my subscription to the Banner," said the deacon.

"Well, that's something nobody'll believe when they hear about it," said Anderson. "It'll be mighty hard fer the proprieter of the Banner to believe it after all these years."

"Times have been so dog-goned hard fer the last couple of years, I ain't really been able to—"

"Too bad about you," broke in Anderson scornfully.

"Everything costs so much in these days," protested the deacon. "I ain't had a new suit of clothes fer seven or eight years. Can't afford 'em. My wife was sayin' only last night she needed a new hat,— somethin' she can wear all the year round,— but goodness knows this ain't no time to be thinkin' of hats. She— "

"She ain't had a new hat fer ten years," interrupted Anderson. "No wonder the pore woman's ashamed to go to church."

"What's that? Who says she's ashamed to go to church? Anybody that says my wife's ashamed to go to church is a— is a— well, he tells a story, that's all."

"Well, why don't she go to church?"

" 'Tain't because she's ashamed of her hat, let me tell you that, Anderson Crow. It's a fine hat an' it's just as good as new. She's tryin' to save it, that's what she's tryin' to do. She knows it's got to last her five or six years more, an' how in tarnation can she make it last that long if she wears it all the time? Use a little common sense, can't you? Besides, I'll thank you not to stick your nose in my family affairs any—"

"What's that you got in your pocket?" demanded Anderson, indicating the bulging sides of the deacon's overcoat.

"None of your business!"

"Now, don't you get hot. I ask you again, civil as possible,— what you got in your pocket?"

"I'm a respectable, tax-paying, church-going citizen of this here town, and I won't put up with any of your cussed insinuations," snapped the deacon. "You act as if I'd stole something. You—"

"I ain't accusin' you of stealin' anything. I'm only accusin' you of havin' something in your pocket. No harm in that, is there?"

The deacon hesitated for a minute. Then he made a determined effort to temporize.

"And what's more," he said, "my wife's hat's comin' back into style before long, anyhow. It's just as I keep on tellin' her. The styles kinder go in circles, an' if she waits long enough they'll get back to the kind she's wearin', and then she'll

be the first woman in Tinkletown to have the very up-to-datest style in hats,— 'way ahead of anybody else,— and it will be as good as new, too, you bet, after the way she's been savin' it."

"Now I know why you got your pockets stuffed full of things,— eggs, maybe, or hick'ry nuts, or—whatever it is you got in 'em. It's because you're tryin' to save a piece of wrappin' paper or a bag, or the wear and tear on a basket. No wonder you got so much money you don't know how to spend it."

"And as for me gettin' a new suit of clothes," pursued the deacon, doggedly, "if times don't get better the chances are I'll have to be buried in the suit I got on this minute. I never knowed times to be so hard—"

The marshal interrupted him. "You go in an' pay up what you owe fer the Banner an' I'll wait here till you come out."

Deacon Rank appeared to reflect. "Come to think of it, I guess I'll stop in on my way back from the post office. Ten or fifteen minutes—"

He stopped short, a fixed intent look in his sharp little eyes. His gaze was directed past Anderson's head at some object down the street. Then, quite abruptly and without even the ceremony of a hasty "good-bye," he bolted into the Banner office, slamming the door in the marshal's face.

"Well, I'll be dog-goned!" burst from the lips of the astonished Mr. Crow. "I never knowed him to change his mind so quick as that in all my life,— or so often. What the dickens—"

Indignation succeeded wonder at this instant, cutting off his audible reflections. Snapping his jaws together, he laid a resolute hand on the doorknob. Just as he turned it and was on the point of stamping in after the deacon, his eye fell upon an approaching figure— the figure of a woman. If it had not been for the hat she was wearing, he would have failed to recognize her at once. But there was no mistaking the hat.

"Hi!" called out the wearer of the too familiar object. Marshal Crow let go of the door knob and stared at the lady in sheer stupefaction.

Mrs. Rank's well-preserved hat was perched rakishly at a perilous angle over one ear. A subsequent shifting to an even more precarious position over the other ear, as the result of a swift, inaccurate sweep of the lady's hand, created an instant impression that it was attached to her drab, disordered hair by means of a new-fangled but absolutely dependable magnet. Never before had Marshal Crow seen that ancient hat so much as the fraction of an inch out of "plumb" with the bridge of Mrs. Rank's undeviating nose.

She approached airily. Her forlorn little person was erect, even soldierly. Indeed, if anything, she was a shade too erect at times. At such times she appeared to be in some danger of completely forgetting her equilibrium. She stepped high, as the saying is, and without her usual precision. In a word, the meek and retiring wife of Deacon Rank was hilariously drunk!

Pedestrians, far and near, stopped stockstill in their tracks to gaze open-mouthed at the jaunty drudge; storekeepers peered wide-eyed and incredulous from windows and doors. If you suddenly had asked any one of them when the world was coming to an end, he would have replied without the slightest hesitation.

She bore down upon the petrified Mr. Crow.

"Is zat you, An'erson?" she inquired, coming to an uncertain stop at the foot of the steps. Where— oh, where! was the subdued, timorous voice of Sister Rank? Whose— oh, whose! were the shrill and fearless tones that issued forth from the lips of the deacon's wife?

"For the Lord's sake, Lucy,— wha— what ails you?" gasped the horrified marshal.

"Nothing ails me, An'erson. Nev' fel' better'n all my lipe— life. Where's my hush—hushban'?"

She brandished her right hand, and clutched in her fingers an implement that caused Anderson's eyes to almost start from his head.

"What's that you got in your hand?" he cried out.

"Thish? Thass a hashet. Don't you know whass a hashet is?"

"I— I know it's a hatchet. Lucy,— but, fer heaven's sake, what are you goin' to do with it?"

"I'm going to cut th' deacon's head off wiz it," she replied blandly.

"What!"

"Yes, shir; thass what I'm goin' cut off. Right smack off, An'erson,— and you can't stop me, unnerstan', An'erson. I been wannin' cuttiz 'ead off f'r twenny-fi' year. I—"

"Hey! Stop wavin' that thing around like that, Lucy Rank!"

"You needen be 'fraid, An'erson. I woulden hurt you fer whole United States. Where's my hussam, An'erson?"

Marshal Crow looked hopelessly at the well-scattered witnesses who were taking in the scene from a respectful distance. Obviously it was his duty to do something. Not that he really felt that the deacon's head should not be cut off by his long-suffering wife, but that it was hardly the proper thing for her to do it in public. Virtually every man in Tinkletown had declared, at one time or another, that Mrs. Rank ought to slit the old skinflint's throat, or poison him, or set fire to him, or something of the sort, but, even though he agreed with them, the fact still remained that Marshal Crow considered it his duty to protect the deacon in this amazing crisis.

"Gimme that hatchet, Lucy Rank," he commanded, with authority. "You ain't yourself, an' you know it. You gimme that hatchet an' then lemme take you home an' put you to bed. You'll be all right in the mornin', an—"

"Didden my hussam go in the Blammer ossif minute ago?" she demanded, fixing a baleful glare upon the closed door.

"See here, Lucy, you been drinkin'. You're full as a goat. You gimme that—"

"An'erson Crow, are you tryin' inshult me?" she demanded, drawing herself up. "Wha' you mean sayin' I'm dunk,— drump? You know I never touched dropper anything. I'm the bes' frien' your wife's got innis town an' she— who's 'at lookin' out zat winner? Zat my hussam?"

Before the marshal could interfere, she blazed away at one of the windows in the Banner office. There was a crash of glass. She was now empty-handed but the startled guardian of the peace was slow to realize it. He was still trying to convince himself that it was the gentle, long-suffering Mrs. Rank who stood before him.

Suddenly, to his intense dismay, she threw her arms around his neck and began to weep—and wail.

"I— I— love my hussam,— I love my hussam,— an' I didden mean cuttiz 'ead off— I didden— I didden, An'erson. My hussam's dead. My hussam's head's all off,— an' I love my hussam— I love my hussam."

The door flew open and Harry Squires strode forth.

"What the devil does this mean— My God! Mrs. Rank! Wha— what's the matter with her, Anderson?"

The marshal gazed past him into the office. His eyes were charged with apprehension.

"Where— where's the deacon's head?" he gulped.

The editor did not hear him. He had eyes and ears only for the mumbling creature who dangled limply from the marshal's neck; her face was hidden but her hat was very much in evidence. It was bobbing up and down on the back of her head.

"Let's get her into the office," he exclaimed. "This is dreadful, Anderson,— shocking!"

A moment later the door closed behind the trio,— and a key was turned in the lock. This was the signal for a general advance of all observers. Headed by Mr. Hawkins, the undertaker, they swarmed up the steps and crowded about the windows. The thoughtful Mr. Squires, however, conducted Mrs. Rank to the composing-room and the crowd was cheated.

Bill Smith, the printer, looked up from his case and pied half of the leading editorial. He proved to be a printer of the old school. After a soft, envious whistle he remarked:

"My God, I'd give a month's pay for one like that," and any one who has ever come in contact with an old-time printer will know precisely what he meant.

"Oh, my poor b'loved hussam," murmured Mrs. Rank. "My poor b'loved hussam whass I have endured f'r twenty-fi' years wiz aller Chrissen forcitude of— where is my poor hussam?"

She swept the floor with a hazy, uncertain look. Not observing anything that looked like a head, she turned a bleary, accusing eye upon Bill Smith, the printer, and there is no telling what she might have said to him if Harry Squires had not intervened.

"Sit down here, Mrs. Rank,— do. Your husband is all right. He was here a few minutes ago, and— which way did he go, Bill?"

"Out," said Bill laconically, jerking his head in the direction of an open window at the rear.

"Didden— didden I cuttiz 'ead off?" demanded Mrs. Rank.

"Not so's you'd notice it," said Bill.

"Well, 'en, whose 'ead did I c'off?"

"Nobody's, my dear lady," said Squires, soothingly. "Everything's all right,— quite all right. Please—"

"Where's my hashet? Gimme my hashet. I insiss on my hashet. I gotter cuttiz 'ead off. Never ress in my grave till I cuttiz 'ead off."

Presently they succeeded in quieting her. She sat limply in an arm-chair, brought from the front office, and stared pathetically up into the faces of the three perspiring men.

"Can you beat it?" spoke Harry Squires to the beaddled marshal.

"Where do you suppose she got it?" muttered Anderson, helplessly. "Maybe she had a toothache or something and took a little brandy—"

"Not a bit of it," said Harry. "She's been hitting old man Rank's stock of hard cider, that's what she's been doing."

"Impossible! He's our leadin' church-member. He ain't got any hard cider. He's dead-set ag'inst intoxicatin' liquors. I've heard him say it a hundred times."

"Well, just ask her," was Harry's rejoinder.

Mr. Crow drew a stool up beside the unfortunate lady and sat down.

"What have you been drinking, Lucy?" he asked gently, patting her hand.

"You're a liar," said Mrs. Rank, quite distinctly. This was an additional shock to Anderson. The amazing potency of strong drink was here being exemplified as never before in the history of Time. A sober Lucy Rank would no more have called any one a liar than she would have cursed her Maker. Such an expression from the lips of the meek and down-trodden martyr was unbelievable,— and the way she said it! Not even Pat Murphy, the coal-wagon driver, with all his years of practice, could have said it with greater distinctness,— not even Pat who possessed the masculine right to amplify the behest with expletives not supposed to be uttered except in the presence of his own sex.

"She'll be swearing next," said Bill Smith, after a short silence. "I couldn't stand that," he went on, taking his coat from a peg in the wall.

Mr. Squires took the lady in hand.

"If you will just be patient for a little while, Mrs. Rank, Bill will go out and find your husband and bring him here at once. In the meantime, I will see that your hatchet is sharpened up, and put in first-class order for the sacrifice. Go on, Bill. Fetch the lady's husband." He winked at the departing Bill. "We've got to humour her," he said in an aside to Anderson. "These hard-cider jags are the worst in the world. The saying is that a quart of hard cider would start a free-for-all fight in heaven. Excuse me, Mrs. Rank, while I fix your nice new hat for you. It isn't on quite straight— and it's such a pretty hat, isn't it?"

Mrs. Rank squinted at him for a moment in doubtful surprise, and then smiled.

"My hussam tol' you to shay that," said she, shaking her finger at him.

"Not at all,— not at all! I've always said it, haven't I, Anderson? Say yes, you old goat!" (He whispered the last, and the marshal responded nobly.) "Now, while we are waiting for Mr. Rank, perhaps you will tell us just why you want to cut his head off today. What has the old villain been up to lately?"

She composed herself for the recital. The two men looked down at her with pity in their eyes.

"He d'sherted me today,— abon— abonimably d'sherted me. For'n Missionary S'ciety met safternoon at our house. All ladies in S'ciety met our house. Deac'n tol' me be generous— givvem all the r'fressmens they wanted. He went down shellar an' got some zat shider he p'up lash Marsh. He said he wanted to shee whezzer it was any good." She paused, her brow wrinkled in thought. "Lesh see— where was I?"

"In the parlour?" supplied Anderson, helpfully.

She shook her head impatiently. "I mean where was I talkin' 'bout? Oh, yesh,— 'bout shider. When Woman For'n Missinary S'ciety come I givvem shider,— lots shider. No harm in shider, An'erson,— so don' look like that. Deacon shays baby could drink barrel shider an— and sho on an' sho forth. Well, For'n Missinary S'ciety all havin' splennid time,—singin' 'n' prayin' 'n' sho on 'n' sho forth, an'— an' sho on 'n' sho forth. Then your wife, An'erson, she jumps up 'n' shays we gotter have shong-shervice,— reg'ler shong shervice. She—"

"My wife?" exclaimed Anderson. "Was Eva Crow there?"

"Shert'nly. Never sho happy 'n' her life. Couldn't b'lieve my eyes 'n' ears. And Sister Jones too,— your bosh's wife, Misser Squires. Say, d'you ever know she could shing bass? Well, she can, all right. She c'n shing bass an' tenor'n ev'thing else, she can. She—"

"Where— where are they now?" demanded Anderson, with a wild look at Harry.

"Who? The Woman For'n Missionary S'ciety?"

"Yes. For heaven's sake, don't tell me they're loose on the street!"

"Not mush! Promished me they wait till I capshered my hussam, deader 'live, an' bring 'im 'ome. Didden I tell you my hussam desherted me? He desherted all of us— all of For'n Missinary S'ciety. I gotter bring 'im back, deader 'live. Wannim to lead in shong shervice. My hussam's got loudes' voice in town. Leads shingin' in chursh 'n' prayer meetin' 'n' ever 'where else. Loudes' voice in town, thass what he is. Prays loudes' of anybody, too. All ladies waitin' up my house f'r loudes voice in town to lead 'em in shacred shong. Muss have somebody with loud voice to lead 'em. Lass I heard of 'em they was all shingin' differen' shongs. Loudes' voice— lou'st voich— lou—"

She slumbered.

The marshal and the editor looked at each other.

"Well, she's safe for the time being," said the latter, wiping his wet forehead.

"An' so's the deacon," added Anderson. "See here, Harry, I got to hustle up to the deacon's house an' see what c'n be done with them women. My lordy! The town will be disgraced if they get out on the street an'— why, like as not, they'll start a parade or somethin'. You stay here an' watch her, an' I'll—"

"No, you don't, my friend," broke in Harry gruffly. "You get her out of this office as quickly as you can."

"Are you afraid to be left alone with that pore, helpless little woman?" demanded Anderson. "I'll take her hatchet away with me, if that's what you're afraid of."

"If you'd been attending to your job as a good, competent official of this benighted town, the poor, helpless little woman wouldn't be in the condition she's in now. You—"

"Hold on there! What do you mean by that?"

"I mean this, Mr. Shellback Holmes. A dozen people in this town have been buying up apples and grinding them and making cider of them as fast as they could cask it ever since last January. Making it right under your nose, and this is the first you've seen of it. There's enough hard cider in Tinkletown at this minute to pickle an army. See those bottles over there under Bill's stool? Well, old Deacon Rank left 'em there because he was afraid he'd bust 'em when he made his exit through that window. He told Bill Smith he could keep them, if he would assume his indebtedness to this office,— two dollars and a quarter,—and he also told Bill that he could guarantee that it was good stuff! We've got visible proof of it here, and we also know how the damned old rascal went about testing the quality of his wares. He has tried it out on the most highly respected ladies in town, that's what he's done,— and why? Because it was the cheapest way to do it. He didn't have to waste more than a quart on the whole bunch of 'em. Sure fire stuff! And there are barrels of it in this town, Mr. Shellback

Holmes, waiting to be converted into song. Now, the first thing you've got to do is to take this unfortunate result of prohibition home and put her to bed."

Anderson sat down heavily.

"My sakes, Harry,— I— I— why, this is turrible! My wife drunk, an'— an'— Mrs. Jones, an' Mrs. Nixon, an'—"

"Yes, sir," said Harry heartlessly; "they probably are lit up like the sunny side of the moon, and what's more, my friend, if they do take it into their poor, beaddled heads to go out and paint the town, there won't be any stopping 'em. Hold on! Didn't you hear what I said about the case in hand? You take her home, do you hear?"

"But— how am I to get her home? I— I can't carry her through the streets," groaned the harassed marshal.

"Hire an automobile, or a delivery-wagon, or— what say?"

"I was just sayin' that maybe I could get Lem Hawkins to loan me his hearse."

Mr. Squires put his hand over his mouth and looked away. When he turned back to the unhappy official, his voice was gentler.

"You leave her to me, old fellow. I'll take care of her. She can stay here till after dark and I'll see that she gets home all right."

"By gosh, Harry, you're a real friend. I— I won't ferget this,— no, sir, never!"

"What are you going to do first?"

"I'm goin' to get my wife out of that den of iniquity and take her home!" said Anderson resolutely.

"Whether she's willing,— or not?"

"Don't you worry. I got that all thought out. If she won't let me take her home, I'll let on as if I'm full and then she'll insist on takin' me home."

With that he was gone.

The crowd in front of the Banner office now numbered at least a hundred. Mr. Crow stopped at the top of the steps and swiftly ran his eye over the excited throng. He was thinking hard and quite rapidly— for him. All the while the crowd was shouting questions at him, he was deliberately counting noses. Suddenly he held up his hand. There was instant, expectant silence.

"All husbands who possess wives in the Woman's Foreign Missionary Society kindly step forward. Make way there, you people,—let 'em through. This way, Newt,— an' you, Alf,— come on, Elmer K.,— I said 'wives,' Mrs. Fry, not husbands. All husbands please congregate in the alley back of the Banner office an' wait fer instructions. Don't ask questions. Just do as I tell you. Hey, you kids! Run over an' tell Mort Fryback an' Ed Higgins an' Situate M. Jones I want 'em right away,— an' George Brubaker. Tell him to lock up his store if he has to, but to come at once. Now, you women keep back! This is fer men only."

In due time a troubled, anxious group of men sallied forth from the alley back of the Banner office, and, headed by Anderson Crow, marched resolutely down Sickle Street to Maple and advanced upon the house of Deacon Rank.

The song service was in full blast. The men stopped at the bottom of the yard and listened with sinking hearts.

"That's my wife," said Elmer K. Pratt, the photographer, a bleak look in his eyes. "She knows that tune by heart."

"Which tune?" asked Mort Fryback, cocking his ear.

"Why, the one she's singin'," said Elmer. "Now listen,— it goes this way." He hummed a few bars of 'The Rosary.' "Don't you get it? There! Why, you must be deef. I can't hear anything else."

"The only one I can make out is 'Tipperary.' Is that the one she's singin'?"

"Certainly not. I said it goes this way. That's somebody else you hear, Mort."

"Hear that?" cried Ed Higgins excitedly. "That's 'Sweet Alice, Ben Bolt!' My wife's favourite. My Lord, Anderson, what's to be done?"

"Keep still!" ordered Anderson. "I'm tryin' to see if I c'n make out my wife's singin'!"

"Well, we got to do somethin'," groaned Newt Spratt, whose wife was organist in the Pond Road Church. "She'll bust that piano all to smash if she keeps on like that."

"Come on, gentlemen," said Anderson, compressing his lips. "Remember now, every man selects his own wife. Every—"

"Wait a minute, Anderson," pleaded George Brubacker. "It'll take more than me to manage my wife if she gets stubborn."

"It ain't our fault if you married a woman twice as big as you are," was the marshal's stern rejoinder. "Now, remember the plan. We're just droppin' in to surprise 'em, to sort of join in the service. Don't fer the land's sake, let 'em see we're uneasy about 'em. We got to use diplomacy. Look pleasant, ever'body,— look happy. Now, then,— forward march! Laugh, dern you, Alf!"

Once more they advanced, chatting volubly, and with faces supposed to be wholly free from anxiety. The merest glance, however, would have penetrated the mask of unconcern. Every man's eye belied his lips.

"I make a motion that we tar an' feather Deacon Rank," said Newt Spratt, as the foremost neared the porch.

Anderson halted them abruptly.

"I want to warn you men right now, that I'm going to search all the cellars in town tomorrow, so you might as well be prepared to empty all your cider into Smock's Crick. You don't need to say you ain't got any on hand. I've been investigatin' for several weeks, an' I want to tell you right here an' now that I've got every cask an' every bottle of hard cider in Tinkletown spotted. I know what's become of every derned apple that was raised in this township last year."

Dead silence followed this heroic speech. Citizens looked at each other, and Situate M. Jones might have been heard to mutter something about "an all-seeing Providence."

Ed Higgins lamely explained that he had "put up a little for vinegar," but Anderson merely smiled.

The front door of the house flew open and several of the first ladies of Tinkletown crowded into view. An invisible choir was singing the Doxology.

"Hello, boys!" called out Mrs. Jones, cheerily. "Come right in! Where's zat nice old deacon?"

"Been waiting for him for nawful long time," said Mrs. Pratt. "Couldn't wait any louder,— I mean longer."

"You had it right the first time," said her husband.

"Just in time for Doxology," called out Mrs. Jones. "Then we're all going down town to hol' open-air temp-rance meet-meeting."

LATE THAT evening, Marshal Crow mounted the steps leading to Dr. Brown's office and rang the bell. He rang it five or six times without getting any response. Then he opened the door and walked in. The doctor was out. On a table inside the door lay the slate on which people left word for him to come to their houses as soon as he returned. The Marshal put on his glasses and took up the pencil to write. One side of the slate was already filled with hurried scribbling. He squinted and with difficulty made out that Dr. Brown was wanted immediately at the homes of Situate M. Jones, Abbie Nixon, Newton Spratt, Mort Fryback, Professor Rank, Rev. Maltby and Joseph P. Singer. He sighed and shook his head sadly. Then he moistened a finger and erased the second name on the list, that of Mrs. Abbie Nixon.

"Husbands first," he muttered in justification of his action in substituting the following line:

"Come at once. A. Crow, Marshal of Tinkletown."

Compunction prevailed, however. He wrote the word "over" at the bottom and, turning the slate over, cleared his conscience by jotting down Mrs. Nixon's "call" at the top of the reverse side. Replacing it on the table, he went away. Virtue was its own reward in this instance at least, for the worthy marshal neglected to put the slate down as he had found it. Mrs. Nixon's "call" alone was visible.

He set out to find Harry Squires. That urbane gentleman was smoking his reportorial corn-cob in the rear of Lamson's store. Except for Lamson's clerk, who had seized the rare opportunity to delve uninterruptedly into the mysteries of the latest "Nick Carter," the store was empty. The usual habitues were absent.

"Did you get her home?" inquired Anderson in a low, cautious tone.

"I did," said Harry.

"See anything of the deacon?"

"No; but Bill Smith did. Bill saw him down at the crick an hour or so ago, knocking in the heads of three or four barrels. Do you know what I've been thinking, Anderson? If somebody would only empty a barrel or so of olive oil into Smock's Crick before morning, we'd have the foundation for the largest supply of French dressing ever created in the history of the world."

Mr. Crow looked scandalized. "Good gosh, Harry, ain't we had enough scandal in this here town today without addin' anything French to it?"

The only moral to be attached to this story lies in the brief statement that Mrs. Crow's indisposition, slight in duration though it was, so occupied Mr. Crow's attention that by the time he was ready to begin his search the second night after the song service, there wasn't so much as a pint of hard cider to be found in Tinkletown. This condition was due in a large measure, no doubt, to the fact that Smock's Creek is an unusually swift little stream. It might even be called turbulent.

2: At Jealousy's Urge

Scott Campbell

1858-1933

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ONLY by the skin of his teeth had Carney found cover in time to elude them—one a stalwart patrolman of the Dayton City police, the other Detective Tom Lannon of the State force, between whom and Jimmie Carney there was no friendly affiliation. He knew the police were seeking him, that his description was in the hands of every county sheriff and town constable in the State. Carney had been released from the penitentiary only eight days, after serving three years for highway robbery. He would have been rearrested at the prison door for a previous burglary on an indictment by the Sanford County Court, save that a railway accident had delayed Detective Lannon in a locality from which he could not communicate with the prison warden, who was not then informed of the circumstances.

Jimmie Carney knew all about it. He had resolved not to be taken alive, that he would never return to a prison cell. Just why he had become a crook is not here important. Nor why, while still under thirty, he was branded by the police as a bad man and a very dangerous criminal. But the line of demarkation between the good and bad in a man is sometimes very sharply defined.

He breathed easier after a moment, crouching back of a high boxwood hedge inclosing the rear grounds of the elegant home of Doctor Harvey Warner, a wealthy and prominent young physician. The gleam of fear and desperation in his frowning eyes was dispelled by a look of relief.

"They didn't see me," he muttered, still watching them. "It's dead lucky I saw them turning the corner. But Lannon must have got a line on me in some way, blast the heartless dick, or he wouldn't be in this locality nosing around with a harness bull. They're looking for me, all right, but are heading the wrong way. Keep going, hang you!"

Carney's impulse was to flee for safety. For eight days he had been skulking in back roads and lonely woods, his only shelter a barn or shed, living like a tramp and looking like one in his shabby, stolen garments. A stubby black beard accentuated the prison pallor in his thin face. He felt sure he had not been seen. He turned from the hedge and got a whiff of the sweet odor from a bed of cinnamon pinks near by. It reminded him of something. He picked one to smell of, and his lips twitched and took a less sinister curve. The place impressed him with its quietude and seclusion of the inclosed grounds, and the beautiful garden, gorgeous with June flowers. He glanced at the house to be sure there was no observer. The window shades were down, and a white card on the back door caught his eye. He approached stealthily and read it.

"*Out of town. Leave no milk or ice until Tuesday morning*."

He brightened up wondrously. It looked good to him, that card, and all it signified. It told him that the house was left unoccupied over the week-end, that both the family and servants were to be absent. He had been wondering where he could spend Sunday, how to find food and shelter, but the problem no longer baffled him.

Carney forced a basement window and entered the house. He heard only the ticking of a clock when he went up to the main hall. It struck five while he paused and listened, and then made himself entirely at home. The elegance of it impressed him. He envied the owner.

Suddenly he saw himself in a mirror and felt out of place. He shrank, venting a growl of disgust, and hastened to find the bathroom. Then he bathed and shaved. He omitted no detail in his elaborate toilet. He had a streak of the esthetic in his very complex nature. He clad himself in the finest underwear and linen, a stylish cravat, and the most fashionable suit to be found in the young physician's wardrobe. All this transfigured him. A French valet could not have wrought a more complete metamorphosis.

"Guess this guy must be about my build," he said musingly, while he drew on patent leather shoes over silk hose, "Not so bad!" he told himself, when the mirror reflected the amazing change. "You're some classy, Jimmie Carney, after all. Even that lynx-eyed dick, Tom Lannon, wouldn't know me. All dressed up and no place to go," he said, jesting grimly. "I reckon I'll dig down to the butler's pantry."

Jimmie Carney kicked his discarded garments under a bed. He found food in a refrigerator and satisfied his hunger. He sauntered into the dining room and saw a decanter of liquor on the sideboard. He eyed it for a moment, lips pursed, but turned away. Then he strolled through several elegant rooms, superbly furnished, and imagined he owned them. It afforded him singular enjoyment. For two days at least he could feel that he did own them.

But a moment later his air castle crumbled. His train of thought was sidetracked by a photograph on the library mantel. It was that of a child about two years old. He took it and sat down in an armchair to look at it. His pallid countenance went grave while he gazed at the sweet young face, and his eyes grew dim and misty. He drew his hand across them, hesitating, then put the picture in his pocket. His tense nerves had relaxed. He felt tired and drowsy. He gazed vacantly at the floor, thinking, yawning, and hearing only the monotonous ticking of the clock, and presently his luxurious comfort and the surrounding elegance faded and were gone. But in slumber, even, the keen senses of a hounded crook are instinctively alert.

Carney was aroused by a sudden giare of light. It vanished instantly— The room was dark, and he heard the grinding of gravel in the driveway and the

quick click of a clutch lever. He sprang up and stole to a window, fearful that Lannon had traced him, that he already was hopelessly cornered. Stars were shining. A big touring car was in the porte-cochére. A man and woman were about to enter the side door of the house, and Carney hurried across the hall to hide in the parlor. Just then a key was turned in the lock, and he heard the voice of the woman.

"Be careful. No noise, Sadler, and only a dim light in the library," she said hurriedly. Her subdued voice, tense with suppressed nervousness and agitation, betrayed that their mission was not an ordinary one. "I would be ruined, hopelessly ruined, Sadler, if we were discovered. If the car should be—"

"Impossible. The lights are out. It cannot be seen from the street," he interrupted. "Remember, too, that we are using a hired car. I'm not known at the garage. I gave a fictitious name.

Whoever saw Mrs. Harvey Warner riding with her chauffeur save in her own limousine?" he pointedly asked her. "No one will suspect. This light cannot be seen. The shades are closely drawn."

He was an erect, well-poised man of twenty-five, with a smooth shaved, impressive face and calm, inscrutable gray eyes. Carney detected a subtle slyness in them, however, a gleam of covert assurance not quite to his liking, and he was startled by the exquisite beauty of his companion, She was a slender, graceful girl of twenty-two, with a very winsome expression and features denoting a sympathetic and very sensitive nature, quickly moved and easily influenced.

"I am appalled by what I am doing," she said nervously, gazing around the lighted library.

"But you can turn back," Sadler said calmly. "It is not too late."

"You know it's too late." She flashed a quick, agonized glance at him. "You have poisoned my mind with heart-racking doubts and suspicions," she said bitterly. "I must know the truth. I cannot endure this terrible uncertainty. If we are discovered

"I am prepared." Sadler displayed a pistol. "Believe me, Mrs. Warner, I will silence any intruder."

"Not that! Don't think of using it." She shrank from him, shuddering. "We must hasten. We may be missed at the farm." She referred to a suburban place owned by her husband, which they quite often visited.

"We came here in twenty minutes," Sadler said, reminding her. 'We can return as quickly. Doctor Warner will not leave his bridge game at the club before midnight. I room in the stable. The house servants will not miss me. We can return before ten o'clock."

"Providing you. can open the safe quickly."

"The safe!" Carney felt a momentary thrill of elation. "They've come here to open it."

"Given two numbers of a combination, Mrs. Warner, the third may easily be found—if one knows' how," Sadler told her.

"I know nothing about it," she replied. She was very pale, and trembling nervously. "I am compelled to rely upon you."

"And I will not fail you. You say you have learned the first and last numbers of the combination."

"That is all I could accomplish, I am horrified when I think of the terrible trickery by which I discovered them."

"You mean—"

"That which you advised. Pretending I was reading, seated with my face turned from the safe, I used a small mirror to watch my husband open it. If he knew, or even suspected— oh, oh, he never would forgive me."

"Just the fact that he will not confide the combination to you seems to justify the step you are taking," Sadler said smoothly. He was dignified and very polite, very convincing because of his subtle suavity and apparent lack of any sinister motive. He had been Doctor Warner's chauffeur about a year, and he soon had discovered not only that Sybil Warner was abnormally jealous of her husband, but also how he might artfully take advantage of it. "What are the two numbers, Mrs. Warner?" he inquired.

"Wait!" She hesitated, shrinking again, with the last vestige of color fading from her cheeks. "I am doing terribly wrong. I am frightened, overwhelmed when I realize it. He would never, never forgive me! Not even for the sake of our little one!" she said, wringing her hands. "If you are mistaken, Sadler, or— or have dared to deceive me—"

"Deceive you! Let us return to the farm." Sadler drew himself up. "You misjudge me. You think tardily of such contingencies," he said coldly. "What have I to gain by deceiving you? I am not mistaken. I know I am right, that positive evidence of his duplicity is locked in the safe. But if you have changed your mind, Mrs. Warner, and prefer not to see for yourself, we will leave at once ,

"Not till I know the truth." She stopped him with a quick, impatient gesture, then drew aside a panei in the wainscot and exposed the face of a safe set in the wall. "Open it, Sadler, as quickly as you can," she cried. "I will see for myself. Open it for me. There are two numbers of the combination."

Sadler glanced at a scrap of paper she hurriedly gave him. Only a momentary gleam in his narrowed eyes, a leer in the corners of his thin-lipped mouth, betrayed the secret exultation with which he finally obtained the information he wanted.

Jimmie Carney was watching him. His crouching form was a mere blur of deeper black in the gloom in the parlor. He was hearing all, seeing all, missing not one detail of the absorbing drama, but his gaze was chiefly fixed on Mrs, Sybil Warner. He had never seen such a look of mingled distress, despair, and desperation on a woman's face. His own was strangely set and white when Sadler, after putting on gloves, turned to the safe— and placed his pistol near him.

"Not to be caught napping." Carney's lips tightened and took a more threatening slant. "Nor leaving a finger print. A clever crook and a cruel rascal, that smooth guy, if there ever was one."

Sybil Warner sat down and watched his deft manipulation of the combination dial. Many times she saw him try and fail to find the needed number. Twenty minutes passed and the silence was broken only by the smooth whirl and occasional quiet click of the dial. The girl grew deathly pale. When her object was about to be attained, but not until then, did she fully realize the gravity of her conduct. A look of indecision, of growing regret, of increasing, heart-sickening remorse crept into her face. She shivered, shuddered, and when Sadler finally succeeded and was opening the heavy door, she uttered a frantic, irrepressible cry and hastened to stop him,

"Wait— wait! Don't open it!" she cried in hurried protest. "I've changed my mind. I won't do it. Close the safe. Close and lock it."

"Stop! Sadler turned and took his pistol. "You have gone too far, Mrs. Warner, to change your mind. You will do what I direct— when you know the truth."

"The truth—"

"It's not what you have feared," Sadler curtly told her. His voice had gone flinty. His face wore an' expression from which she shrank in sudden dread and dismay. "Sit down. Wait till I'm ready to tell you," he commanded. "It won't be long."

He ignored her distress. He took a jewel case from the safe, and from it a rope of costly pearls, a diamond necklace and pendant, several rings, a valuable brooch, and other costly pieces, and then from the safe a quantity of Liberty bonds and a package of bank notes, all of which he quickly put' in his pocket.

"That's all there is to it, Mrs. Warner." Sadler turned and took off his gloves. "I see you begin to realize it, also your own egregious folly," he told her with almost brutal frankness. "The safe contains nothing detrimental to the very fine character of Doctor Warner. I have deceived you only to get his bonds and your own very valuable jewels."

"You have done this only— only for robbery!" She stared at him as if dazed.

"For nothing else," Sadler said bluntly. "I needed your ajd to learn the combination. Don't blame me. Every crook has his own methods. I took the

most feasible, the line of least resistance." He laughed softly in his cold and cynical fashion. "You're a very fine woman, Mrs. Warner, but you're much too sensitive, as credulous as a child, and absurdly, unreasonably jealous. I suppose it's inherent, and you can't help it."

"So you took advantage of it to deceive me." She gazed steadily at him. She appeared as if a sudden strange calm had fallen upon her, but her fair, girlish face was frightfully pale; her dry, glittering eyes reflecting remorse and anguish too poignant for tears, too terrible for words.

"Exactly," Sadler replied. "That's all there is to it."

"I admit that since my marriage I have been the victim of a foolish, ungovernable jealousy. You have taken advantage of it. You have outrageously wronged and deceived me," she said, bitterly accusing him. "You began with vague hints, which I at first ignored, then foolishly considered and finally brooded over, not suspecting you. Is there any spark of manliness in you?" she asked. "You were so artful that instead of resenting your outrageous presumption, I became an easy victim to your subtle guile."

"True." Sadler laughed again. "Really, Mrs. Warner, you were quite an easy mark. But you will not be suspected," he told her with unblushing assurance, "I planned the robbery very carefully. I have left no finger prints. It will pass for a burglary. We will leave the safe wide open. The police will say some clever crook got into the house and worked on the safe till he found the combination. They will never suspect the truth. We will now return to the farm. You will reveal nothing. I will retain my chauffeur's job for a time, and then resign and go about my business. That's all there is to it," he reeated. "The truth will never be known, or even suspected."

"You are mistaken." Mrs. Warner drew up a little and tried to govern her distress. "I shall confess the whole truth to my husband."

"Oh, no, you won't," Sadler said, sneering derisively. "Could you make a greater mistake? Consider your deception and the part you have played with me in this crime. You have only one wise course. You will say nothing, and let me keep the bonds and jewels. You have no sane alternative. We waste time." He digressed abruptly. "Let's return to the farm."

Mrs. Warner did not reply. She shrank from him, shuddering, and turned toward the door.

Sadler took his pistol and followed her. He kept the weapon in his hand. He paused at the door and gazed after her, smiling confidently, and then snapped out the light. It was ten o'clock when he arrived with her at the farm. He stopped the dark touring car in a lane fifty yards back of the house. Only a vague outline of the dwelling and the stable could be seen through the intervening trees.

He watched her hasten toward the house. She left him without speaking, with a look of utter despair on her drawn, white face. He felt sure she would not expose him, that she would suffer in silence the loss of the bonds and jewels. He decided to hide them in the stable before returning the car to its owner. He went to his room and lighted an oil lamp, then placed his pistol on a shelf and approached a table to take his plunder from his pocket. A board in the floor creaked slightly. He turned, as quick as a flash, and found himself confronting—Jimmie Carney.

ii

THE FINE clothes that Carney wore were gray with dust, his head bare, his linen soiled and wrinkled. There was a smudge of black on his cheek, a ragged scratch on his right wrist, and a red smear on the cuff protruding from his sleeve, while he covered Sadler with the pistol which he had seized from the shelf where the chauffeur had placed it. But Sadler saw chiefly the fierce, threatening expression on Carney's face, his fiery eyes and twitching lips, drawn like those of a dog about to bite.

"Good heavens!" he exclaimed, drawing back with a look of dismay. "Who the deuce are you? How came you here? What do you want?" he asked rapidly.

"You rat! You contemptible cur!" Carney's voice quivered with pent-up passion. "You sketch and outline of a man, I'll tell you what I want— not many words with you!"

"See here!"

"I'm here all right," Carney said vehemently. "I've got the gun now, and have you where I want you. Come across with the stuff,' he commanded.

"What stuff?" Sadler questioned. He could not believe his crime had been discovered, and that he had been followed from Dayton. "I don't know what you mean by i

"Can that! You may blind and dupe an unsuspecting girl with your treacherous tongue; but you can't get by me with a lie. I know what came off tonight. I saw what you did, heard all you said to her, You're a snake, a crawling, sneaking reptile, if there ever was one. You had the gun then, and I had to lie low, but what you told her showed me the way. Your spare tire and its iron frame was good enough for me to ride on. Come across!" he repeated fiercely, while he jabbed the pistol with sudden energy against his hearer's waist. "Put that stuff on the table. Be quick about it, too, or you'll not have time to wish you did."

Sadler, his courage oozing out, staggered and fell to trembling. He obeyed, staring with increasing fear and dismay at Carney's threatening face, while he placed the bonds, bank notes, and jewels upon the table.

"Now back up and sit down." Carney pointed to a chair and seized a piece of rope which he had quickly found in the stable and brought up to Sadler's room before the latter entered. "Hands behind you. Not a word, or I'll silence you in a way you'll not fancy."

Jimmie Carney meant it. He was entirely capable of it. He tied Sadler securely to the chair, working as if in desperate haste, and then he put the stolen property in his pockets. A pencil and a few sheets of paper on the table caught his eye. He gazed at them for a moment, then took the pencil and a single sheet and hurried out of the stable. He returned in about ten minutes. He entered as hastily as he had left, with the same fierce, threatening gleam in his frowning eyes. He quickly liberated Sadler, and with the pistol at his back, he marched him out to the touring car.

"Take me to Dayton," he commanded, thrusting the cringing chauffeur into his seat in the car. "Drive as fast as you came here."

"But—"

"Dry up!" Carney vented a wolfish snarl. "There aren't any buts. Do what you're told and keep your mouth shut. I hate to talk with you."

Jimmie Carney took the rear seat. Now and then as a threatening reminder he prodded Sadler in the back with the pistol. But not until the lights of the city came into view did he speak to him again.

"Stop here," he said sharply. "Stop here and get out."

And Sadler obeyed and stood with him in a lonely, deserted street near a fashionable outskirt. There was an expression on Carney's face no man could forget, or would venture to ignore.

"Now, you cowardly cur, listen to me," he said sternly. "I'll not send you to prison, as you seem to fear. I know what that means. A prison term wouldn't make a man of you, or maybe of any other. Instead, I'm going to let you go. But— listen!" He came closer to Sadler, his eyes glowing, his voice vibrant with threatening severity. "You beat it! I know you'll not reveal your own crime. But if you return to these parts, or by word or deed molest that girl again, I'll not sleep nights until I've found and sent you up for this contemptible robbery. Now, you beat it! Get across the State line as fast as you can, and go as far as you can. That's all! Beat it!"

Sadler's white face wore a look of relief. He did not venture to question, or even reply. He turned quickly and entered the car, then drove rapidly away.

Jimmie. Carney, after watching the receding car till its red rear light vanished around the corner, drew a deep breath and gazed up for several moments at the night sky. His features softened, and a kindlier light came into his eyes. The glittering stars looked good to him. And only the stars saw him enter the city, stealthily seeking the darker side of the streets, the shelter of shade trees,

stealing on and on close to fences and hedges, until a clock on a church tower struck eleven. He stole into the rear grounds of the Warner residence.

Carney breathed easier again. He paused briefly. He crouched to smell of a cinnamon pink in a flower bed near the wall. Then he went on quickly and entered the basement window he had forced several hours before. It was-on the opposite side of the house from the library. It was dark in the basement, and he had no match, but he remembered where the stairs were located. He stumbied noisily over a box, but he felt no alarm. He was sure the house was unoccupied. He laughed softly and groped his way up to the hall and into the library, where he snapped on the light.

He found things as they had been left when he crept out to the touring car when Sadler and Sybil Warner left the house. He shook the dust from his clothing, wiped the smudge of black from his cheek, and the red smear from his wrist. Then he sat down and took the bonds and bank notes and jewels from his pocket. He admired them for a time. They looked good to him and tempted him, the stolen string of pearls and the radiant diamonds. They looked good to him, indeed—but—

He recalled, too, the picture of a child with curls and a sweet young face, and he took it from his pocket. He found it bent and crushed by the pressure of the spare tire to which he had clung desperately for nearly twenty miles. He felt a tinge of pain, as if the mutilation of the picture were ominous, but he replaced it in his pocket.

Carney then arose and put the bonds and bank notes into,the safe. The open jewel case was lying on the floor. Crouching to get it— with the jewels in his hand—he heard a footstep on the threshold of the hall door. He turned, starting up, and saw a policeman entering with— Detective Lannon,

"Goodness!" Carney— exclaimed, turning to meet them. Though his heart sank as if turned to lead, he instantly took a chance that he was not recognized. "How you startled me— and how came you in the house?" he asked quickly. "I didn't hear you enter. lucky one of you is in uniform, or I'd have feared I was up against crooks," he told them, forcing a laugh that was very creditable under the circumstances.

"I am an officer, too," said Lannon. He paused, gazing -straight at Carney, but his dark, strong-lined face betrayed no suspicion, "I take it you are Doctor Warner," he added,

"Oh, no!" Carney laughed again. "I'm Doctor Warner's assistant and private secretary. I've been repairing his wife's string of pearls," he explained, displaying them. "The clasp was slightly bent. The doctor and his family are at the farm until Tuesday."

"I see." Lannon nodded and appeared credulous,

"Yes, it would have been bad, indeed, to have been caught by crooks with the safe open," said Carney. "I was just replacing the jewels when you entered. But how came you in the house?" he repeated affably. '"What's the idea?"

"As a matter of fact," Lannon explained a bit dryly, "we are seeking a crook whom I traced to this locality several hours ago."

"Goodness!" said Carney. "Is that so? It's too bad you didn't get him."

"Since then I've had a cordon of officers all around the district, thinking he had found a hiding place and later would try to escape. I'm Detective Lannon, of the State force. The crook's name is Carney."

"Carney— I never heard of him."

"He's a bad egg," said Lannon. "I met Baxter, this patrolman a short time ago, and we just now discovered some damp tire tracks running across the sidewalk and entering your driveway. Baxter happened to know the Warners are away with their servants, so we had a look at the house. We found a broken window in the basement. That seemed very suspicious, so we entered quietly and came up here, thinking we might catch a thief at work."

"Ah, that explains it," said Carney, smiling. "I really was quite mystified. The window you found was broken a few days ago and ought to have been repaired by this time. But, pardon me— will you sit down?"

"Pretty good." Lannon laughed and drew up his imposing figure. "Very good, in fact, so far as it goes. But you can't get by with it. I knew you, Carney, the moment I entered the room." He took handcuffs from his pocket. "Take a friendly tip, now, and don't get gay. Baxter has a gun ready. Let me fit you with these."

Carney's eyes had a momentary gleam of desperation. He was about to take his life in his hands and try to escape. Instead, he replaced the jewels on the table, then threw back his head a bit scornfully and held out his hands.

"A friendly tip, eh?" he said bitterly. "A crook would get fat, Lannon, on a friendly tip from you. You don't know the meaning of friendliness. You're as heartless as a stone image."

"Hunting crooks of your type may have hardened me," Lannon retorted, closing the handcuffs securely. "Let's see what you have in your pockets. An automatic, eh? Where did you get it?"

"Borrowed it— without asking," Carney told him more coldly. Though he appeared sullen and indifferent, his face had gone strangely white and determined.

"Very likely. Whose picture is this?'

"Mine." Carney's brows contracted. "Whose do you think it is?"

"That's a guess. Very little you have, Carney, is really your own."

"It's not a guess, Tom," said Baxter, gazing at it. "That's Doctor Warner's little girl, Mabel. I've often seen her with him."

"Humph!" Lannon gazed more sharply at Carney's set face. "You're wearing Doctor Warner's garments, too, I judge. Fixed yourself up finely, Carney, didn't you? You took the best in his wardrobe."

"Why not?" said Carney. "He's not wearing them."

"You haven't broken the safe. How did you learn the combination?"

"That's my business. I'm not telling you all I know."

"I guess that's right," Lannon said dryly.

"You caught me committing the robbery," said Carney. "That ought to be good enough for any merciless dick."

"I think I'll find it easy to convict you," Lannon retorted. "but I want you on an indictment of the Sanford Criminal Court. You'll have this crime hanging over you while serving your time for that job. I'll take you there to-morrow. Keep an eye on him, Baxter, while I look into this a bit deeper."

Jimmie Carney said nothing. He returned with his lips closed to a prison cell, and he kept them closed. His case was not called in court, however, and he saw no more of Deteective Lannon for ten days. He then was somewhat surprised when he was ordered out one morning and taken to the office of the Sanford County district attorney, with whom he found the detective seated.

"This is the man, Baldwin," said the detective, after the officer in charge of Carney had left the room. "Sit there, Carney," he added, pointing to a chair.

Carney obeyed indifferently.

Attorney Baldwin gazed at him intently for a moment. "His case will soon come up," he said carelessly. "Have you any questions to ask?"

"Only about that Warner robbery," said Lannon. "He has refused to talk about it. Why are you so closemouthed, Carney, about that crime?" he demanded, turning to him.

"Because I have nothing to gain by talking," Carney coldly told him. "You wouldn't let up on a man, Lannon, under any circumstances."

"Were there any extenuating circumstances ?"

"None that I know of," Carney replied. "I was caught robbing the safe. How could there be any extenuating circumstances?"

"I'll tell you why I ask," said Lannon. "Your prison record, Carney, was remarkably good. I was hoping you had determined to turn over a new leaf and go straight."

"That so?" Carney eyed him narrowly. "Well, I did tell myself something like that," he admitted, and his voice quavered slightly. "There was only this Sanford case hanging over me, and I figured I might get away and not do time for that. I had resolved I wouldn't put myself in wrong again. But you had me hard pressed, Lannon, and I couldn't get away without some coin. So I took another chance and— well, that's all there was to it."

"You mean the Warner robbery?" asked Lannon, with his lips oddly pursed.

"What else would I mean? no other job."

"Then tell me, who was your pal in that crime?" Lannon asked abruptly.

"Pal?" Carney's eyes dilated. "I had no pal."

"Didn't you? We found a woman's finger prints on the safe."

"They must have been left. there earlier. There was no woman with me."

"Are you sure about that?"

"Sure about it," Carney said growlingly. "Of course I'm sure of it."

"Why did you steal the picture I found in your pocket?"

"Only because I had a fancy for it."

"And that's all you have to say about the Warner robbery, is it?" Lannon demanded.

"That's all I can say," Carney declared emphatically. "There was nothing else to it. I—"

"Stop a moment." Detective Lannon took a folded piece of paper from his pocket. "I have something here bearing on that crime. I'll read what is written on it. '*Say nothing about it. I've muzzled that scoundrel. You'll never see or hear from him again. I'll put the stuff back in the safe and close it. Say nothing. I've taken the kid's picture*.' Is that your writing, Carney?" Lannon leaned forward and held out the sheet of paper.

"Nothing doing!" Carney cried. "I know nothing about it. Where'd you find it? Where ,

"Wait." Lannon laughed. He appeared not only amused, but also very much pleased. "I guess, Baldwin, you won't make any mistake. It's well worth trying." He turned abruptly toward the door of an inner room and cried: "Come in! Come in, both of you!"

Carney swayed back in his chair and uttered a cry. Doctor Harvey Warner, a tall, handsome man of very pleasing mien, was leading his wife into the room. Her lips were quivering, and tears were rolling down her cheeks. She hurried to Carney and put her hand on his shoulder.

"What can I say for what you have done!" she cried a bit hysterically. "Here is my husband. I've told him all about it. He has always known what a weak and jealous little fool Iam. I'm sure this has cured me. I told Detective Lannon, too, the moment I heard of your-arrest. But he insisted upon waiting a week or two to see whether you really would continue to shield me and suffer for the crime of another, I hope you can be repaid for—"

"One moment!" The district attorney stopped her gravely. "Suppose I file this case against you, Carney, and let you go on probation. Do you think you can go straight?"

"Straight! I know I can. I know I will."

"I will do it, then," said Baldwin shortly.

"Good enough!" Lannon cried. He arose and held out his hand. "I'm not half so heartless, Carney, as you have thought. I am sure, too, that you're not nearly so bad as supposed. I told you how I traced you to the Warner residence. As a matter of fact, I was in the house when you returned with the jewels. I heard you stumble over something in the cellar. I put out the library light and waited to see who was entering and what would follow. I have found out. Really, Carney, you have the makings of a very fine man. Prove it in the future. I'm confident that you will. But— tell me!" Lannon's sonorous voice softened. "Just why, Carney, did you do this?"

Jimmie Carney was choked and could not speak for several moments.

"It isn't much," he said at length. "I had a wife and a little girl in the West. We had a home and a small garden where cinnamon pinks and geraniums grew. She was a bit vain, Mollie was, and I couldn't buy her all the pretty things she wanted. So I went wrong for gold, only to find that what I most wanted was not for sale. She left me after I was caught and convicted. But I've not forgotten her and the kid," Carney continued brokenly. "I couldn't let that smooth guy get away with his game. I saw her crying in the house, with her kid in her arms, after I got the jewels from him. I didn't feel like talking with her, and I feared he might get away, so I wrote that note and threw it in the window. I figured she'd be all right if the jewels were replaced in the safe. I wasn't expecting to be arrested, and since then— well, I would have gone up for the crime rather than give away her story. That's all there is to it."

"Except to reunite you and your wife and child," Lannon said roundly. "I appoint you, Mrs. Warner, to accomplish that."

"I'll do it." She turned quickly to Carney and held out her hand. "Believe me, I'll accomplish it."

And she did.

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3: The Mystery of Joseph Laquedem

Arthur Quiller-Couch

1863-1944

The Cornish Magazine July 1898

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A Jew, unfortunately slain on the sands of Sheba Cove, in the parish of Ruan Lanihale, August 15, 1810: or so much of it as is hereby related by the Rev. Endymion Trist, B.D., then vicar of that parish, in a letter to a friend.

MY DEAR J——,

—You are right, to be sure, in supposing that I know more than my neighbours in Ruan Lanihale concerning the unfortunate young man, Joseph Laquedem, and more than I care to divulge; in particular concerning his tragical relations with the girl Julia Constantine, or July, as she was commonly called. The vulgar knowledge amounts to little more than this—that Laquedem, a young Hebrew of extraordinary commercial gifts, first came to our parish in 1807 and settled here as managing secretary of a privateering company at Porthlooe; that by his aptitude and daring in this and the illicit trade he amassed a respectable fortune, and at length opened a private bank at Porthlooe and issued his own notes; that on August 15, 1810, a forced "run" which, against his custom, he was personally supervising, miscarried, and he met his death by a carbine-shot on the sands of Sheba Cove; and, lastly, that his body was taken up and conveyed away by the girl Julia Constantine, under the fire of the preventive men.

The story has even in our time received what I may call some fireside embellishments; but these are the facts, and the parish knows little beyond them. I (as you conjecture) know a great deal more; and yet there is a sense in which I know nothing more. You and I, my old friend, have come to an age when men do not care to juggle with the mysteries of another world, but knowing that the time is near when all accounts must be rendered, desire to take stock honestly of what they believe and what they do not. And here lies my difficulty. On the one hand I would not make public an experience which, however honestly set down, might mislead others, and especially the young, into rash and mischievous speculations. On the other, I doubt if it be right to keep total silence and withhold from devout and initiated minds any glimpse of truth, or possible truth, vouchsafed to me. As the Greek said, "Plenty are the thyrsus-bearers, but few the illuminate"; and among these few I may surely count my old friend.

It was in January 1807— the year of the abominable business of Tilsit— that my churchwarden, the late Mr. Ephraim Pollard, and I, in cleaning the south wall

of Lanihale Church for a fresh coat of whitewash, discovered the frescoes and charcoal drawings, as well as the brass plaque of which I sent you a tracing; and I think not above a fortnight later that, on your suggestion, I set to work to decipher and copy out the old churchwardens' accounts. On the Monday after Easter, at about nine o'clock p.m., I was seated in the Vicarage parlour, busily transcribing, with a couple of candles before me, when my housekeeper Frances came in with a visiting-card, and the news that a stranger desired to speak with me. I took the card and read "Mr. Joseph Laquedem."

"Show the gentleman in," said I.

Now the fact is, I had just then a few guineas in my chest, and you know what a price gold fetched in 1807. I dare say that for twelve months together the most of my parishioners never set eyes on a piece, and any that came along quickly found its way to the Jews. People said that Government was buying up gold, through the Jews, to send to the armies. I know not the degree of truth in this, but I had some five and twenty guineas to dispose of, and had been put into correspondence with a Mr. Isaac Laquedem, a Jew residing by Plymouth Dock, whom I understood to be offering 25*s.* 6*d.* per guinea, or a trifle above the price then current.

I was fingering the card when the door opened again and admitted a young man in a caped overcoat and tall boots bemired high above the ankles. He halted on the threshold and bowed.

Mr.—?"

"Joseph Laquedem," said he in a pleasant voice.

"I guess your errand," said I, "though it was a Mr. Isaac Laquedem whom I expected.— Your father, perhaps?"

He bowed again, and I left the room to fetch my bag of guineas. "You have had a dirty ride," I began on my return.

"I have walked," he answered, lifting a muddy boot. "I beg you to pardon these."

"What, from Torpoint Ferry? And in this weather? My faith, sir, you must be a famous pedestrian!"

He made no reply to this, but bent over the guineas, fingering them, holding them up to the candlelight, testing their edges with his thumbnail, and finally poising them one by one on the tip of his forefinger.

"I have a pair of scales," suggested I.

"Thank you, I too have a pair in my pocket. But I do not need them. The guineas are good weight, all but this one, which is possibly a couple of grains short."

"Surely you cannot rely on your hand to tell you that?"

His eyebrows went up as he felt in his pocket and produced a small velvet-lined case containing a pair of scales. He was a decidedly handsome young man,

with dark intelligent eyes and a slightly scornful— or shall I say ironical?— smile. I took particular note of the steadiness of his hand as he adjusted the scales and weighed my guinea.

"To be precise," he announced, "1.898, or practically one and nine-tenths short."

"I should have thought," said I, fairly astounded, "a lifetime too little for acquiring such delicacy of sense!"

He seemed to ponder. "I dare say you are right, sir," he answered, and was silent again until the business of payment was concluded. While folding the receipt he added, "I am a connoisseur of coins, sir, and not of their weight alone."

"Antique, as well as modern?"

"Certainly."

"In that case," said I, "you may be able to tell me something about this": and going to my bureau I took out the brass plaque which Mr. Pollard had detached from the planks of the church wall. "To be sure, it scarcely comes within the province of numismatics."

He took the plaque. His brows contracted, and presently he laid it on the table, drew my chair towards him in an absent-minded fashion, and, sitting down, rested his brow on his open palms. I can recall the attitude plainly, and his bent head, and the rain still glistening in the waves of his black hair.

"Where did you find this?" he asked, but without looking up.

I told him. "The engraving upon it is singular. I thought that possibly—"

"Oh, that," said he, "is simplicity itself. An eagle displayed, with two heads, the legs resting on two gates, a crescent between, an imperial crown surmounting— these are the arms of the Greek Empire, the two gates are Rome and Constantinople. The question is, how it came where you found it? It was covered with plaster, you say, and the plaster whitewashed? Did you discover anything near it?"

Upon this I told him of the frescoes and charcoal drawings, and roughly described them.

His fingers began to drum upon the table.

"Have you any documents which might tell us when the wall was first plastered?"

"The parish accounts go back to 1594— here they are: the Registers to 1663 only. I keep them in the vestry. I can find no mention of plastering, but the entries of expenditure on whitewashing occur periodically, the first under the year 1633." I turned the old pages and pointed to the entry "*Ite' paide to George mason for a dayes work about the churche after the Jew had been, and white wassche* i^{s} vj^{d}."

"A Jew? But a Jew had no business in England in those days. I wonder how and why he came." My visitor took the old volume and ran his finger down the leaf, then up, then turned back a page. "Perhaps this may explain it," said he. "*Ite' deliuēd Mr. Beuill to make puīsion for the companie of a fforeste barke y*^{e} *came ashoare* iii^{s} iv^{d}." He broke off, with a finger on the entry, and rose. "Pray forgive me, sir; I had taken your chair."

"Don't mention it," said I. "Indeed I was about to suggest that you draw it to the fire while Frances brings in some supper."

To be short, although he protested he must push on to the inn at Porthlooe, I persuaded him to stay the night; not so much, I confess, from desire of his company, as in the hope that if I took him to see the frescoes next morning he might help me to elucidate their history.

I remember now that during supper and afterwards my guest allowed me more than my share of the conversation. He made an admirable listener, quick, courteous, adaptable, yet with something in reserve (you may call it a facile tolerance, if you will) which ended by irritating me. Young men should be eager, fervid, *sublimis cupidusque*, as I was before my beard grew stiff. But this young man had the air of a spectator at a play, composing himself to be amused. There was too much wisdom in him and too little emotion. We did not, of course, touch upon any religious question— indeed, of his own opinions on any subject he disclosed extraordinarily little: and yet as I reached my bedroom that night I told myself that here, behind a mask of good manners, was one of those perniciously modern young men who have run through all beliefs by the age of twenty, and settled down to a polite but weary atheism.

I fancy that under the shadow of this suspicion my own manner may have been cold to him next morning. Almost immediately after breakfast we set out for the church. The day was sunny and warm; the atmosphere brilliant after the night's rain. The hedges exhaled a scent of spring. And, as we entered the churchyard, I saw the girl Julia Constantine seated in her favourite angle between the porch and the south wall, threading a chain of daisies.

"What an amazingly handsome girl!" my guest exclaimed.

"Why, yes," said I, "she has her good looks, poor soul!"

"Why 'poor soul'?"

"She is an imbecile, or nearly so," said I, fitting the key in the lock.

We entered the church. And here let me say that, although I furnished you at the time of their discovery with a description of the frescoes and the ruder drawings which overlay them, you can scarcely imagine the grotesque and astonishing *coup d'œil* presented by the two series. To begin with the frescoes, or original, series. One, as you know, represented the Crucifixion. The head of the Saviour bore a large crown of gilded thorns, and from the wound in His left side flowed a continuous stream or red gouts of blood, extraordinarily intense in

colour (and intensity of colour is no common quality in fresco-painting). At the foot of the cross stood a Roman soldier, with two female figures in dark-coloured drapery a little to the right, and in the background a man clad in a loose dark upper coat, which reached a little below the knees.

The same man reappeared in the second picture, alone, but carrying a tall staff or hunting spear, and advancing up a road, at the top of which stood a circular building with an arched doorway and, within the doorway, the head of a lion. The jaws of this beast were open and depicted with the same intense red as the Saviour's blood.

Close beside this, but further to the east, was a large ship, under sail, which from her slanting position appeared to be mounting over a long swell of sea. This vessel had four masts; the two foremost furnished with yards and square sails, the others with lateen-shaped sails, after the Greek fashion; her sides were decorated with six gaily painted bands or streaks, each separately charged with devices— a golden saltire on a green ground, a white crescent on a blue, and so on; and each masthead bore a crown with a flag or streamer fluttering beneath.

Of the frescoes these alone were perfect, but fragments of others were scattered over the wall, and in particular I must mention a group of detached human limbs lying near the ship— a group rendered conspicuous by an isolated right hand and arm drawn on a larger scale than the rest. A gilded circlet adorned the arm, which was flexed at the elbow, the hand horizontally placed, the forefinger extended towards the west in the direction of the picture of the Crucifixion, and the thumb shut within the palm beneath the other three fingers.

So much for the frescoes. A thin coat of plaster had been laid over them to receive the second series, which consisted of the most disgusting and fantastic images, traced in black. One of these drawings represented Satan himself—an erect figure, with hairy paws clasped in a supplicating posture, thick black horns, and eyes which (for additional horror) the artist had painted red and edged with a circle of white. At his feet crawled the hindmost limb of a peculiarly loathsome monster with claws stuck in the soil. Close by a nun was figured, sitting in a pensive attitude, her cheek resting on the back of her hand, her elbow supported by a hideous dwarf, and at some distance a small house, or prison, with barred windows and a small doorway crossed with heavy bolts.

As I said, this upper series had been but partially scraped away, and as my guest and I stood at a little distance, I leave you to imagine, if you can, the incongruous tableau; the Prince of Darkness almost touching the mourners beside the cross; the sorrowful nun and grinning dwarf side by side with a ship in full sail, which again seemed to be forcing her way into a square and forbidding prison, etc.

Mr. Laquedem conned all this for some while in silence, holding his chin with finger and thumb.

"And it was here you discovered the plaque?" he asked at length.

I pointed to the exact spot.

"H'm!" he mused, "and that ship must be Greek or Levantine by its rig. Compare the crowns on her masts, too, with that on the plaque …" He stepped to the wall and peered into the frescoes. "Now this hand and arm—"

"They belong to me," said a voice immediately behind me, and turning, I saw that the poor girl had followed us into the church.

The young Jew had turned also. "What do you mean by that?" he asked sharply.

"She means nothing," I began, and made as if to tap my forehead significantly.

"Yes, I do mean something," she persisted. "They belong to me. I remember—"

"What do you remember?"

Her expression, which for a moment had been thoughtful, wavered and changed into a vague foolish smile. "I can't tell… something… it was sand, I think …"

"Who is she?" asked Mr. Laquedem.

"Her name is Julia Constantine. Her parents are dead; an aunt looks after her—a sister of her mother's."

He turned and appeared to be studying the frescoes. "Julia Constantine—an odd name," he muttered. "Do you know anything of her parentage?"

"Nothing except that her father was a labourer at Sheba, the manor-farm. The family has belonged to this parish for generations. I believe July is the last of them."

He faced round upon her again. "*Sand*, did you say? That's a strange thing to remember. How does *sand* come into your mind? Think, now."

She cast down her eyes; her fingers plucked at the daisy-chain. After a while she shook her head. "I can't think," she answered, glancing up timidly and pitifully.

"Surely we are wasting time," I suggested. To tell the truth I disapproved of his worrying the poor girl.

He took the daisy-chain from her, looking at me the while with something between a "by-your-leave" and a challenge. A smile played about the corners of his mouth.

"Let us waste a little more." He held up the chain before her and began to sway it gently to and fro. "Look at it, please, and stretch out your arm; look steadily. Now your name is Julia Constantine, and you say that the arm on the wall belongs to you. Why?"

"Because… if you please, sir, because of the mark."

"What mark?"

"The mark on my arm."

This answer seemed to discompose as well as to surprise him. He snatched at her wrist and rolled back her sleeve, somewhat roughly, as I thought. "Look here, sir!" he exclaimed, pointing to a thin red line encircling the flesh of the girl's upper arm, and from that to the arm and armlet in the fresco.

"She has been copying it," said I, "with a string or ribbon, which no doubt she tied too tightly."

"You are mistaken, sir; this is a birthmark. You have had it always?" he asked the girl.

She nodded. Her eyes were fixed on his face with the gaze of one at the same time startled and confiding; and for the moment he too seemed to be startled. But his smile came back as he picked up the daisy-chain and began once more to sway it to and fro before her.

"And when that arm belonged to you, there was sand around you—eh! Tell us, how did the sand come there?"

She was silent, staring at the pendulum-swing of the chain. "Tell us," he repeated in a low coaxing tone.

And in a tone just as low she began, "There was sand… red sand… it was below me … and something above… something like a great tent." She faltered, paused and went on, "There were thousands of people…." She stopped.

"Yes, yes— there were thousands of people on the sand—"

"No, they were not on the sand. There were only two on the sand… the rest were around… under the tent… my arm was out… just like this…."

The young man put a hand to his forehead. "Good Lord!" I heard him say, "the amphitheatre!"

"Come, sir," I interrupted, "I think we have had enough of this jugglery."

But the girl's voice went on steadily as if repeating a lesson:—

"And then you came "

"*I!*" His voice rang sharply, and I saw a horror dawn in his eyes, and grow. "I!"

"And then you came," she repeated, and broke off, her mind suddenly at fault. Automatically he began to sway the daisy-chain afresh. "We were on board a ship… a funny ship… with a great high stern…."

"Is this the same story?" he asked, lowering his voice almost to a whisper; and I could hear his breath going and coming.

"I don't know… one minute I see clear, and then it all gets mixed up again … we were up there, stretched on deck, near the tiller … another ship was chasing us… the men began to row, with long sweeps…."

"But the sand," he insisted, "is the sand there?"

"The sand?… Yes, I see the sand again… we are standing upon it… we and the crew … the sea is close behind us… some men have hold of me… they are trying to pull me away from you…. Ah!—"

And I declare to you that with a sob the poor girl dropped on her knees, there in the aisle, and clasped the young man about the ankles, bowing her forehead upon the insteps of his high boots. As for him, I cannot hope to describe his face to you. There was something more in it than wonder— something more than dismay, even— at the success of his unhallowed experiment. It was as though, having prepared himself light-heartedly to witness a play, he was seized and terrified to find himself the principal actor. I never saw ghastlier fear on human cheeks.

"For God's sake, sir," I cried, stamping my foot, "relax your cursed spells! Relax them and leave us! This is a house of prayer."

He put a hand under the girl's chin, and, raising her face, made a pass or two, still with the daisy-chain in his hand. She looked about her, shivered and stood erect. "Where am I?" she asked. "Did I fall? What are you doing with my chain?" She had relapsed into her habitual childishness of look and speech.

I hurried them from the church, resolutely locked the door, and marched up the path without deigning a glance at the young man. But I had not gone fifty yards when he came running after.

"I entreat you, sir, to pardon me. I should have stopped the experiment before. But I was startled— thrown off my balance. I am telling you the truth, sir!"

"Very likely," said I. "The like has happened to other rash meddlers before you."

"I declare to you I had no thought—" he began. But I interrupted him:

"'No thought,' indeed! I bring you here to resolve me, if you can, a curious puzzle in archæology, and you fall to playing devil's pranks upon a half-witted child. 'No thought!'— I believe you, sir."

"And yet," he muttered, "it is an amazing business: the sand— the *velarium*— the outstretched arm and hand— *pollice compresso*— the exact gesture of the gladiatorial shows—"

"Are you telling me, pray, of gladiatorial shows under the Eastern Empire?" I demanded scornfully.

"Certainly not: and that," he mused, "only makes it the more amazing."

"Now, look here," said I, halting in the middle of the road, "I'll hear no more of it. Here is my gate, and there lies the highroad, on to Porthlooe or back to Plymouth, as you please. I wish you good morning, sir; and if it be any consolation to you, you have spoiled my digestion for a week."

I am bound to say the young man took his dismissal with grace. He halted then and there and raised his hat; stood for a moment pondering; and, turning on his heel, walked quickly off towards Porthlooe.

It must have been a week before I learnt casually that he had obtained employment there as secretary to a small company owning the *Lord Nelson* and the *Hand-in-hand* privateers. His success, as you know, was rapid; and naturally in a gossiping parish I heard about it— a little here, a little there— in all a great deal. He had bought the *Providence* schooner; he had acted as freighter for Minards' men in their last run with the *Morning Star;* he had slipped over to Cork and brought home a Porthlooe prize illegally detained there; he was in London, fighting a salvage case in the Admiralty Court; … Within twelve months he was accountant of every trading company in Porthlooe, and agent for receiving the moneys due to the Guernsey merchants. In 1809, as you know, he opened his bank and issued notes of his own. And a year later he acquired two of the best farms in the parish, Tresawl and Killifreeth, and held the fee simple of the harbour and quays.

During the first two years of his prosperity I saw little of the man. We passed each other from time to time in the street of Porthlooe, and he accosted me with a politeness to which, though distrusting him, I felt bound to respond. But he never offered conversation, and our next interview was wholly of my seeking.

One evening towards the close of his second year at Porthlooe, and about the date of his purchase of the *Providence* schooner, I happened to be walking homewards from a visit to a sick parishioner, when at Cove Bottom, by the miller's footbridge, I passed two figures— a man and a woman standing there and conversing in the dusk. I could not help recognising them; and halfway up the hill I came to a sudden resolution and turned back.

"Mr. Laquedem," said I, approaching them, "I put it to you, as a man of education and decent feeling, is this quite honourable?"

"I believe, sir," he answered courteously enough, "I can convince you that it is. But clearly this is neither the time nor the place."

"You must excuse me," I went on, "but I have known Julia since she was a child."

To this he made an extraordinary answer. "No longer?" he asked; and added, with a change of tone, "Had you not forbidden me the vicarage, sir, I might have something to say to you."

"If it concern the girl's spiritual welfare— or yours— I shall be happy to hear it."

"In that case," said he, "I will do myself the pleasure of calling upon you— shall we say to-morrow evening?"

He was as good as his word. At nine o'clock next evening— about the hour of his former visit— Frances ushered him into my parlour. The similarity of

circumstance may have suggested to me to draw the comparison; at any rate I observed then for the first time that rapid ageing of his features which afterwards became a matter of common remark. The face was no longer that of the young man who had entered my parlour two years before; already some streaks of grey showed in his black locks, and he seemed even to move wearily.

"I fear you are unwell," said I, offering a chair.

"I have reason to believe," he answered, "that I am dying." And then, as I uttered some expression of dismay and concern, he cut me short. "Oh, there will be no hurry about it! I mean, perhaps, no more than that all men carry about with them the seeds of their mortality— so why not I? But I came to talk of Julia Constantine, not of myself."

"You may guess, Mr. Laquedem, that as her vicar, and having known her and her affliction all her life, I take something of a fatherly interest in the girl."

"And having known her so long, do you not begin to observe some change in her, of late?"

"Why, to be sure," said I, "she seems brighter."

He nodded. "*I* have done that; or rather, love has done it."

"Be careful, sir!" I cried. "Be careful of what you are going to tell me! If you have intended or wrought any harm to that girl, I tell you solemnly—"

But he held up a hand. "Ah, sir, be charitable! I tell you solemnly our love is not of *that* kind. We who have loved, and lost, and sought each other, and loved again through centuries, have out-learned that rougher passion. When she was a princess of Rome and I a Christian Jew led forth to the lions—"

I stood up, grasping the back of my chair and staring. At last I knew. This young man was stark mad.

He read my conviction at once. "I think, sir," he went on, changing his tone, "the learned antiquary to whom, as you told me, you were sending your tracing of the plaque, has by this time replied with some information about it."

Relieved at this change of subject, I answered quietly (while considering how best to get him out of the house), "My friend tells me that a similar design is found in Landulph Church, on the tomb of Theodore Paleologus, who died in 1636."

"Precisely; of Theodore Paleologus, descendant of the Constantines."

I began to grasp his insane meaning. "The race, so far as we know, is extinct," said I.

"The race of the Constantines," said he slowly and composedly, "is never extinct; and while it lasts, the soul of Julia Constantine will come to birth again and know the soul of the Jew, until—"

I waited.

"—Until their love lifts the curse, and the Jew can die."

"This is mere madness," said I, my tongue blurting it out at length.

"I expected you to say no less. Now look you, sir— in a few minutes I leave you, I walk home and spend an hour or two before bedtime in adding figures, balancing accounts; to-morrow I rise and go about my daily business cheerfully, methodically, always successfully. I am the long-headed man, making money because I know how to make it, respected by all, with no trace of madness in me. You, if you meet me to-morrow, shall recognise none. Just now you are forced to believe me mad. Believe it then; but listen while I tell you this:— When Rome was, I was; when Constantinople was, I was. I was that Jew rescued from the lions. It was I who sailed from the Bosphorus in that ship, with Julia beside me; I from whom the Moorish pirates tore her, on the beach beside Tetuan; I who, centuries after, drew those obscene figures on the wall of your church— the devil, the nun, and the barred convent— when Julia, another Julia but the same soul, was denied to me and forced into a nunnery. For the frescoes, too, tell *my* history. *I* was that figure in the dark habit, standing a little back from the cross. Tell me, sir, did you never hear of Joseph Kartophilus, Pilate's porter?"

I saw that I must humour him. "I have heard his legend," said I; * "and have understood that in time he became a Christian."

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** The legend is that as Christ left the judgment hall on His way to Calvary, Kartophilus smote Him, saying, "Man, go quicker!" and was answered, "I indeed go quickly; but thou shalt tarry till I come again."*

He smiled wearily. "He has travelled through many creeds; but he has never travelled beyond Love. And if that love can be purified of all passion such as you suspect, he has not travelled beyond forgiveness. Many times I have known her who shall save me in the end; and now in the end I have found her and shall be able, at length, to die; have found her, and with her all my dead loves, in the body of a girl whom you call half-witted— and shall be able, at length, to die."

And with this he bent over the table, and, resting his face on his arms, sobbed aloud. I let him sob there for a while, and then touched his shoulder gently.

He raised his head. "Ah," said he, in a voice which answered the gentleness of my touch, "you remind me!" And with that he deliberately slipped his coat off his left arm and, rolling up the shirt sleeve, bared the arm almost to the shoulder. "I want you close," he added with half a smile; for I have to confess that during the process I had backed a couple of paces towards the door. He took up a candle, and held it while I bent and examined the thin red line which ran like a circlet around the flesh of the upper arm just below the apex of the deltoid muscle. When I looked up I met his eyes challenging mine across the flame.

"Mr. Laquedem," I said, "my conviction is that you are possessed and are being misled by a grievous hallucination. At the same time I am not fool enough to deny that the union of flesh and spirit, so passing mysterious in everyday life (when we pause to think of it), may easily hold mysteries deeper yet. The Church Catholic, whose servant I am, has never to my knowledge denied this; yet has providentially made a rule of St. Paul's advice to the Colossians against intruding into those things which she hath not seen. In the matter of this extraordinary belief of yours I can give you no such comfort as one honest man should offer to another: for I do not share it. But in the more practical matter of your conduct towards July Constantine, it may help you to know that I have accepted your word and propose henceforward to trust you as a gentleman."

"I thank you, sir," he said, as he slipped on his coat. "May I have your hand on that?"

"With pleasure," I answered, and, having shaken hands, conducted him to the door.

FROM THAT DAY the affection between Joseph Laquedem and July Constantine, and their frequent companionship, were open and avowed. Scandal there was, to be sure; but as it blazed up like straw, so it died down. Even the women feared to sharpen their tongues openly on Laquedem, who by this time held the purse of the district, and to offend whom might mean an empty skivet on Saturday night. July, to be sure, was more tempting game; and one day her lover found her in the centre of a knot of women fringed by a dozen children with open mouths and ears. He stepped forward. "Ladies," said he, "the difficulty which vexes you cannot, I feel sure, be altogether good for your small sons and daughters. Let me put an end to it." He bent forward and reverently took July's hand. "My dear, it appears that the depth of my respect for you will not be credited by these ladies unless I offer you marriage. And as I am proud of it, so forgive me if I put it beyond their doubt. Will you marry me?" July, blushing scarlet, covered her face with her hands, but shook her head. There was no mistaking the gesture: all the women saw it. "Condole with me, ladies!" said Laquedem, lifting his hat and including them in an ironical bow; and placing July's arm in his, escorted her away.

I need not follow the history of their intimacy, of which I saw, indeed, no more than my neighbours. On two points all accounts of it agree: the rapid ageing of the man during this period and the improvement in the poor girl's intellect. Some profess to have remarked an equally vehement heightening of her beauty; but, as my recollection serves me, she had always been a handsome maid; and I set down the transfiguration— if such it was— entirely to the dawn and growth of her reason. To this I can add a curious scrap of evidence. I was walking along the cliff track, one afternoon, between Porthlooe and Lanihale

church-town, when, a few yards ahead, I heard a man's voice declaiming in monotone some sentences which I could not catch; and rounding the corner, came upon Laquedem and July. She was seated on a rock; and he, on a patch of turf at her feet, held open a small volume which he laid face downwards as he rose to greet me. I glanced at the back of the book and saw it was a volume of Euripides. I made no comment, however, on this small discovery; and whether he had indeed taught the girl some Greek, or whether she merely listened for the sake of hearing his voice, I am unable to say.

Let me come then to the last scene, of which I was one among many spectators.

On the morning of August 15th, 1810, and just about daybreak, I was awakened by the sound of horses' hoofs coming down the road beyond the vicarage gate. My ear told me at once that they were many riders and moving at a trot; and a minute later the jingle of metal gave me an inkling of the truth. I hurried to the window and pulled up the blind. Day was breaking on a grey drizzle of fog which drove up from seaward, and through this drizzle I caught sight of the last five or six scarlet plumes of a troop of dragoons jogging down the hill past my bank of laurels.

Now our parish had stood for some weeks in apprehension of a visit from these gentry. The riding-officer, Mr. Luke, had threatened us with them more than once. I knew, moreover, that a run of goods was contemplated: and without questions of mine— it did not become a parish priest in those days to know too much— it had reached my ears that Laquedem was himself in Roscoff bargaining for the freight. But we had all learnt confidence in him by this time— his increasing bodily weakness never seemed to affect his cleverness and resource— and no doubt occurred to me that he would contrive to checkmate this new move of the riding-officer's. Nevertheless, and partly I dare say out of curiosity, to have a good look at the soldiers, I slipped on my clothes and hurried downstairs and across the garden.

My hand was on the gate when I heard footsteps, and July Constantino came running down the hill, her red cloak flapping and her hair powdered with mist.

"Hullo!" said I, "nothing wrong, I hope?"

She turned a white, distraught face to me in the dawn.

"Yes, yes! All is wrong! I saw the soldiers coming— I heard them a mile away, and sent up the rocket from the church-tower. But the lugger stood in— they *must* have seen!— she stood in, and is right under Sheba Point now— and *he*—"

I whistled. "This is serious. Let us run out towards the point; we— you, I mean— may be in time to warn them yet."

So we set off running together. The morning breeze had a cold edge on it, but already the sun had begun to wrestle with the bank of sea-fog. While we hurried along the cliffs the shoreward fringe of it was ripped and rolled back like

a tent-cloth, and through the rent I saw a broad patch of the cove below; the sands (for the tide was at low ebb) shining like silver; the dragoons with their greatcoats thrown back from their scarlet breasts and their accoutrements flashing against the level rays. Seaward, the lugger loomed through the weather; but there was a crowd of men and black boats— half a score of them— by the water's edge, and it was clear to me at once that a forced run had been at least attempted.

I had pulled up, panting, on the verge of the cliff, when July caught me by the arm.

"*The sand!*"

She pointed; and well I remember the gesture— the very gesture of the hand in the fresco— the forefinger extended, the thumb shut within the palm. "*The sand*… he told me …"

Her eyes were wide and fixed. She spoke, not excitedly at all, but rather as one musing, much as she had answered Laquedem on the morning when he waved the daisy-chain before her.

I heard an order shouted, high up the beach, and the dragoons came charging down across the sand. There was a scuffle close by the water's edge; then, as the soldiers broke through the mob of free-traders and wheeled their horses round, fetlock deep in the tide, I saw a figure break from the crowd and run, but presently check himself and walk composedly towards the cliff up which climbed the footpath leading to Porthlooe. And above the hubbub of oaths and shouting, I heard a voice crying distinctly, "Run, man! 'Tis after thee they are! *Man, go faster!*"

Even then, had he gained the cliff-track, he might have escaped; for up there no horseman could follow. But as a trooper came galloping in pursuit, he turned deliberately. There was no defiance in his attitude; of that I am sure. What followed must have been mere blundering ferocity. I saw a jet of smoke, heard the sharp crack of a firearm, and Joseph Laquedem flung up his arms and pitched forward at full length on the sand.

The report woke the girl as with the stab of a knife. Her cry— it pierces through my dreams at times— rang back with the echoes from the rocks, and before they ceased she was halfway down the cliffside, springing as surely as a goat, and, where she found no foothold, clutching the grass, the rooted samphires and sea pinks, and sliding. While my head swam with the sight of it, she was running across the sands, was kneeling beside the body, had risen, and was staggering under the weight of it down to the water's edge.

"Stop her!" shouted Luke, the riding-officer. "We must have the man! Dead or alive, we must have'n!"

She gained the nearest boat, the free-traders forming up around her, and hustling the dragoons. It was old Solomon Tweedy's boat, and he, prudent man,

had taken advantage of the skirmish to ease her off, so that a push would set her afloat. He asserts that as July came up to him she never uttered a word, but the look on her face said "Push me off," and though he was at that moment meditating his own escape, he obeyed and pushed the boat off "like a mazed man." I may add that he spent three months in Bodmin Gaol for it.

She dropped with her burden against the stern sheets, but leapt up instantly and had the oars between the thole-pins almost as the boat floated. She pulled a dozen strokes, and hoisted the mainsail, pulled a hundred or so, sprang forward and ran up the jib. All this while the preventive men were straining to get off two boats in pursuit; but, as you may guess, the free-traders did nothing to help and a great deal to impede. And first the crews tumbled in too hurriedly, and had to climb out again (looking very foolish) and push afresh, and then one of the boats had mysteriously lost her plug and sank in half a fathom of water. July had gained a full hundred yards' offing before the pursuit began in earnest, and this meant a good deal. Once clear of the point the small cutter could defy their rowing and reach away to the eastward with the wind just behind her beam. The riding-officer saw this, and ordered his men to fire. They assert, and we must believe, that their object was merely to disable the boat by cutting up her canvas.

Their first desultory volley did no damage. I stood there, high on the cliff, and watched the boat, making a spy-glass of my hands. She had fetched in close under the point, and gone about on the port tack— the next would clear— when the first shot struck her, cutting a hole through her jib, and I expected the wind to rip the sail up immediately; yet it stood. The breeze being dead on-shore, the little boat heeled towards us, her mainsail hiding the steerswoman.

It was a minute later, perhaps, that I began to suspect that July was hit, for she allowed the jib to shake and seemed to be running right up into the wind. The stern swung round and I strained my eyes to catch a glimpse of her. At that moment a third volley rattled out, a bullet shore through the peak halliards, and the mainsail came down with a run. It was all over.

The preventive men cheered and pulled with a will. I saw them run alongside, clamber into the cutter, and lift the fallen sail.

And that was all. There was no one on board, alive or dead. Whilst the canvas hid her, in the swift two minutes between the boat's putting about and her running up into the wind, July Constantine must have lifted her lover's body overboard and followed it to the bottom of the sea. There is no other explanation; and of the bond that knit these two together there is, when I ask myself candidly, no explanation at all, unless I give more credence than I have any wish to give to the wild tale which Joseph Laquedem told me. I have told you the facts, my friend, and leave them to your judgment.

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4: The White Slave

Arthur B. Reeve

1880-1936

Cosmopolitan Magazine, June 1912

Collected in: *The Poisoned Pen and other stories*, 1912

An early entry in the long-running "Craig Kennedy, Scientific Detective" series of more than 100 short stories, and several full length novels. The first Kennedy story appeared in 1910.

KENNEDY and I had just tossed a coin to decide whether it should be a comic opera or a good walk in the mellow spring night air and the opera had won, but we had scarcely begun to argue the vital point as to where to go, when the door buzzer sounded— a sure sign that some box-office had lost four dollars.

It was a much agitated middle-aged couple who entered as Craig threw open the door. Of our two visitors, the woman attracted my attention first, for on her pale face the lines of sorrow were almost visibly deepening. Her nervous manner interested me greatly, though I took pains to conceal the fact that I noticed it. It was quickly accounted for, however, by the card which the man presented, bearing the name "Mr. George Gilbert" and a short scribble from First Deputy O'Connor:

Mr. and Mrs. Gilbert desire to consult you with regard to the mysterious disappearance of their daughter, Georgette. I am sure I need say nothing further to interest you than that the M. P. Squad is completely baffled.

O'CONNOR.

"H-m," remarked Kennedy; "not strange for the Missing Persons Squad to be baffled— at least, at this case."

"Then you know of our daughter's strange— er— departure?" asked Mr. Gilbert, eagerly scanning Kennedy's face and using a euphemism that would fall less harshly on his wife's ears than the truth.

"Indeed, yes," nodded Craig with marked sympathy: "that is, I have read most of what the papers have said. Let me introduce my friend, Mr. Jameson. You recall we were discussing the Georgette Gilbert case this morning, Walter?"

I did, and perhaps before I proceed further with the story I should quote at least the important parts of the article in the morning Star which had occasioned the discussion. The article had been headed, "When Personalities Are Lost," and with the Gilbert case as a text many instances had been cited which had later been solved by the return of the memory of the sufferer. In part the article had said:

Mysterious disappearances, such as that of Georgette Gilbert, have alarmed the public and baffled the police before this, disappearances that in their suddenness, apparent lack of purpose, and inexplicability, have had much in common with the case of Miss Gilbert.

Leaving out of account the class of disappearances such as embezzlers, blackmailers, and other criminals, there is still a large number of recorded cases where the subjects have dropped out of sight without apparent cause or reason and have left behind them untarnished reputations. Of these a small percentage are found to have met with violence; others have been victims of a suicidal mania; and sooner or later a clue has come to light, for the dead are often easier to find than the living. Of the remaining small proportion there are on record a number of carefully authenticated cases where the subjects have been the victims of a sudden and complete loss of memory.

This dislocation of memory is a variety of aphasia known as amnesia, and when the memory is recurrently lost and restored it is an "alternating personality." The psychical researchers and psychologists have reported many cases of alternating personality. Studious efforts are being made to understand and to explain the strange type of mental phenomena exhibited in these cases, but no one has as yet given a final, clear, and comprehensive explanation of them. Such cases are by no means always connected with disappearances, but the variety known as the ambulatory type, where the patient suddenly loses all knowledge of his own identity and of his past and takes himself off, leaving no trace or clue, is the variety which the present case calls to popular attention.

Then followed a list of a dozen or so interesting cases of persons who had vanished completely and had, some several days and some even years later, suddenly "awakened" to their first personality, returned, and taken up the thread of that personality where it had been broken.

To Kennedy's inquiry I was about to reply that I recalled the conversation distinctly, when Mr. Gilbert shot an inquiring glance from beneath his bushy eyebrows, quickly shifting from my face to Kennedy's, and asked, "And what was your conclusion— what do you think of the case? Is it aphasia or amnesia, or whatever the doctors call it, and do you think she is wandering about somewhere unable to recover her real personality?"

"I should like to have all the facts at first hand before venturing an opinion," Craig replied with precisely that shade of hesitancy that might reassure the anxious father and mother, without raising a false hope.

Mr. and Mrs. Gilbert exchanged glances, the purport of which was that she desired him to tell the story.

"It was day before yesterday," began Mr. Gilbert, gently touching his wife's trembling hand that sought his arm as he began rehearsing the tragedy that had cast its shadow across their lives, "Thursday, that Georgette— er— since we have heard of Georgette." His voice faltered a bit, but he proceeded: "As you know, she was last seen walking on Fifth Avenue. The police have traced her since she left home that morning. It is known that she went first to the public library, then that she stopped at a department store on the avenue, where she

made a small purchase which she had charged to our family account, and finally that she went to a large book-store. Then— that is the last."

Mrs. Gilbert sighed, and buried her face in a lace handkerchief as her shoulders shook convulsively.

"Yes, I have read that," repeated Kennedy gently, though with manifest eagerness to get down to facts that might prove more illuminating. "I think I need hardly impress upon you the advantage of complete frankness, the fact that anything you may tell me is of a much more confidential nature than if it were told to the police. Er—r, had Miss Gilbert any— love affair, any trouble of such a nature that it might have preyed on her mind?"

Kennedy's tactful manner seemed to reassure both the father and the mother, who exchanged another glance.

"Although we have said no to the reporters," Mrs. Gilbert replied bravely in answer to the nod of approval from her husband, and much as if she herself were making a confession for them both, "I fear that Georgette had had a love affair. No doubt you have heard hints of Dudley Lawton's name in connection with the case? I can't imagine how they could have leaked out, for I should have said that that old affair had long since been forgotten even by the society gossips. The fact is that shortly after Georgette 'came out,' Dudley Lawton, who is quite on the road to becoming one of the rather notorious members of the younger set, began to pay her marked attentions. He is a fascinating, romantic sort of fellow, one that, I imagine, possesses much attraction for a girl who has been brought up as simply as Georgette was, and who has absorbed a surreptitious diet of modern literature such as we now know Georgette did. I suppose you have seen portraits of Georgette in the newspapers and know what a dreamy and artistic nature her face indicates?"

Kennedy nodded. It is, of course, one of the cardinal tenets of journalism that all women are beautiful, but even the coarse screen of the ordinary newspaper half-tone had not been able to conceal the rather exceptional beauty of Miss Georgette Gilbert. If it had, all the shortcomings of the newspaper photographic art would have been quickly glossed over by the almost ardent descriptions by those ladies of the press who come along about the second day after an event of this kind with signed articles analysing the character and motives, the life and gowns of the latest actors in the front-page stories.

"Naturally both my husband and myself opposed his attentions from the first. It was a hard struggle, for Georgette, of course, assumed the much-injured air of some of the heroines of her favourite novels. But I, at least, believed that we had won and that Georgette finally was brought to respect and, I hoped, understand our wishes in the matter. I believe so yet. Mr. Gilbert in a roundabout way came to an understanding with old Mr. Dudley Lawton, who possesses a great influence over his son, and— well, Dudley Lawton seemed to

have passed out of Georgette's life. I believed so then, at least, and I see no reason for not believing so yet. I feel that you ought to know this, but really I don't think it is right to say that Georgette had a love affair. I should rather say that she had *had* a love affair, but that it had been forgotten, perhaps a year ago."

Mrs. Gilbert paused again, and it was evident that though she was concealing nothing she was measuring her words carefully in order not to give a false impression.

"What does Dudley Lawton say about the newspapers bringing his name into the case?" asked Kennedy, addressing Mr. Gilbert.

"Nothing," replied he. "He denies that he has even spoken to her for nearly a year. Apparently he has no interest in the case. And yet I cannot quite believe that Lawton is as uninterested as he seems. I know that he has often spoken about her to members of the Cosmos Club where he lives, and that he reads practically everything that the newspapers print about the case."

"But you have no reason to think that there has ever been any secret communication between them? Miss Georgette left no letters or anything that would indicate that her former infatuation survived?"

"None whatever," repeated Mr. Gilbert emphatically. "We have gone over her personal effects very carefully, and I can't say they furnish a clue. In fact, there were very few letters. She rarely kept a letter. Whether it was merely from habit or for some purpose, I can't say."

"Besides her liking for Dudley Lawton and her rather romantic nature, there are no other things in her life that would cause a desire for freedom?" asked Kennedy, much as a doctor might test the nerves of a patient. "She had no hobbies?"

"Beyond the reading of some books which her mother and I did not altogether approve of, I should say no— no hobbies."

"So far, I suppose, it is true that neither you nor the police have received even a hint as to where she went after leaving the book-store?"

"Not a hint. She dropped out as completely as if the earth had swallowed her."

"Mrs. Gilbert," said Kennedy, as our visitors rose to go, "you may rest assured that if it is humanly possible to find your daughter I shall leave no stone unturned until I have probed to the bottom of this mystery. I have seldom had a case that hung on more slender threads, yet if I can weave other threads to support it I feel that we shall soon find that the mystery is not so baffling as the Missing Persons Squad has found it so far."

Scarcely had the Gilberts left when Kennedy put on his hat, remarking: "We'll at least get our walk, if not the show. Let's stroll around to the Cosmos Club. Perhaps we may catch Lawton in."

Luckily we chanced to find him there in the reading-room. Lawton was, as Mrs. Gilbert had said, a type that is common enough in New York and is very fascinating to many girls. In fact, he was one of those fellows whose sins are readily forgiven because they are always interesting. Not a few men secretly admire though publicly execrate the Lawton type.

I say we chanced to find him in. That was about all we found. Our interview was most unsatisfactory. For my part, I could not determine whether he was merely anxious to avoid any notoriety in connection with the case or whether he was concealing something that might compromise himself.

"Really, gentlemen," he drawled, puffing languidly on a cigarette and turning slowly toward the window to watch the passing throng under the lights of the avenue, "really I don't see how I can be of any assistance. You see, except for a mere passing acquaintance Miss Gilbert and I had drifted entirely apart— entirely apart— owing to circumstances over which I, at least, had no control."

"I thought perhaps you might have heard from her or about her, through some mutual friend," remarked Kennedy, carefully concealing under his nonchalance what I knew was working in his mind— a belief that, after all, the old attachment had not been so dead as the Gilberts had fancied.

"No, not a breath, either before this sad occurrence or, of course, after. Believe me, if I could add one fact that would simplify the search for Georgette— ah, Miss Gilbert— ah— I would do so in a moment," replied Lawton quickly, as if desirous of getting rid of us as soon as possible. Then perhaps as if regretting the brusqueness with which he had tried to end the interview, he added, "Don't misunderstand me. The moment you have discovered anything that points to her whereabouts, let me know immediately. You can count on me— provided you don't get me into the papers. Good-night, gentlemen. I wish you the best of success."

"Do you think he could have kept up the acquaintance secretly?" I asked Craig as we walked up the avenue after this baffling interview. "Could he have cast her off when he found that in spite of her parents' protests she was still in his power?"

"It's impossible to say what a man of Dudley Lawton's type could do," mused Kennedy, "for the simple reason that he himself doesn't know until he has to do it. Until we have more facts, anything is both possible and probable."

There was nothing more that could be done that night, though after our walk we sat up for an hour or two discussing probabilities. It did not take me long to reach the end of my imagination and give up the case, but Kennedy continued to revolve the matter in his mind, looking at it from every angle and calling upon all the vast store of information that he had treasured up in that marvellous brain of his, ready to be called on almost as if his mind were card-indexed.

"Murders, suicides, robberies, and burglaries are, after all, pretty easily explained," he remarked, after a long period of silence on my part, "but the sudden disappearance of people out of the crowded city into nowhere is something that is much harder to explain. And it isn't so difficult to disappear as some people imagine, either. You remember the case of the celebrated Arctic explorer whose picture had been published scores of times in every illustrated paper. He had no trouble in disappearing and then reappearing later, when he got ready.

"Yet experience has taught me that there is always a reason for disappearances. It is our next duty to discover that reason. Still, it won't do to say that disappearances are not mysterious. Disappearances except for money troubles are all mysterious. The first thing in such a case is to discover whether the person has any hobbies or habits or fads. That is what I tried to find out from the Gilberts. I can't tell yet whether I succeeded."

Kennedy took a pencil and hastily jotted down something on a piece of paper which he tossed over to me. It read:

1. Love, family trouble.
2. A romantic disposition.
3. Temporary insanity, self-destruction.
4. Criminal assault.
5. Aphasia.
6. Kidnapping.

"Those are the reasons why people disappear, eliminating criminals and those who have financial difficulties. Dream on that and see if you can work out the answer in your subliminal consciousness. Good-night."

Needless to say, I was no further advanced in the morning than at midnight, but Kennedy seemed to have evolved at least a tentative programme. It started with a visit to the public library, where he carefully went over the ground already gone over by the police. Finding nothing, he concluded that Miss Gilbert had not found what she wanted at the library and had continued the quest, even as he was continuing the quest of herself.

His next step was to visit the department-store. The purchase had been an inconsequential affair of half a dozen handkerchiefs, to be sent home. This certainly did not look like a premeditated disappearance; but Craig was proceeding on the assumption that this purchase indicated nothing except that there had been a sale of handkerchiefs which had caught her eye. Having stopped at the library first and a book-shop afterward, he assumed that she had also visited the book-department of the store. But here again nobody seemed to recall her or that she had asked for anything in particular.

Our last hope was the book-shop. We paused for a moment to look at the display in the window, but only for a moment, for Craig quickly pulled me along inside. In the window was a display of books bearing the sign:

BOOKS ON NEW THOUGHT
OCCULTISM, CLAIRVOYANCE, MESMERISM

Instead of attempting to go over the ground already traversed by the police, who had interrogated the numerous clerks without discovering which one, if any, had waited on Miss Gilbert, Kennedy asked at once to see the record of sales of the morning on which she had disappeared. Running his eye quickly down the record, he picked out a work on clairvoyance and asked to see the young woman who had made the sale. The clerk was, however, unable to recall to whom she had sold the book, though she finally admitted that she thought it might have been a young woman who had some difficulty in making up her mind just which one of the numerous volumes she wanted. She could not say whether the picture Kennedy showed her of Miss Gilbert was that of her customer, nor was she sure that the customer was not escorted by some one. Altogether it was nearly as hazy as our interview with Lawton.

"Still," remarked Kennedy cheerfully, "it may furnish a clue, after all. The clerk at least was not positive that it was *not* Miss Gilbert to whom she sold the book. Since we are down in this neighbourhood, let us drop in and see Mr. Gilbert again. Perhaps something may have happened since last night."

Mr. Gilbert was in the dry-goods business in a loft building in the new dry-goods section on Fourth Avenue. One could almost feel that a tragedy had invaded even his place of business. As we entered, we could see groups of clerks, evidently discussing the case. It was no wonder, I felt, for the head of the firm was almost frantic, and beside the loss of his only daughter the loss of his business would count as nothing, at least until the keen edge of his grief was worn off.

"Mr. Gilbert is out," replied his secretary, in answer to our inquiry. "Haven't you heard? They have just discovered the body of his daughter in a lonely spot in the Croton Aqueduct. The report came in from the police just a few minutes ago. It is thought that she was murdered in the city and carried there in an automobile."

The news came with a stinging shock. I felt that, after all, we were too late. In another hour the extras would be out, and the news would be spread broadcast. The affair would be in the hands of the amateur detectives, and there was no telling how many promising clues might be lost.

"Dead!" exclaimed Kennedy, as he jammed his hat on his head and bolted for the door. "Hurry, Walter. We must get there before the coroner makes his examination."

I don't know how we managed to do it, but by dint of subway, elevated, and taxicab we arrived on the scene of the tragedy not very long after the coroner. Mr. Gilbert was there, silent, and looking as if he had aged many years since the night before; his hand shook and he could merely nod recognition to us.

Already the body had been carried to a rough shanty in the neighbourhood, and the coroner was questioning those who had made the discovery, a party of Italian labourers on the water improvement near by. They were a vicious looking crew, but they could tell nothing beyond the fact that one of them had discovered the body in a thicket where it could not possibly have lain longer than overnight. There was no reason, as yet, to suspect any of them, and indeed, as a much travelled automobile road ran within a few feet of the thicket, there was every reason to believe that the murder, if murder it was, had been committed elsewhere and that the perpetrator had taken this means of getting rid of his unfortunate victim.

Drawn and contorted were the features of the poor girl, as if she had died in great physical agony or after a terrific struggle. Indeed, marks of violence on her delicate throat and neck showed only too plainly that she had been choked.

As Kennedy bent over the form of the once lovely Georgette, he noted the clenched hands. Then he looked at them more closely. I was standing a little behind him, for though Craig and I had been through many thrilling adventures, the death of a human being, especially of a girl like Miss Gilbert, filled me with horror and revulsion. I could see, however, that he had noted something unusual. He pulled out a little pocket magnifying glass and made an even more minute examination of the hands. At last he rose and faced us, almost as if in triumph. I could not see what he had discovered— at least it did not seem to be anything tangible, like a weapon.

Quickly he opened the pocketbook which she had carried. It seemed to be empty, and he was about to shut it when something white, sticking in one corner, caught his eye. Craig pulled out a clipping from a newspaper, and we crowded about him to look at it. It was a large clipping from the section of one of the metropolitan journals which carries a host of such advertisements as "spirit medium," "psychic palmist," "yogi mediator," "magnetic influences," "crystal gazer," "astrologer," "trance medium," and the like. At once I thought of the sallow, somewhat mystic countenance of Dudley, and the idea flashed, half-formed, in my mind that somehow this clue, together with the purchase of the book on clairvoyance, might prove the final link necessary.

But the first problem in Kennedy's mind was to keep in touch with what the authorities were doing. That kept us busy for several hours, during which Craig

was in close consultation with the coroner's physician. The physician was of the opinion that Miss Gilbert had been drugged as well as strangled, and for many hours, down in his laboratory, his chemists were engaged in trying to discover from tests of her blood whether the theory was true. One after another the ordinary poisons were eliminated, until it began to look hopeless.

So far Kennedy had been only an interested spectator, but as the different tests failed, he had become more and more keenly alive. At last it seemed as if he could wait no longer.

"Might I try one or two reactions with that sample?" he asked of the physician who handed him the test tube in silence.

For a moment or two Craig thoughtfully regarded it, while with one hand he fingered the bottles of ether, alcohol, distilled water, and the many reagents standing before him. He picked up one and poured a little liquid into the test tube. Then, removing the precipitate that was formed, he tried to dissolve it in water. Not succeeding, he tried the ether and then the alcohol. Both were successful.

"What is it?" we asked as he held the tube up critically to the light.

"I can't be sure yet," he answered slowly. "I thought at first that it was some alkaloid. I'll have to make further tests before I can be positive just what it is. If I may retain this sample I think that with other clues that I have discovered I may be able to tell you something definite soon."

The coroner's physician willingly assented, and Craig quickly dispatched the tube, carefully sealed, to his laboratory.

"That part of our investigation will keep," he remarked as we left the coroner's office. "To-night I think we had better resume the search which was so unexpectedly interrupted this morning. I suppose you have concluded, Walter, that we can be reasonably sure that the trail leads back through the fortune-tellers and soothsayers of New York,— which one, it would be difficult to say. The obvious thing, therefore, is to consult them all. I think you will enjoy that part of it, with your newspaperman's liking for the bizarre."

The fact was that it did appeal to me, though at the moment I was endeavouring to formulate a theory in which Dudley Lawton and an accomplice would account for the facts.

It was early in the evening as we started out on our tour of the clairvoyants of New York. The first whom Kennedy selected from the advertisements in the clipping described himself as "Hata, the Veiled Prophet, born with a double veil, educated in occult mysteries and Hindu philosophy in Egypt and India." Like all of them his advertisement dwelt much on love and money:

The great questions of life are quickly solved, failure turned to success, sorrow to joy, the separated are brought together, foes made friends. Truths are laid bare to his mysterious mind. He gives you power to attract and control

those whom you may desire, tells you of living or dead, your secret troubles, the cause and remedy. Advice on all affairs of life, love, courtship, marriage, business, speculations, investments. Overcomes rivals, enemies, and all evil influences. Will tell you how to attract, control, and change the thought, intentions, actions, or character of any one you desire.

Hata was a modest adept who professed to be able to explain the whole ten stages of Yoga. He had established himself on a street near Times Square, just off Broadway, and there we found several automobiles and taxicabs standing at the curb, a mute testimony to the wealth of at least some of his clientele.

A solemn-faced coloured man ushered us into a front parlour and asked if we had come to see the professor. Kennedy answered that we had.

"Will you please write your names and addresses on the outside sheet of this pad, then tear it off and keep it?" asked the attendant. "We ask all visitors to do that simply as a guarantee of good faith. Then if you will write under it what you wish to find out from the professor I think it will help you concentrate. But don't write while I am in the room, and don't let me see the writing."

"A pretty cheap trick," exclaimed Craig when the attendant had gone. "That's how he tells the gullible their names before they tell him. I've a good notion to tear off two sheets. The second is chemically prepared, with paraffin, I think. By dusting it over with powdered charcoal you can bring out what was written on the first sheet over it. Oh, well, let's let him get something across, anyway. Here goes, our names and addresses, and underneath I'll write, 'What has become of Georgette Gilbert?'"

Perhaps five minutes later the negro took the pad, the top sheet having been torn off and placed in Kennedy's pocket. He also took a small fee of two dollars. A few minutes later we were ushered into the awful presence of the "Veiled Prophet," a tall, ferret-eyed man in a robe that looked suspiciously like a brocaded dressing-gown much too large for him.

Sure enough, he addressed us solemnly by name and proceeded directly to tell us why we had come.

"Let us look into the crystal of the past, present, and future and read what it has to reveal," he added solemnly, darkening the room, which was already only dimly lighted. Then Hata, the crystal-gazer, solemnly seated himself in a chair. Before him, in his hands, reposing on a bag of satin, lay a huge oval piece of glass. He threw forward his head and riveted his eyes on the milky depths of the crystal. In a moment he began to talk, first ramblingly, then coherently.

"I see a man, a dark man," he began. "He is talking earnestly to a young girl. She is trying to avoid him. Ah— he seizes her by both arms. They struggle. He has his hand at her throat. He is choking her."

I was thinking of the newspaper descriptions of Lawton, which the fakir had undoubtedly read, but Kennedy was leaning forward over the crystal-gazer, not watching the crystal at all, nor with his eyes on the clairvoyant's face.

"Her tongue is protruding from her mouth, her eyes are bulging—"

"Yes, yes," urged Kennedy. "Go on."

"She falls. He strikes her. He flees. He goes to—"

Kennedy laid his hand ever so lightly on the arm of the clairvoyant, then quickly withdrew it.

"I cannot see where he goes. It is dark, dark. You will have to come back to-morrow when the vision is stronger."

The thing stung me by its crudity. Kennedy, however, seemed elated by our experience as we gained the street.

"Craig," I remonstrated, "you don't mean to say you attach any importance to vapourings like that? Why, there wasn't a thing the fellow couldn't have imagined from the newspapers, even the clumsy description of Dudley Lawton."

"We'll see," he replied cheerfully, as we stopped under a light to read the address of the next seer, who happened to be in the same block.

It proved to be the psychic palmist who called himself "the Pandit." He also was "born with a strange and remarkable power— not meant to gratify the idle curious, but to direct, advise, and help men and women"— at the usual low fee. He said in print that he gave instant relief to those who had trouble in love, and also positively guaranteed to tell your name and the object of your visit. He added:

Love, courtship, marriage. What is more beautiful than the true unblemished love of one person for another? What is sweeter, better, or more to be desired than perfect harmony and happiness? If you want to win the esteem, love, and everlasting affection of another, see the Pandit, the greatest living master of the occult science.

Inasmuch as this seer fell into a passion at the other incompetent soothsayers in the next column (and almost next door) it seemed as if we must surely get something for our money from the Pandit.

Like Hata, the Pandit lived in a large brownstone house. The man who admitted us led us into a parlour where several people were seated about as if waiting for some one. The pad and writing process was repeated with little variation. Since we were the latest comers we had to wait some time before we were ushered into the presence of the Pandit, who was clad in a green silk robe.

The room was large and had very small windows of stained glass. At one end of the room was an altar on which burned several candles which gave out an incense. The atmosphere of the room was heavy with a fragrance that seemed to combine cologne with chloroform.

The Pandit waved a wand, muttering strange sounds as he did so, for in addition to his palmistry, which he seemed not disposed to exhibit that night, he dealt in mysteries beyond human ken. A voice, quite evidently from a phonograph buried in the depths of the altar, answered in an unknown language which sounded much like "Al-ya wa-aa haal-ya waa-ha." Across the dim room flashed a pale blue light with a crackling noise, the visible rays from a Crookes tube, I verily believe. The Pandit, however, said it was the soul of a saint passing through. Then he produced two silken robes, one red, which he placed on Kennedy's shoulders, and one violet, which he threw over me.

From the air proceeded strange sounds of weird music and words. The Pandit seemed to fall asleep, muttering. Apparently, however, Kennedy and I were bad subjects, for after some minutes of this he gave it up, saying that the spirits had no revelation to make to-night in the matter in which we had called. Inasmuch as we had not written on the pad just what that matter was, I was not surprised. Nor was I surprised when the Pandit laid off his robe and said unctuously, "But if you will call to-morrow and concentrate, I am sure that I can secure a message that will be helpful about your little matter."

Kennedy promised to call, but still he lingered. The Pandit, anxious to get rid of us, moved toward the door. Kennedy sidled over toward the green robe which the Pandit had laid on a chair.

"Might I have some of your writings to look over in the meantime?" asked Craig as if to gain time.

"Yes, but they will cost you three dollars a copy— the price I charge all my students," answered the Pandit with just a trace of a gleam of satisfaction at having at last made an impression.

He turned and entered a cabinet to secure the mystic literature. The moment he had disappeared Kennedy seized the opportunity he had been waiting for. He picked up the green robe and examined the collar and neck very carefully under the least dim of the lights in the room. He seemed to find what he wished, yet he continued to examine the robe until the sound of returning footsteps warned him to lay it down again. He had not been quite quick enough. The Pandit eyed us suspiciously, then he rang a bell. The attendant appeared instantly, noiselessly.

"Show these men into the library," he commanded with just the faintest shade of trepidation. "My servant will give you the book," he said to Craig. "Pay him."

It seemed that we had suddenly been looked upon with disfavour, and I half suspected he thought we were spies of the police, who had recently received numerous complaints of the financial activities of the fortune tellers, who worked in close harmony with certain bucket-shop operators in fleecing the credulous of their money by inspired investment advice. At any rate, the

attendant quickly opened a door into the darkness. Treading cautiously I followed Craig. The door closed behind us. I clenched my fists, not knowing what to expect.

"The deuce!" exclaimed Kennedy. "He passed us out into an alley. There is the street not twenty feet away. The Pandit is a clever one, all right."

It was now too late to see any of the other clairvoyants on our list, so that with this unceremonious dismissal we decided to conclude our investigations for the night.

The next morning we wended our way up into the Bronx, where one of the mystics had ensconced himself rather out of the beaten track of police protection, or persecution, one could not say which. I was wondering what sort of vagary would come next. It proved to be "Swami, the greatest clairvoyant, psychic palmist, and Yogi mediator of them all." He also stood alone in his power, for he asserted:

Names friends, enemies, rivals, tells whom and when you will marry, advises you upon love, courtship, marriage, business, speculation, transactions of every nature. If you are worried, perplexed, or in trouble come to this wonderful man. He reads your life like an open book; he overcomes evil influences, reunites the separated, causes speedy and happy marriage with the one of your choice, tells how to influence any one you desire, tells whether wife or sweetheart is true or false. Love, friendship, and influence of others obtained and a greater share of happiness in life secured. The key to success is that marvellous, subtle, unseen power that opens to your vision the greatest secrets of life. It gives you power which enables you to control the minds of men and women.

The Swami engaged to explain the "wonderful Karmic law," and by his method one could develop a wonderful magnetic personality by which he could win anything the human heart desired. It was therefore with great anticipation that we sought out the wonderful Swami and, falling into the spirit of his advertisement, posed as "come-ons" and pleaded to obtain this wonderful magnetism and a knowledge of the Karmic law— at a ridiculously low figure, considering its inestimable advantages to one engaged in the pursuit of criminal science. Naturally the Swami was pleased at two such early callers, and his narrow, half-bald head, long slim nose, sharp grey eyes, and sallow, unwholesome complexion showed his pleasure in every line and feature.

Rubbing his hands together as he motioned us into the next room, the Swami seated us on a circular divan with piles of cushions upon it. There were clusters of flowers in vases about the room, which gave it the odour of the renewed vitality of the year.

A lackey entered with a silver tray of cups of coffee and a silver jar in the centre. Talking slowly and earnestly about the "great Karmic law," the Swami bade us drink the coffee, which was of a vile, muddy, Turkish variety. Then from

the jar he took a box of rock crystal containing a sort of greenish compound which he kneaded into a little gum— gum tragacanth, I afterward learned,— and bade us taste. It was not at all unpleasant to the taste, and as nothing happened, except the suave droning of the mystic before us, we ate several of the gum pellets.

I am at a loss to describe adequately just the sensations that I soon experienced. It was as if puffs of hot and cold air were alternately blown on my spine, and I felt a twitching of my neck, legs, and arms. Then came a subtle warmth. The whole thing seemed droll; the noise of the Swami's voice was most harmonious. His and Kennedy's faces seemed transformed. They were human faces, but each had a sort of animal likeness back of it, as Lavater has said. The Swami seemed to me to be the fox, Kennedy the owl. I looked in the glass, and I was the eagle. I laughed outright.

It was sensuous in the extreme. The beautiful paintings on the walls at once became clothed in flesh and blood. A picture of a lady hanging near me caught my eye. The countenance really smiled and laughed and varied from moment to moment. Her figure became rounded and living and seemed to stir in the frame. The face was beautiful but ghastly. I seemed to be borne along on a sea of pleasure by currents of voluptuous happiness.

The Swami was affected by a profound politeness. As he rose and walked about the room, still talking, he salaamed and bowed. When I spoke it sounded like a gun, with an echo long afterward rumbling in my brain. Thoughts came to me like fury, bewildering, sometimes as points of light in the most exquisite fireworks. Objects were clothed in most fantastic garbs. I looked at my two animal companions. I seemed to read their thoughts. I felt strange affinities with them, even with the Swami. Yet it was all by the psychological law of the association of ideas, though I was no longer master but the servant of those ideas.

As for Kennedy, the stuff seemed to affect him much differently than it did myself. Indeed, it seemed to rouse in him something vicious. The more I smiled and the more the Swami salaamed, the more violent I could see Craig getting, whereas I was lost in a maze of dreams that I would not have stopped if I could. Seconds seemed to be years; minutes ages. Things at only a short distance looked much as they do when looked at through the inverted end of a telescope. Yet it all carried with it an agreeable exhilaration which I can only describe as the heightened sense one feels on the first spring day of the year.

At last the continued plying of the drug seemed to be too much for Kennedy. The Swami had made a profound salaam. In an instant Kennedy had seized with both hands the long flowing hair at the back of the Swami's bald forehead, and he tugged until the mystic yelled with pain and the tears stood in his eyes.

With a leap I roused myself from the train of dreams and flung myself between them. At the sound of my voice and the pressure of my grasp, Craig sullenly and slowly relaxed his grip. A vacant look seemed to steal into his face, and seizing his hat, which lay on a near-by stool, he stalked out in silence, and I followed.

Neither of us spoke for a moment after we had reached the street, but out of the corner of my eye I could see that Kennedy's body was convulsed as if with suppressed emotion.

"Do you feel better in the air?" I asked anxiously, yet somewhat vexed and feeling a sort of lassitude and half regret at the reality of life and not of the dreams.

It seemed as if he could restrain himself no longer. He burst out into a hearty laugh. "I was just watching the look of disgust on your face," he said as he opened his hand and showed me three or four of the gum lozenges that he had palmed instead of swallowing. "Ha, ha! I wonder what the Swami thinks of his earnest effort to expound the Karmic law."

It was beyond me. With the Swami's concoction still shooting thoughts like sky rockets through my brain I gave it up and allowed Kennedy to engineer our next excursion into the occult.

One more seer remained to be visited. This one professed to "hold your life mirror" and by his "magnetic monochrome," whatever that might be, he would "impart to you an attractive personality, mastery of being, for creation and control of life conditions."

He described himself as the "Guru," and, among other things, he professed to be a sun-worshipper. At any rate, the room into which we were admitted was decorated with the four-spoked wheel, or wheel and cross, the winged circle, and the winged orb. The Guru himself was a swarthy individual with a purple turban wound around his head. In his inner room were many statuettes, photographs of other Gurus of the faith, and on each of the four walls were mysterious symbols in plaster representing a snake curved in a circle, swallowing his tail, a five-pointed star, and in the centre another winged sphere.

Craig asked the Guru to explain the symbols, to which he replied with a smile: "The snake represents eternity, the star involution and evolution of the soul, while the winged sphere— eh, well, that represents something else. Do you come to learn of the faith?"

At this gentle hint Craig replied that he did, and the utmost amicability was restored by the purchase of the *Green Book of the Guru*, which seemed to deal with everything under the sun, and particularly the revival of ancient Asiatic fire-worship with many forms and ceremonies, together with posturing and breathing that rivalled the "turkey trot," the "bunny hug," and the "grizzly bear." The book, as we turned over its pages, gave directions for preparing everything

from food to love-philtres and the elixir of life. One very interesting chapter was devoted to "electric marriage," which seemed to come to those only who, after searching patiently, at last found perfect mates. Another of the Guru's tenets seemed to be purification by eliminating all false modesty, bathing in the sun, and while bathing engaging in any occupation which kept the mind agreeably occupied. On the first page was the satisfying legend, "There is nothing in the world that a disciple can give to pay the debt to the Guru who has taught him one truth."

As we talked, it seemed quite possible to me that the Guru might exert a very powerful hypnotic influence over his disciples or those who came to seek his advice. Besides this indefinable hypnotic influence, I also noted the more material lock on the door to the inner sanctuary.

"Yes," the Guru was saying to Kennedy, "I can secure you one of the love-pills from India, but it will cost you— er— ten dollars." I think he hesitated, to see how much the traffic would bear, from one to one hundred, and compromised with only one zero after the unit. Kennedy appeared satisfied, and the Guru departed with alacrity to secure the specially imported pellet.

In a corner was a sort of dressing-table on which lay a comb and brush. Kennedy seemed much interested in the table and was examining it when the Guru returned. Just as the door opened he managed to slip the brush into his pocket and appear interested in the mystic symbols on the wall opposite.

"If that doesn't work," remarked the Guru in remarkably good English, "let me know, and you must try one of my charm bottles. But the love-pills are fine. Good-day."

Outside Craig looked at me quizzically. "You wouldn't believe it, Walter, would you?" he said. "Here in this twentieth century in New York, and in fact in every large city of the world— love-philtres, love-pills, and all the rest of it. And it is not among the ignorant that these things are found, either. You remember we saw automobiles waiting before some of the places."

"I suspect that all who visit the fakirs are not so gullible, after all," I replied sententiously.

"Perhaps not. I think I shall have something interesting to say to-night as a result of our visits, at least."

During the remainder of the day Kennedy was closely confined in his laboratory with his microscopes, slides, chemicals, test-tubes, and other apparatus. As for myself, I put in the time speculating which of the fakirs had been in some mysterious way connected with the case and in what manner. Many were the theories which I had formed and the situations I conjured up, and in nearly all I had one central figure, the young man whose escapades had been the talk of even the fast set of a fast society.

That night Kennedy, with the assistance of First Deputy O'Connor, who was not averse to taking any action within the law toward the soothsayers, assembled a curiously cosmopolitan crowd in his laboratory. Besides the Gilberts were Dudley Lawton and his father, Hata, the Pandit, the Swami, and the Guru— the latter four persons in high dudgeon at being deprived of the lucrative profits of a Sunday night.

Kennedy began slowly, leading gradually up to his point: "A new means of bringing criminals to justice has been lately studied by one of the greatest scientific detectives of crime in the world, the man to whom we are indebted for our most complete systems of identification and apprehension." Craig paused and fingered the microscope before him thoughtfully. "Human hair," he resumed, "has recently been the study of that untiring criminal scientist, M. Bertillon. He has drawn up a full, classified, and graduated table of all the known colours of the human hair, a complete palette, so to speak, of samples gathered in every quarter of the globe. Henceforth burglars, who already wear gloves or paint their fingers with a rubber composition for fear of leaving finger-prints, will have to wear close-fitting caps or keep their heads shaved. Thus he has hit upon a new method of identification of those sought by the police. For instance, from time to time the question arises whether hair is human or animal. In such cases the microscope tells the answer truthfully.

"For a long time I have been studying hair, taking advantage of those excellent researches by M. Bertillon. Human hair is fairly uniform, tapering gradually. Under the microscope it is practically always possible to distinguish human hair from animal. I shall not go into the distinctions, but I may add that it is also possible to determine very quickly the difference between all hair, human or animal, and cotton with its corkscrew-like twists, linen with its jointed structure, and silk, which is long, smooth, and cylindrical."

Again Kennedy paused as if to emphasise this preface. "I have here," he continued, "a sample of hair." He had picked up a microscope slide that was lying on the table. It certainly did not look very thrilling— a mere piece of glass, that was all. But on the glass was what appeared to be merely a faint line. "This slide," he said, holding it up, "has what must prove an unescapable clue to the identity of the man responsible for the disappearance of Miss Gilbert. I shall not tell you yet who he is, for the simple reason that, though I could make a shrewd guess, I do not yet know what the verdict of science is, and in science we do not guess where we can prove.

"You will undoubtedly remember that when Miss Gilbert's body was discovered, it bore no evidence of suicide, but on the contrary the marks of violence. Her fists were clenched, as if she had struggled with all her power against a force that had been too much for her. I examined her hands, expecting to find some evidence of a weapon she had used to defend herself. Instead, I

found what was more valuable. Here on this slide are several hairs that I found tightly grasped in her rigid hands."

I could not help recalling Kennedy's remark earlier in the case— that it hung on slender threads. Yet how strong might not those threads prove!

"There was also in her pocketbook a newspaper clipping bearing the advertisements of several clairvoyants," he went on. "Mr. Jameson and myself had already discovered what the police had failed to find, that on the morning of the day on which she disappeared Miss Gilbert had made three distinct efforts, probably, to secure books on clairvoyance. Accordingly, Mr. Jameson and myself have visited several of the fortune-tellers and practitioners of the occult sciences in which we had reason to believe Miss Gilbert was interested. They all, by the way, make a specialty of giving advice in money matters and solving the problems of lovers. I suspect that at times Mr. Jameson has thought that I was demented, but I had to resort to many and various expedients to collect the specimens of hair which I wanted. From the police, who used Mr. Lawton's valet, I received some hair from his head. Here is another specimen from each of the advertisers, Hata, the Swami, the Pandit, and the Guru. There is just one of these specimens which corresponds in every particular of colour, thickness, and texture with the hair found so tightly grasped in Miss Gilbert's hand."

As Craig said this I could feel a sort of gasp of astonishment from our little audience. Still he was not quite ready to make his disclosure.

"Lest I should be prejudiced," he pursued evenly, "by my own rather strong convictions, and in order that I might examine the samples without fear or favour, I had one of my students at the laboratory take the marked hairs, mount them, number them, and put in numbered envelopes the names of the persons who furnished them. But before I open the envelope numbered the same as the slide which contains the hair which corresponds precisely with that hair found in Miss Gilbert's hand— and it is slide No. 2—" said Kennedy, picking out the slide with his finger and moving it on the table with as much coolness as if he were moving a chessman on a board instead of playing in the terrible game of human life, "before I read the name I have still one more damning fact to disclose."

Craig now had us on edge with excitement, a situation which I sometimes thought he enjoyed more keenly than any other in his relentless tracing down of a criminal.

"What was it that caused Miss Gilbert's death?" asked Kennedy. "The coroner's physician did not seem to be thoroughly satisfied with the theory of physical violence alone. Nor did I. Some one, I believe, exerted a peculiar force in order to get her into his power. What was that force? At first I thought it might have been the hackneyed knockout drops, but tests by the coroner's physician eliminated that. Then I thought it might be one of the alkaloids, such

as morphine, cocaine, and others. But it was not any of the usual things that was used to entice her away from her family and friends. From tests that I have made I have discovered the one fact necessary to complete my case, the drug used to lure her and against which she fought in deadly struggle."

He placed a test tube in a rack before us. "This tube," he continued, "contains one of the most singular and, among us, least known of the five common narcotics of the world— tobacco, opium, coca, betel nut, and hemp. It can be smoked, chewed, used as a drink, or taken as a confection. In the form of a powder it is used by the narghile smoker. As a liquid it can be taken as an oily fluid or in alcohol. Taken in any of these forms, it literally makes the nerves walk, dance, and run. It heightens the feelings and sensibilities to distraction, producing what is really hysteria. If the weather is clear, this drug will make life gorgeous; if it rains, tragic. Slight vexation becomes deadly revenge; courage becomes rashness; fear, abject terror; and gentle affection or even a passing liking is transformed into passionate love. It is the drug derived from the Indian hemp, scientifically named *Cannabis Indica*, better known as hashish, or *bhang*, or a dozen other names in the East. Its chief characteristic is that it has a profound effect on the passions. Thus, under its influence, natives of the East become greatly exhilarated, then debased, and finally violent, rushing forth on the streets with the cry, 'Amok, amok,'— 'Kill, kill'— as we say, 'running amuck.' An overdose of this drug often causes insanity, while in small quantities our doctors use it as a medicine. Any one who has read the brilliant Theophile Gautier's *'Club des Hachichens*' or Bayard Taylor's experience at Damascus knows something of the effect of hashish, however.

"In reconstructing the story of Georgette Gilbert, as best I can, I believe that she was lured to the den of one of the numerous cults practised in New York, lured by advertisements offering advice in hidden love affairs. Led on by her love for a man whom she could not and would not put out of her life, and by her affection for her parents, she was frantic. This place offered hope, and to it she went in all innocence, not knowing that it was only the open door to a life such as the most lurid disorderly resorts of the metropolis could scarcely match. There her credulity was preyed upon, and she was tricked into taking this drug, which itself has such marked and perverting effect. But, though she must have been given a great deal of the drug, she did not yield, as many of the sophisticated do. She struggled frantically, futilely. Will and reason were not conquered, though they sat unsteadily on their thrones. The wisp of hair so tightly clasped in her dead hand shows that she fought bitterly to the end."

Kennedy was leaning forward earnestly, glaring at each of us in turn. Lawton was twisting uneasily in his chair, and I could see that his fists were doubled up and that he was holding himself in leash as if waiting for something, eyeing us all

keenly. The Swami was seized with a violent fit of trembling, and the other fakirs were staring in amazement.

Quickly I stepped between Dudley Lawton and Kennedy, but as I did so, he leaped behind me, and before I could turn he was grappling wildly with some one on the floor.

"It's all right, Walter," cried Kennedy, tearing open the envelope on the table. "Lawton has guessed right. The hair was the Swami's. Georgette Gilbert was one victim who fought and rescued herself from a slavery worse than death. And there is one mystic who could not foresee arrest and the death house at Sing Sing in his horoscope."

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5: Regency Buck, by Georgette Heyer
Terry Walker, aka Pulpmeister
In: *A Century of Sensational Fiction*, 2012 (e-book)

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Years ago, to amuse myself, I began writing reviews of some of the novels I'd recently read (or re-read). Eventually I gathered them together and made an e-book of them, and posted the book in MobileRead's Library for free. Since I can't post any story by Georgette Heyer here, why not one of those reviews, which I placed in the public domain years ago?

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"I was hearing she was an excessively delightful girl. Eighty thousand pounds I believe."

LOVE, we are told, makes the world go around, or at least makes the earth move. Story-tellers have been right across this idea ever since Homer glamorised a minor war fought over Helen of Troy, who was no better than she ought to have been anyway.

It's amazing how pervasive romance is in fiction. Even those tough, masculine, hardboiled heroes who leap, supercharged with testosterone, from the pages of Dashiell Hammet, John D. MacDonald, Alistair MacLean, Clive Cussler and Co., feel their hearts soften at the sight of a well-turned ankle (or rather more, these days).

Jane Austen's beautifully observed descriptions of the mating rituals of the upper-middle and upper classes in Regency England ultimately begat Harlequin Mills and Boon, not to mention all those fat paperbacks with pink and violet covers often featuring a bare-chested Fabio clutching a damsel in, or party out of, crinolines. Practically every romance novel since the advent of pulp paper has freely plagiarised the seminal plot of her brilliant *Pride and Prejudice* (1813): boy meets girl, boy loses girl, boy gets girl.

Mr Darcy, we remember, was an immensely proud young man who had a snobbishly low opinion of Elizabeth Bennett's rambling family, and Elizabeth was deeply prejudiced against the immensely proud Darcy. It took quite a bit of stylish manoeuvring on the part of the author before the couple could send out those deckle-edged invitations.

Pride and Prejudice created a genre that shows no sign of dying out, the Regency romance. For many years the undisputed queen of Regency romance was Georgette Heyer (1902-1974).

In truth, Georgette Heyer didn't specialise quite that narrowly. Her fifty-six novels (published between 1921 and 1975, and all but a handful still in print) include some romances set in other historical periods, eleven entertaining

romantic whodunits set in modern times, and surprisingly the rather grim tragedy *Penhallow*. But the brief, golden Regency period (1811-1820) was her special beat.

Regency Buck (1935) is a good example of the oeuvre, and is practically irresistible on the strength of the title alone. I found my 1975 Pan edition in an untidy pile of Heyer paperbacks in a second hand bookshop. It set me back just $2, which only goes to prove you can still buy something of value with a single coin.

The Taverners

THE TALL, spirited, beautiful and very rich heiress Judith Taverner, 20, is *en route* from Yorkshire to London with her younger brother Peregrine. On page 18, she meets by accident— and instantly dislikes— a tall, dark, handsome, aristocratic and supercilious stranger who, at a second encounter on page 31 enrages her by stealing a kiss and dubbing her "Clorinda".

Surely an in-joke. Clorinda was the name of the ill-fated Saracen girl in Tasso's famous epic 16 C. Italian poem *La Gerusalemme Liberata* about the Crusades, which Judith Taverner may be taken to have read. Clorinda was also the name of the insufferable heroine of one of the worst novels in the history of purple prose, Frances Hodgson Burnett's 1896 best-seller *A Lady of Quality*, which, it is just possible, Heyer may have read. And of course there is a certain tradition in the romance genre of the heroine being awarded a pet name by the hero fairly early in the novel. Recently I found another example of the practice in a 1950s romantic thriller by M M Kaye.

Judith Taverner has a fortune of £80,000, a fact much discussed by potential suitors: "I was hearing she was an excessively delightful girl. Eighty thousand pounds I believe." Her younger brother Sir Peregrine Taverner, Bart, 19, has considerably more money, giving him an income of £12,000 per year.

Using the Postage Stamp Deflator (which I just invented) we can readily convert this into today's funny money. England's universal penny-post began in 1830, about 17 years after the date of the novel. An ordinary letter cost one penny then, and about 35 new pence, or 85 old pennies, today. Multiply by 85 for modern English quids, or by roughly 200 for modern Australian dollars. Judith is worth about $A16,000,000, while Peregrine as some $A65,000,000, yielding $A2.4 million a year pocket money. Let's face it: these kids are not doing it tough.

All this sordid calculation is highly relevant. by the way, and not just the product of an agonising spasm of sheer envy (well, all right, there was an agonising spasm of sheer envy). The snag is that both these millionaires are

minors, and their lately deceased Yorkshire father has left them as wards of his elderly London crony, the Earl of Worth.

Meet Lord Worth...

IN LONDON Judith and her brother are appalled to discover that their guardian is not that elderly gentleman, but is none other than the supercilious young stranger who kissed Judith on page 31. Old Lord Worth had died, and his son Julian St John Audley had succeeded to the title. (He has a secretary named Blackader, with one "d"; I thought you might like to know.)

The two youngsters, reluctantly under the control of the equally reluctant Lord Worth, enter into the *ton*. The feckless Peregrine falls in with the cock-fighting, boxing, gaming and boozing set. The beautiful, impetuous, headstrong Judith is given the imprimatur of that famous arbiter of Regency taste and style, Beau Brummell, and she proceeds to cut a swathe through the Season.

A triangle forms. As we watch the bare-knuckle boxing matches, cockfights, duels, snuff-taking, balls and routs so dear to the hearts of the Regency upper crust, we suspect that Lord Worth rather fancies Judith. He has a strong rival in Judith's London-based cousin, and now good friend, Bernard Taverner, an elegant man-about-town who is so much more amiable than the stern, stubborn Worth. Judith, unable to forget the humiliation of that unwanted kiss on page 31, despises Worth as an ill-mannered autocratic dandy.

It is axiomatic in romance novels that characters who despise each other on page 31 are certain to be embracing by page 331, but three hundred pages of star-crossed lovers pouting at one another would be very thin gruel indeed. There has to be a boy-loses-girl scene, and it occurs around page 254 when Judith and Worth collide over one of Judith’s high-spirited but socially disastrous whims, and their slowly warming relationship becomes one of icy hostility. Heyer further interweaves this, and the minutiae of a full Regency society season, with a whodunit sub-plot whereby a series of murderous attempts is made on young Peregrine’s life.

The Murder Plot Thickens

WHO WANTS to rub out the feckless teenager, and why? It’s not until page 298 that the truth is exposed at last: if Peregrine dies before he marries, his fortune passes to his sister Judith. She will then be worth about $A80 million, an awe-inspiring $1.3 million per delectable kilogram. Cousin Bernard, secretly in dire financial straits, has been desperately, if ineffectually, trying to kill Peregrine so he can marry Judith for the aforesaid vast fortune. He’d marry Judith for that amount of money even if she had three heads, all with

moustaches; that she's gorgeous is a fabulous bonus. But Judith has already rejected his offer of marriage.

Confident that his latest Byzantine plot to dispose of Peregrine is being carried out successfully by his henchmen, Bernard lures Judith to a remote house in Kent and reveals his true self at last. Here Judith faces a Fate Worse Than Death, after which she would be so socially disgraced she would have to marry Bernard, who would then, of course, take her money.

However, Lord Worth, working behind the scenes, has successfully frustrated every murder attempt, including the latest. He hunts down Bernard Taverner and rescues Judith at the eleventh hour, furiously decking the villain with a single blow (and subsequently, we infer with approval, beating him to a pulp).

Two days later Judith Taverner turns twenty-one and Worth's year of her guardianship is over. So long as she was his ward, Worth tells her, he could not, with honour, reveal that he had been in love with her since page 18; hence his stern demeanour, and his frequent conflicts with her. And Judith has finally realised that she has really loved him ever since that stolen kiss on page 31. As they embrace, you hear the ghostly sound of a church organ clearing its throat and tentatively sounding the opening notes of "The Wedding March".

When you're on a good thing—

IT WAS all good clean fun and worth the $2, but I couldn't help feeling that it seemed a little familiar. Then the penny dropped. Almost exactly the same romantic setup is found in Georgette Heyer's enjoyable whodunit *Behold, Here's Poison* (1936), which I had read some time before.

It is 1935. The peppery heroine is Stella, with a weak brother; the Worth part is taken by her rich, supercilious cousin Randall Matthews, whom Stella cordially despises but who secretly loves her; and she has a boyfriend who proves to be a fortune-hunter with feet of clay. The romance is moved into the background to make room for a most ingenious murder mystery, ultimately solved by Randall Matthews. He also wins Stella's love, much to her surprise.

"But I don't even like your type!" she wails between passionate kisses.

A clever whodunit, and a typical Heyer romance; two for the price of one.

Somewhat surprised by how much I enjoyed *Regency Buck*, I have since read several of Heyer's other historical romances and all of her whodunits, and found them to be immensely enjoyable. The romances frequently have a strong action element. *The Quiet Gentleman* (1951) includes a murder mystery; *The Reluctant Widow* (1946) has a spy story embedded in it (and was made into a very mediocre movie with too many unnecessary changes); and *The Unknown Ajax*

(1958) deals with smugglers. Others are played more for comedy: *The Grand Sophy* (1950) bubbles with fun.

Heyer's good-humoured and light-hearted romantic novels, which are definitely not bodice rippers by the way, haven't aged a bit; and the butterfly lives of her wealthy unemployables are as entertaining today as ever they were.

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6: Swinnerton's Wonderful Dog

Edward Dyson (as by "Silas Snell")

1865–1931

Critic (Adelaide) 15 Dec 1900

IF SWINNERTON'S DOG was any good for anything on earth but as a fattening paddock for fleas his appearance belied him; he was a low-browed, boss-eyed, squalid cur, with a dirty yellow complexion and the morals of a warthog. He was of an atrabilious temperament, and had an evil disposition, and was wont to waken suddenly out of a fit of reverie, and start nervously kicking insects off his neck with his hind claw. When Venus started hitting himself behind the ear in that hysterical, energetic way with his left hind leg, it was time to give him air and stand from under, because, instantly, and without further warning, it began to rain large, famished fleas in his vicinity, and if you happened to be in the line of fire you would not be fit for publication in decent society for a week at least.

Swinnerton affected a great pride in his dog, and tremendous admiration for his intellect and moral abilities, but I believe now that he did this with sinister and ulterior motives. Swinny would stand around in front of the pub, when any of the boys were about, and gaze at that old sore flea-emporium of his, with a look of mute admiration in his eyes that was quite touching, and Venus would do nothing to deserve this evident great respect, but chase himself up and down the fence, rubbing all the nap off his ribs on the pickets, or sit kicking fleas at the visitors; and I must admit that he could kick a flea further and straighter than any other tortured dog it has been my misfortune to meet.

At last Swinnerton broke out about his dog. He had a large audience under the pub. verandah, and the day was warm, and he was nearly up to his chin in beer. He had been gloating over the brute in silence for about ten minutes, and he broke out like a man who could retain his feelings no longer.

"See that dog, lads?" he said, "that's the most wonderful dog on earth below."

"Dorg!" growled Blue Peter. "Call 'im a dorg! He's a blanky pea-shooter fer fleas; he's a reg'lar flea squirt. He ain't no dorg!"

"That dog," continued Swinnerton, with emphasis, "is the most wonderfully gifted dog on this here earthly footstool."

"What breed o' dog?'' asked Piper, with the air of an expert.

"Half sheep, half cattle," said the proud owner, "but he's an artist after either. No better sheepdog ever smelt wool, an' he could take a mob o' cattle up the side of a house. Accomplishments! That dog's got more accomplishments than Melbourne University, an' as much intelligence as a science congress. Look here, talkin' about drovin', that dog could yard a swarm o' wild bees into a barrel through the blanky bunghole, an' never lose a single bleedin' bee.

"I call him Venus 'cause he's a good water dog. See here, he's a livin' for the man who owns him; an' easy livin', that's what he is. He's bloomin' well kept me for five years. An' how? Winnin' bets, that's how. It's like this; coves what think they're smart, they see Venus there, loungin' round, leanin' up against things, lookin' too tired to die, and they jump to the conclusion that he hasn't got sense enough to wag his own tail or spirit enough to steal giblets from a consumptive cat. 'Bout this time I chances round, an' makes a airy remark bearin' on Venus's intellectual attainments an' his trickiness generally. They ridicule the idea of his knowin' any more than a tin pan, an' I makes a pretty temptin' bet. They snaps me up, an' I win, 'cause that dog'll do anythin' I tell him.

"Now, s'pose any o' you fellers want a superior sheepdog— a sheepdog what'd round a hard old immoral, moonstruck, buttin' ram into a pill box if you gave him the order— there's yer animal. What's the hardest things in the world to drive?"

"Pigs," said Piper, sententiously. "Wrong again. Pigs are bad, but they are the spirit o' righteousness an the pinnacle o' reason compared to goats. The pig when you want him to go one way insists on goin' the other, an' argues the matter like 'ell in a high falsetta voice. Now, a smart dog soon discovers this. Venus there discovered it in half an hour, an' now when he's asked to drive pigs in one direction he tries his darnedest to drive 'em the opposite way, knowin' that the pigs will go right from blanky contrariness.

"But what about goats? Set a dog to drive a mob o' goats, an' what happens? The bally goats don't go any way, but just rounds on that dog, and tries to butt him into hash an' tatters. I was once very nearly bein' had over Venus through a mob of goats, an' I'll tell you how 'twas. I'd struck some smart flats at a little Gippsland township, an' won five quid from 'em over a bet that Venus could take five hundred sheep through a two foot openin' in a fence without leaving a single strand of wool on the palins. When he'd done it a long feller that'd been lookin' on ups and says:

" 'I'll tell you what, mate, I'll bet you twenty quid I'll bring a mob of twenty that that dog o' yours won't put through that openin' in an hour.'

" 'Done,' I said. "We fixed the time, an' next momin' along came the tall cove with his mob, an' as soon as I clapped eyes on 'em I reckoned I was done brown on both sides. The mob was not sheep at all, but goats, an' most of 'em big buttin' billies that would have fought with the bloomin' pyramids. O' course, I bucked, but what was the use? They were all agen me, an' so I reckoned I'd haw a bustle for my money.

"Well, I called Venus up, an' gave him his order, and he sailed in in his old, cheery, obligin', confident way, but he hadn't had no experience of goats; he hadn't been dealin' in 'em, an' no sooner did he start roundin' 'em up than a

large male, with a deep bass voice an' a beard like Dan O'Connor, of Sydney, whipped round an' butted him from here to the valley of the shadder of death.

"You never saw a dog so surprised in all your born natural, but Venus is not a dog that's easy discouraged. You can see by the way he deals with his fleas that he's a sticker. He pulled himself together, an' had another shot at it. This time four old goats all came at him together, and they bounced off his ribs, an' left him feelin' as if he'd been bumped by a locomotive. When he took 'em on for a third time, a pert little nanny countered, and got in on his brisket, bowling him over endways; another chipped in an' caught him as he revolved, helpin' him on his way; a third took him on the hop, an' passed him on, still revolvin' on his own axis; a fourth rapped him as he bounced, and so they strung him out for nearly a hundred yards, while the crowd laughed. Hair of Higgins! how that crowd laughed. They hung on to each other and roared, they had giddy fits on the grass and yelled, they bounded around like spring idiots an' shrieked, an' the long man began to tell about the things he was goin' to buy fer his old mother with my fifteen quid.

"Poor Venus, he was awfully hurt. He was more depressed when them goats had done bouncing him along than a young an' tender slug what's been rolled over by a fifty-ton road-roller. He looked at me with awful reproach in his eye, as much as to say, 'Well, this is dirty, low, Chinese joke to put upon a dog, isn't it?' But when I gave the word he took it on again.

"Venus is a dog that's quick to learn. Already he had learned the guidin' principle that you want to be able to dodge quick and lively when you go drovin' goats. This time he dodged, and the goats kept him pretty busy. Now and again while he was dodging one billy a second would plunge head-first into his ribs, and land him in the valley of the shadder again, and the crowd would laugh some more, and the long fellow would say that he never knew how sweet it was to be paid fifteen clean, cool quid for havin' a howlin' good day. I was feelin' a great chill in my pocket by this time, but Venus was not done yet; he was pickin' up hints an' splinters all the time.

"Presently he makes a brilliant change in his tactics, an' swings round in front of the goats between them and the hole in the fence, and starts playin' monkey tricks with the old billies, tryin' to lure them on.

"For a time I couldn't get on to his game, but at last he kidded a big bearded William to rush him, and then, like a flash, he was through the opening in the fence, and the goat after him. He'd got one through.

"Venus followed up his success. He came out again, an' started the same game once more. This time three rushed him through the opening, and the crowd suddenly stopped laughing, an' the long fellow said that it promised to be an unpleasant evenin'.

"It was my turn now, an' I encouraged that there dog all I knew. He didn't need it; he'd discovered the weakness of goats; he'd got on to the kink in their intellects, an' he worked it for all he was worth. He worked up them goats into a perfect lather of disgust, an' every time one rushed him he turned tail, an' scuttled through the fence, an' he never failed to get a goat or two on the bounce. Once six followed him in a string, eager to butt his spine up like a shut concertina.

"Sometimes a goat inside would wait for him coming, and get a bat on to him that made his head ache, and shook all his ideas loose, but he never backed down till he'd got the last goat through that fence. He just waited to see the fifteen quid paid over to me fair and square, and to have a good long look at the crowd which was now all crumpled up, an' lookin' as miserable as a wet Sunday in Geelong, before he turned tail an' left for the township.

"When I got back he was waitin' for me to rub him with a bottle of embrocation what he'd stolen from the corner store.

"There he is," continued Swinnerton. pointing to Venus, who was kicking out fleas one at a time and in parcels, "the most accomplished dog from Hobart to the Gulf, and any man that's wanting a dog to be a guide to his old age an' a teacher to his children can have him for two half-crowns an' a medium beer."

There were no takers.

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7: The Rattlesnake Hunter

John Greenleaf Whittier

1807-1892

In: *Legends of New England* (1831)

"Until my ghastly tale is told
This heart within me burns."
—Rime of the Ancient Mariner.

DURING a delightful excursion in the vicinity of the Green Mountains, a few years since, I had the good fortune to meet with a singular character, known in many parts of Vermont as the Rattlesnake Hunter. It was a warm, clear day of sunshine, in the middle of June that I saw him for the first time, while engaged in a mineralogical ramble among the hills. His head was bald, and his forehead was deeply marked with the strong lines of care and age. His form was wasted and meagre; and, but for the fiery vigor of his eye, he might have been supposed incapacitated by age and infirmities for even a slight exertion. Yet he hurried over the rude ledges of rock with a quick and almost youthful tread; nd seemed earnestly

searching among the crevices and loose crags and stinted bushes around him. All at once, he started suddenly— drew himself back with a sort of shuddering recoil— and then smote fiercely with his staff upon the rock before him. Another, and another blow,— and he lifted the lithe and crushed form of a large Rattlesnake upon the end of his rod.

The old man's eye glistened but his lip trembled, as he looked steadfastly upon his yet writhing victim. "Another of the cursed race!" he muttered, between his clenched teeth, apparently unconscious of my presence.

I was now satisfied that the person before me was none other than the famous Rattlesnake Hunter. He was known throughout the neighborhood as an outcast, and a wanderer, obtaining a miserable subsistence from the casual charities of the people around him. His time was mostly spent among the rocks and rude hills, where his only object seemed to be the hunting out and destroying of the dreaded *Crotalus horridus*, or Rattlesnake. I immediately determined to satisfy my curiosity, which had been strangely excited by the remarkable appearance and behavior of the stranger; and for this purpose I approached him.

"Are there many of these reptiles in this vicinity?" I enquired, pointing to the crushed serpent.

"They are getting to be scarce," said the old man, lifting his slouched hat and wiping his bald brow; "I have known the time when you could hardly stir ten rods from your door in this part of the State without hearing their low, quick

rattle at your side, or seeing their many-colored bodies coiling up in your path. But, as I said before, they are getting to be scarce—the infernal race will be extinct in a few years;— and thank God, I have myself been a considerable cause of their extermination."

"You must, of course, know the nature of these creatures perfectly well," said I. "Do you believe in their power of fascination or charming?"

The old man's countenance fell. There was a visible struggle of feeling within him: for his lip quivered, and he dashed his brown hand suddenly across his eyes, as if to conceal a tear. But quickly recovering himself, he answered in the low, deep voice of one about to reveal some horrible secret—

"I believe in the Rattlesnake's power of fascination as firmly as I believe in my own existence."

"Surely," said I, "you do not believe that they have power over human beings?"

"I do—I know it to be so!"—and the old man trembled as he spoke. — "You are a stranger to me," he said slowly, after scrutinizing my features for a moment,— "but if you will go down with me to the foot of this rock, in the shade there"—and he pointed to a group of leaning oaks that hung over the declivity— "I will tell you a strange and sad story of my own experience."

It may be supposed that I readily assented to this proposal. Bestowing one more blow on the rattlesnake, as if to be certain of his death, the old man descended the rocks with a rapidity, which would have endangered the neck of a less practiced hunter. After reaching the spot which he had pointed out, the Rattlesnake Hunter commenced his story in a manner which confirmed what I had previously heard of his education and intellectual strength.

"I was among the earliest settlers in this part of the country. I had just finished my education at the University of Harvard, when I was induced, by the flattering representations of some of the earlier pioneers into the wild lands beyond the Connecticut, to seek my fortune in the new settlements. My wife"—the old man's eye glistened an instant, and then a tear crossed his brown cheek—"my wife accompanied me, young and delicate and beautiful as she was, to this wild and rude country. I shall never forgive myself for bringing her hither—never. "Young man," he continued, "you look like one who could pity me. You shall see the image of the girl who followed me to the new country." And he unbound, as he spoke, a ribbon from his neck, with a small miniature attached to it.

It was that of a beautiful female. She might have been twenty years of age—but there was an almost childish expression in her countenance,— a softness—a delicacy, and a sweetness of smile, which I have seldom seen in the features of those who have tasted, even slightly, of the bitter waters of existence. The old

man watched my countenance intently, as I surveyed the image of his early love. "She must have been very beautiful," I said, as I returned the picture.

"Beautiful!" he repeated, "you may well say so. But this avails nothing. I have a fearful story to tell: would to God I had not attempted it; but I will go on. My heart has been stretched too often on the rack of memory to suffer any new pang."

"We had resided in the new country nearly a year. Our settlements had increased rapidly; and the comforts and delicacies of life were beginning to be felt, after the weary privations, and severe trials to which we had been subjected. The red men were few and feeble, and did not molest us. The beasts of the forest and mountain were ferocious, but we suffered little from them. The only immediate danger to which we were exposed resulted from the Rattlesnakes which infested our neighborhood. Three or four of our settlers were bitten by them, and died in terrible agonies. The Indians often told us frightful stories of this snake, and its powers of fascination, and although they were generally believed, yet for myself, I confess, I was rather amused than convinced by their marvellous legends.

"In one of my hunting excursions abroad, on a fine morning—it was just at this time of the year— I was accompanied by my wife. 'Twas a beautiful morning. The sunshine was warm, but the atmosphere was perfectly clear; and a fine breeze from the northwest shook the bright, green leaves which clothed to profusion the wreathing branches above us. I had left my companion for a short time, in pursuit of game; and in climbing a rugged ledge of rocks, interspersed with shrubs and dwarfish trees, I was startled by a quick, grating rattle. I looked forward. On the edge of a loosened rock lay a large Rattlesnake, coiling himself, as if for the deadly spring. He was within a few feet of me; and I paused for an instant to survey him. I know not why, but I stood still, and looked at the deadly serpent with a strange feeling of curiosity. Suddenly he unwound his coil, as if relenting from his purpose of hostility, and raising his head, he fixed his bright, fiery eye directly upon my own. A chilling and indescribable sensation totally different from any thing I had ever before experienced, followed this movement of the serpent; but I stood still, and gazed steadily and earnestly, for at that moment there was a visible change in the reptile.— His form seemed to grow larger, and his colors brighter. His body moved with a slow, almost imperceptible motion towards me, and a low hum of music came from him— or, at least, it sounded in my ear— a strange, sweet melody, faint as that which melts from the throat of the Humming-bird. Then the tints of his body deepened, and changed and glowed, like the changes of a beautiful kaleidoscope,— green, purple and gold, until I lost sight of the serpent entirely, and saw only wild and curiously woven circles of strange colors, quivering around me, like an atmosphere of rainbows. I seemed in the centre of a great

prism— a world of mysterious colors;— and the tints varied and darkened and lighted up again around me; and the low music went on without ceasing, until my brain reeled; and fear, for the first time, came like a shadow over me. The new sensation gained upon me rapidly, and I could feel the cold sweat gushing from my brow. I had no certainty of danger in my mind— no definite ideas of peril— all was vague and clouded, like the unaccountable terrors of a dream,— and yet my limbs shook, and I fancied I could feel the blood stiffening with cold as it passed along my veins. I would have given worlds to have been able to tear myself from the spot—I even attempted to do so, but the body obeyed not the impulse of the mind—not a muscle stirred; and I stood still, as if my feet had grown to the solid rock, with the infernal music of the tempter in my ear, and the baleful colorings of his enchantment before me.

Suddenly a new sound came on my ear—it was a human voice—but it seemed strange and awful. Again—again—but I stirred not; and then a white form plunged before me, and grasped my arm. The horrible spell was at once broken. The strange colors passed from before my vision. The Rattlesnake was coiling at my very feet, with glowing eyes and uplifted fangs; and my wife was clinging in terror upon me. The next instant the serpent threw himself upon us. My wife was the victim!— The fatal fangs pierced deeply into her hand; and her scream of agony, as she staggered backward from me, told me the dreadful truth.

Then it was that a feeling of madness came upon me; and when I saw the foul serpent stealing away from his work of death, reckless of danger, I sprang forward and crushed him under my feet, grinding him in pieces upon the ragged rock. The groans of my wife now recalled me to her side, and to the horrible reality of her situation. There was a dark, livid spot on her hand; and it deepened into blackness as I led her away. We were at a considerable distance from any dwelling; and after wandering for a short time, the pain of her wound became insupportable to my wife, and she swooned away in my arms. Weak and exhausted as I was, I had yet strength enough remaining to carry her to the nearest rivulet, and bathe her brow in the cool water. She partially recovered, and sat down upon the bank, while I supported her head upon my bosom. Hour after hour passed away, and none came near us,— and there— alone, in the great wilderness, I watched over her, and prayed with her— and she died!

The old man groaned audibly, as he uttered these words; and, as he clasped his long, bony hands over his eyes, I could see the tears falling thickly through his gaunt fingers. After a momentary struggle with his feelings, he lifted his head once more, and there was a fierce light in his eye as he spoke:

"But I have had my revenge. From that fatal moment I have felt myself fitted and set apart, by the terrible ordeal of affliction, to rid the place of my abode of its foulest curse. And I have well nigh succeeded. The fascinating demons are

already few and powerless. Do not imagine," said he, earnestly regarding the somewhat equivocal expression of my countenance, "that I consider these creatures as serpents only— creeping serpents;— they are the servants of the fallen Angel— the immediate ministers of the infernal Gulf!"

YEARS HAVE PASSED since my interview with the Rattlesnake Hunter: the place of his abode has changed— a beautiful village rises near the spot of our conference, and the grass of the church yard is green over the grave of the old Hunter. But his story is yet fixed upon my mind, and Time, like enamel, only burns deeper the first strong impression. It comes up before me like a vividly remembered dream, whose features are too horrible for reality.

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8: A Flood of Trouble

Ernest O'Ferrall (as by "Kodak")

1881-1925

The Lone Hand Dec 1910

"CAN you fight?" asked the man in the dray from the midst of his oilskins.

The wet swagman glanced keenly at him from under his dripping hat brim.

"A bit."

The man in the dray nodded approvingly. "Chuck your swag in the back there and climb up. I'll tell you what I want as we go along."

The swagman thankfully threw his wet Matilda over the tailboard, carefully placed his blackened billy alongside it, and hopped in. The driver slapped the reins on his horse's flank, and the dray jolted off along the muddy road.

"The river's riz a lot," said the swagman-

"It'll rise a dashed sight higher," muttered the driver gloomily.

"Think there's a flood comin'?"

"I don't think— I know!" The driver's tone was one of utter hopelessness.

"Think it will cover th' plain 'ere?" The swagman was becoming alarmed.

"Sure thing; this plain will be a lake to-morrow."

"Oh, I dunno; th' storekeeper in the town said he reckoned th' worst of it was over."

The driver waved his whip at the leaden skies and remarked, "There's lots more rain coming, and it's going to be an old man flood— I've lived all my life in this district, and I know how that old river can spread itself out when th' water from the hills comes down. That's why I want you!"

"Why?"

"It's this way. I've got a nice little place about two miles further on. The house is on a little bit of a rise; and if the flood comes down (as I reckon it will) it'll make a sort of desert island of the place."

"What can I do?"

"Hold on, and I'll tell you! I got married last week. The girl's family couldn't stand me because I was a divorced man, and wouldn't give their consent. We married in spite of them, wired the news to them at home, and came on down here to the farm. It was raining— had been raining for five days, and we didn't think it was worth while going away for a honeymoon. So we just came on to the farm."

The swagman nodded. "Best thing yer could have done— save money and bother."

"It didn't save any bother— it made

it. Last night her father and his two sons arrived and raised the finest row I've ever been in. I tell you there's been a perfect hell of an argument raging up.

We sat up half the night talking fight; and they started off this morning by threatening to punch me off the face of the earth. At last I quit and went into the township to see the J.P. about it; and I would have had them cleared off by now only the troopers are up to their eyes in work getting the settlers out of harm's way. I've told these darned relations of mine that there's a big flood coming for sure, and that they'd belter get back to town while they had the chance; but they're too busy threatening me to think about floods. They're certain to be caught to-night or to-morrow if they don't clear; and God only knows when they'll be able to get away. It might be over a week. I didn't like the prospect of being alone, you understand; so when I saw you mooching along I thought I might rope you in for my side. What do you think?"

The swagman looked solemnly ahead. "Can any of their side fight?"

"I don't know, old man; they've only talked about it so far."

"Well, can you fight yourself?"

"No," said the driver, in a frank and cheerful manner; "I'm no good with my hands."

Doubt seized upon the pilgrim immediately.

"Look here, mate, what do I get out of this? I can scrap a bit, but I can't fight three on my own. Then if there's any bother afterwards, and they haul me up, how do I stand then? I know how these country J.P.'s are down on a chap like me. I tell you straight, I don't like it."

"Don't worry," said the bride-groom reassuringly. "They mightn't do anything after all, and anyhow I'll see you through. Look! There's the house on the little hill. That's the old man on the verandah, and the two sons by the fence. They're all waiting for me to come home. Faithful, affectionate beasts!"

The cart jolted along through an open gateway, creaked up the rise, and, skirting the house, drew up at the stable opposite the back door. The big, old man on the verandah watched it sullenly all the way, but made no sound of greeting. It was a gloomy home coming. Then the driver got down, and, unharnessing the horse with the assistance of his ally, led it to the stable and made it comfortable.

After the dray had been run under a rough shed, the bridegroom invited his aide to follow him, and, whistling drearily through his teeth, led the way towards the house. An anxious girl with reddened eyes met them at the door.

"How is it, Jack?" she asked.

"Tell you later," he replied, patting her shoulder. "Look! I met this chap on the road. He's going to take the fencing job when the rain clears. In the meantime we'll give him a shake-down here. Oh, I say, I forgot to ask your name?"

"Fred Johnson," said the swagman.

"Right-o, Johnson. Now how about some tea?"

"It's all ready. You and Mr. Johnson go in, and I'll call the others. I'll lay another place for myself. "

The two men tramped into a room lit by a swinging kerosene lamp in which there was a table at which places were set for four people. The host took a chair on one side and drew out the next for his guest.

"If you want the bread or anything, Johnson, point at it, and I or the wife will get it for you. This isn't a sociable family just now, and passing is off. Here they come, hang them."

The muffled tread of heavy men sounded in the hall, the door was thrown open, and the three tramped in and silently took their places on the opposite side of the table to that occupied by Johnson and his host. The bride arrived immediately afterwards with a tray on which were five steaming cups of tea. She distributed these round and retired, re-appearing a minute or so later with two immense plates of hot scones. Then she retreated to the kitchen, where she stayed. The five men ate and drank steadily in unfriendly silence for three minutes; then the rain, which had been merely drumming lightly on the roof, started a steady and deafening bombardment.

Johnson, with his mouth full of hot scone, turned to his host and shouted,

"My word, it won't take much of this to bring that flood along!"

The father-in-law—a grim man with an iron-grey beard —scowled horribly on the talkative stranger, and, looking round, noticed for the first time that he was occupying his daughter's place. Putting down his knife, he roared angrily, "Mary!"

The girl appeared at the door as if by magic, rubbing her floury hands on her apron. "Yes, Dad. Do you want some more tea?"

"Why aren't you having your meal in here?" demanded her parent.

"Me? Oh, I'm just having a cup in the kitchen. I want to keep my eye on the scones."

"Can't you eat your meal in here instead of sitting out in the kitchen like a servant?"

"I'd rather have it out here, Dad. It's all right." She disappeared hastily and opened and shut the oven door to reassure him.

"Bill," said the old man, addressing the bigger of his two sons, "Mary doesn't seem to have done much good for herself by changing her name to Smithers. I don't know the name of her husband's friend—"

"Johnson!" interpolated the swagman promptly.

The old man turned on him in a fury. "I didn't ask you your name!"

"I know you didn't!"

"I don't care what it is!"

"Thought you might like to know," muttered Johnson quietly.

"Well, I don't!"

"Right-o," said the philosophical Johnson, and went on eating. The rain roared steadily on the iron roof; and beyond the walls rushing water gurgled fatuously of peace in a liquid undertone. It was a fearful night— both indoors and out.

The business of eating and drinking went forward steadily, the young wife dodging in and out fearfully with plates of hot scones and cups of tea. There was no further conversation of any kind; and at last the three, having quite finished, rose silently and tramped out of the room, the last man shutting the door with a tremendous and totally unnecessary bang. They filed up the hall, went into a distant room, shut that door with another bang, and were heard no more.

"Now for a smoke," said the bride-groom cheerily. He produced pipe, knife and matches from one pocket, and from the other half a plug of tobacco, which he pushed towards his guest. Then he proceeded with the excruciating business of scraping out the bowl of his ancient cherrywood. The rain roared harder than ever on the roof; and somewhere close handy a disconsolate and overworked pipe sobbed and slobbered an unintelligible complaint. The wife tiptoed in from the kitchen with a dishcloth in one hand and a gleaming plate in the other.

"Have they gone, Jack?"

"Yes, Girl. Can I give you a hand?"

"No; you sit and smoke. Terrible heavy rain, isn't it?"

The husband nodded and reached for the tobacco. Then the two men smoked comfortably, and yarned about everything except the hostile party in the front room, until the wife came in with some sort of sewing job in her hands and took up a position where she could hear everything that was said without having to join in the conversation. This finally drifted round to floods, and stayed there till 11 p.m., when the wife folded up her work and remarked that she had made up the guest's bed in the kitchen. Then the party broke up with muttered good-nights. In a few minutes the last light was out; and the house of dissension sat like an immense, dejected fowl on the rise.

And the pitiless rain poured down.

"IS THERE enyone in this 'ouse? "

Smithers awoke with a vague idea that someone was singing a song, the refrain of which was, "Is there anyone in this 'ouse ?" It seemed to have been going on for hours.

A vigorous attack on the front door at last shattered his dreams. He hastily lit a candle; and, pattering up the hall, unchained the door. The light revealed a drenched and incredibly dirty man in some sort of uniform holding the ear of a wet elephant.

"What the blazes is this?"

The man outside shivered wretchedly.

"Oh Gord! I've been ridin' Peter 'ere 'arf th' blanky night; an' I reckoned I was done for when we struck this 'ere island and seen the 'ouse. "

"This isn't an island," retorted the dazed householder.

"Yes, it is," insisted the elephant rider. "It mightn't be an island at ordin'ry times, but th' flood's round it now."

Smithers, holding the candle on high, discerned dimly illimitable water. So the flood had caught them at last!

"What are you doing with that elephant?"

"Tryin' t' save me life," chattered the dirty man. "Me an' old Ram Chunder was takin' Pete across th' flats t' th' States Circus' new pitch at Watson's Crossin'. We was 'arf-way over w'en th' flood caught us proper. Old Ram climbed a tree and wouldn't budge; so I climbed up on Pete 'ere and started ridin' 'im round lookin' f'r dry land. 'E Found this place some'ow. I thought it was one of them islands in th' middle of th' river. Say, mate, is there any place I can put th' pore old josser? I don't want t' leave 'im out in the cold if I can 'elp it; he cost th' boss a lot o' money."

Smithers lost his temper at the unreasonableness of the request. "Do you think this place is an orphan asylum for elephants? I've got enough trouble on me already without you bringing your blithering wet elephant along! Why don't you talk sense?"

"Blimey, yer needn't go off pop on a man! I wouldn't have worried yer at all only th' flood came down on me. I'll leave th' pore old beggar loose— he won't hurt anythin'."

"I suppose there's nothing else for it," grumbled Smithers, relenting somewhat and holding the candle higher with the idea of seeing how big the brute was and if he looked dangerous. But a gust of wind blew the candle out and foiled him.

An indignant shout rent the night in twain. "Who's trying to pull me out of bed? Help! Strike a light!"

Smithers recognised the bellow; it was his father-in-law's voice. Sounds of scuffling and falling furniture were heard, the room of the front bedroom was thrown open, and someone stumbled into the passage and bumped heavily into the hall-stand.

"What's up?" asked Smithers, who had no matches and so could not relight his candle.

"Someone pulled me out of bed!"

"It must a bin Peter," cried the elephant man without. "Th' winder's open; he muster reached through!"

"Who is that talking outside?" shouted the enraged old man. "Bring me a light, someone! I'll knock his head off if someone will bring me a light! Get me a light!"

One of the solemn sons shuffled out half-asleep with a flaring candle. The father seized it and hobbled to the door roaring, "Show me the scoundrel who pulled me out of bed!" Directly he got to the door, and before he could look, the wind blew his candle out with a vicious, icy puff; the elephant, which was black, remained invisible.

"It was Peter that done it, Mister," whined the circus man from exterior darkness.

"D—n the candle! Who are you, and who is Peter, you blackguard?"

"It was the elephant," said the voice of Smithers calmly, as if stating a commonplace fact.

"Do you think I'm mad, young man? What's the matter with the house? It's a conspiracy! No lights— horseplay I I'll prosecute someone for this!"

"What's th' old bloke goin' orf about?" asked the Voice in the Rain. "Strike a light and show 'im th' bloomin' elephant; then p'r'aps he'll be satisfied!"

"What larrikin is that out there talking about elephants? Bring me a light!"

"Oh-h, give 'im a light!" appealed the Voice in the Rain.

"A light!" shouted Smithers lustily.

Lights started to come from everywhere. A straggling procession of four figures, bearing four flaring candles, came down the hall. The wavering illumination illuminated one side of the streaming elephant and the whole of the soaked man. There was an excited babel of questions and replies out of which the elephant-man's incredible story struggled in pieces.

The wet soughing of the wind and the steady musical tinkling of rain on a vast expanse of water made a running accompaniment to it all. Finally, the elephant was dismissed with a slap, his rider admitted to the house, and the door closed. Within the hour, the refugee had been provided with an impromptu bed, his soaked clothes hung up in the kitchen to dry, and the house once more had relapsed into darkness and settled down for the night. Outside the rain fell steadily, the wind moaned, and something vast, resembling an uncompleted cathedral, waved its flexible spire in the air and made muffled screams with the organ concealed inside it.

It might have been two hours or two months afterwards that something like a floating candle factory with flame shooting from its chimney came mooning along, and a delighted man shouted hoarsely, "We're all right now Bill! Here's Big Toe Island!"

Another voice shouted some unintelligible direction; and the pattering of rain was drowned by the vigorous threshing of paddle-wheels. When the strayed river steamer had manoeuvred itself right in front of Smithers' front door, the anchor was let go and the ship came to rest right over the submerged vegetable garden. Then a shadowy boat was dropped into the water; and two

shadowy men got in with a lantern and pulled for what they imagined to be the clump of trees on Big Toe.

When Smithers was awakened for the second time that night by vigorous pounding on his front door, he rose and groped mechanically for the matches and candle; but, failing to find them, he felt his way to the front door and opened it.

The light of a hurricane lamp dazzled him so that he could make out nothing distinctly. "Who's there?"

"The *Water Lily*," answered an anxious voice. "What bloomin' place is this? We thought it was Big Toe Island."

Smithers, who had not heard distinctly, thought it was the rest of the circus, and flew into a passion instantly. "Well, you're wrong! I wish you'd take your blighted elephant away; it's been squealing out at the back all night!"

"What are yer talkin' about?"

"Elephants! Aren't you the circus?"

"Circus be blowed! We're from the steamer *Water Lily*, that's at anchor out there in the river!"

"Why, you fool, the river's two miles away to your right! This is a farm'."

A flare of flame from the *Water Lily*'s funnel showed Smithers where the vessel was lying.

"Hey! he yelled. "Your rotten craft is cruising about on top of my cabbages! Tell the lunatic in charge that he's on top of my cabbages! Tell him if he starts his engines and ruins that bed, I'll punch his nose for him!" Then, ignoring the two mariners, he made a megaphone of his hands and bellowed, "Ship, ahoy!"

"Ahoy-y!" replied a rusty voice.

"Keep off those cabbages, can't you!"

"Keep— off — what?"

"Keep— off— those —cabbages!"

There was a pause. Then —"What's— th'— blanky— joke— anyhow?"

Smithers and the two mariners, all howling their loudest, repeated the mysterious warning in unison, "Keep— off— the— cabbages!"

After that the ship was strangely silent.

Smithers then, at the earnest solicitation of the two mariners, described their exact location, and told them how, if they didn't get their boat away before the flood-waters fell, the liner would be left high and dry, and only be useful as a summer residence. Smithers was dwelling on this aspect of the matter when the visitors' boat came butting at their legs like a playful sea-calf.

"Why, it's rising faster than I thought," said the householder. "It will float us off if it gets up another inch or so!"

"Lucky for you we came," remarked the man with the lantern.

"I'll go aboard and tell the old man," said the seaman who was holding the boat. He scrambled in and rowed off in the direction of the cabbage anchorage.

Smithers groaned. Then he recollected that it was time they got ready to depart, and howled a warning to the other inmates of his endangered home.

While the flood lapped hungrily at the doorstep, they gathered in the hall,

and were solemnly informed that the place was doomed, and that they would have to go aboard the river steamer. Mrs. Smithers sobbed twice, and hurried away to show the others what she wanted to take along. They trailed after her; and shortly the depressing cries of enquiry which always accompany packing arose on every side. While they gathered and tied and knotted, the flood lapped and rose to the very edge of the hall. The minutes fled— or swam— by.

Suddenly the house lifted, tilted over to one side, spun slowly round, and, amid cries and shouts, began to drift with the flood.

"Chuck us a rope!" howled Smithers to the ship.

"Haven't got one long enough!" yelled the ship.

Johnson, the hired defender, staggered out of the sloping kitchen and shouted some advice. "Jump out, Smithers, and hold on to the old home! I'll help you!"

"Rot!" yelled his frantic host. "How the devil can we hold a house against a flood?"

"Well, let's anchor her with something! What is there? Here, quick! give us a hand with the mangle! Got a clothes line? Right-o! Double it quick! Now tie it to the mangle and give her a shove down the hall! Away she goes!"

The absurd evolution was performed with almost miraculous swiftness. Johnson, the inventive nomad, and Smithers, the landowner, rushed the laundry appliance down the hall, tipped it into the swirling water, and rapidly tied the end of the line to the leg of the dining-room table, which, as the rope became taut, rose up, slid forward and jammed in the dining-room doorway. The house came to a dead stop and rode safely at anchor— or mangle.

"That," said Johnson proudly, as they hung on to the doorpost and watched the hempen cable, "that's what I call bosker! I wouldn't mind betting a fiver this is the first house in Australia that was ever anchored; but I'm willing to stake my life it's the first one in the world that was ever anchored with a mangle. I reckon it's the brightest idea I ever had in my life, and I'm proud of it. If a man could have one idea like that every week regular he wouldn't have to work. Hullo! what's up with his nibs?"

''What's the matter with this house? Has the elephant got underneath it?"

"All right, now," shouted Smithers in reply. "The flood lifted it off the piles, so we tied a line to the mangle and pushed it overboard— I mean through the

front door. We're safe so long as the elephant doesn't sit on the back doorstep and try to keep his feet dry. By the way, where is the brute?"

The voice of the elephant man floated in from the kitchen.

"I've got 'im 'ere, pore ol' chap! He's standin' outside th' kichen winder and askin' f r somethin' t' eat. Wish I 'ad somethin' t' give 'im —some straw or somethin'. Say, Mister, don't suppose I could give 'im a bit o' th' straw outer this 'ere mattress, could I?"

"No, I'm blowed if you can!'' snapped Smithers, who was lighting another candle preparatory to looking for his few legal documents.

"Well, 'ave yer got an ole straw 'at yer don't want?"

"No, I haven't! Give him your own hat if he wants one!"

"Strewth! I give 'im me own 'at at tea-time w'en we was flounderin' out on th' flats. 'E scoffed it too— 'ficial badge, red band, and all. I 'ope th' dye ain't poisonous; th' boss 'ud give me 'ell if anythin' 'appened to 'im!"

Something wooden bumped softly against the front wall of the house, there was a rattle of oars, and one of the mariners appeared holding on to the window-sill.

"All aboard!" he chuckled. "Cap'n says he wants t' get back nearer t' th' river t'night in case this blanky flood drains off quick and leaves th' *Lily* out on th' flats. We're only simple seamen, and don t feel up t' runnin' a summer boardin' house which is what th' *Lily* will be if we get left. I'd hate t' have t' tranship th' cargo inter drays on dry land and walk home through th' dust like a bloomin navvy. Are you blokes nearly ready?"

"Stop gassin' an' take th' taxi round t' th' front door," retorted Johnson, as he struggled with a roll of bedding.

"Hurry up, all of you," shouted Smithers. "The ark in the garden wants to go home!"

Answering murmurs came from all oarts of the house; they were all getting ready to embark. The family feud had been shoved into the background by the ridiculous happenings of the night; and something remotely resembling good fellowship pervaded the place from the front door, where the beaming seaman waited in the boat for luggage to ferry, to the kitchen window, where the wet elephant waited hungrily for a straw hat to eat.

From the elephant's chauffeur or caterer presently arose a wail of enquiry.

"I say, what am I goin' t' do with ole Peter? Can I get 'im on board th' ship? 'E only weighs a ton an' a quarter."

The waiting boatman hooted at the suggestion.

"Say, bloke, is that there Jumbo a relation of yours? How do yer reckon we're goin' t' hoist yer blanky ole two-ton uncle an' his trunk aboard in th' open sea? Swim out and ask th' old man that, an' I reckon he'll throw th' binnacle at yer."

"Well, can I tie 'im t' th' stern?"

"No, yer can't do that, neither! We can't risk havin' a full-powered elephant hitched on to th' hindquarters of th' *Lily*. Our engine has t' be nursed as it,is; an' we couldn't give old luggage van a tow even if he was a broken-down liner with a pot o' salvage money hangin' to him. If our didn't agree with yer uncle's an' th' tow-line held, I reckon we'd have t' go his way; an' he don't look as if he had a master's ticket in 'is recticule. No, I reckon he'll have t' walk behind."

Smithers' stern parent-in-law at this stage hove in sight at the end of the hall. He was partly hidden by an immense roll of bedding which rode on his chest like a bass drum. Breathing gruff warnings to everyone to get out of his road, he carried it to the edge of the doorstep, where it was received as cargo by the waiting seaman, and stowed In the bows of the heavy boat. The two solemn, silent sons followed with kitchen utensils, pictures and other sundries; and Smithers and Johnson together contributed immense, mysterious bundles until the gondolier warned them they were not leavingmuch room for themselves.

Suddenly there was a spluttering shriek from the *Lily*'s whistle, and a hoarse hail from the skipper, "How much longer are they goin't' be, Bill?"

Bill passed on the warning ; and after a last search of the rooms, they gathered at the doorstep and sadly embarked by the light of the hurricane lamp. As the laden boat slid past the corner of the desolate, anchored home, something like a tug-boat with all lights out and a madman sitting in an armchair on top of the wheelhouse splashed ponderously after them. It was Peter, with his devoted rider perched on the roof of his enormous skull.

The business of transhipment to the *Lily* did not take long; but the elephant rider, from the hurricane deck of Peter, addressed a long, impassioned appeal to the captain of the *Lily* to be allowed to lead Peter from the stern; and the captain's refusal from the bridge took the shape of a lengthy and impassioned address; so it was some time before the understanding was come to that the *Lily* was to go slow in front like a hearse, and show the way, if Peter would follow respectably like a first mourning coach, and not try to climb over the stern or fool about with his trunk

The cortege then moved off and splashed slowly across the waste for about half an hour. Then the paddle-wheels of the *Lily* ceased to go round, and before Peter's helmsman could goad him out of the way, the *Lily* had drifted back against his head. However, he calmly took hold of the stern with his trunk and held it away from him.

"What's wrong with th' blanky engine?" howled the captain.

The begrimed face of an apologetic engineer rose from a hatch. "That fool of a crank's gone again, skipper. We'll have to anchor here and whistle for a tow."

"Whistle f'r your Aunt Kate!" roared the master. "Hitch that there elephant to the bows; he'll look just as sensible in front as behind!"

Peter's manager instantly demanded one straw mattress on account, and stipulated that the fodder be placed in the stern within easy reach of the trunk, and that the *Lily* be anchored until the end of the meal. This was done with all despatch; and Peter leisurely handed himself the innards of the engineer's bed. The operation took some time, and dawn was just breaking as he sidled into position to commence the tow. Far ahead, the roofs of a flooded river town gleamed white and cold above the leaden waters.

"Steer Fr th' main street," shouted the captain to the first mate of Peter. "Don't let him go astern or stop suddenly— he might sit down on the *Lily*'s bows! Hanged if I ever thought I'd come down t' this," he added, bitterly, and busied himself with his steering by way of avoiding the eyes of his passengers.

Then Peter splashed patiently forward, the *Lily* sagged after him, and the rim of the rising sun showed above the cold roofs of Riverbend.

It was the licensee of the Royal Hotel who sighted the insane marine procession from the balcony of his half-submerged pub; and he didn't raise the alarm because he had been dreading something of the kind for days. For nearly a fortnight he had been expecting the flood and complete ruin; and, by way of preparing for the worst, had broken all his previous brandy-drinking records. The D.T.'s were just about due; and when Peter and the *Lily* struggled up the main street, or canal, he reckoned they had arrived in force.

Rushing back into his room, he scrambled shudderingly into bed and drew the clothes over his head. That is how the great rescue of the Smithers' household and the utter and complete degradation of a popular river skipper escaped being made into History.

Editor's note: "Riverbend" is probably the real Murray River town of Robinvale in light disguise. The Murray snakes and winds for many miles through the flat Riverina countryside, and in one of its floods, many years ago, a Murray River paddle steamer did indeed steam cross-country between two towns rather than follow the winding river course.

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9: The Diamond Necklace

Guy de Maupassant

1850-1893

Le Gaulois, 17 Feb 1884, as "La Parure"

In: *Complete Works*, 1903; Translator not stated

THE GIRL WAS one of those pretty and charming young creatures who sometimes are born, as if by a slip of fate, into a family of clerks. She had no dowry, no expectations, no way of being known, understood, loved, married by any rich and distinguished man; so she let herself be married to a little clerk of the Ministry of Public Instruction.

She dressed plainly because she could not dress well, but she was unhappy as if she had really fallen from a higher station; since with women there is neither caste nor rank, for beauty, grace and charm take the place of family and birth. Natural ingenuity, instinct for what is elegant, a supple mind are their sole hierarchy, and often make of women of the people the equals of the very greatest ladies.

Mathilde suffered ceaselessly, feeling herself born to enjoy all delicacies and all luxuries. She was distressed at the poverty of her dwelling, at the bareness of the walls, at the shabby chairs, the ugliness of the curtains. All those things, of which another woman of her rank would never even have been conscious, tortured her and made her angry. The sight of the little Breton peasant who did her humble housework aroused in her despairing regrets and bewildering dreams. She thought of silent antechambers hung with Oriental tapestry, illumined by tall bronze candelabra, and of two great footmen in knee breeches who sleep in the big armchairs, made drowsy by the oppressive heat of the stove. She thought of long reception halls hung with ancient silk, of the dainty cabinets containing priceless curiosities and of the little coquettish perfumed reception rooms made for chatting at five o'clock with intimate friends, with men famous and sought after, whom all women envy and whose attention they all desire.

When she sat down to dinner, before the round table covered with a tablecloth in use three days, opposite her husband, who uncovered the soup tureen and declared with a delighted air, "Ah, the good soup! I don't know anything better than that," she thought of dainty dinners, of shining silverware, of tapestry that peopled the walls with ancient personages and with strange birds flying in the midst of a fairy forest; and she thought of delicious dishes served on marvellous plates and of the whispered gallantries to which you listen with a sphinxlike smile while you are eating the pink meat of a trout or the wings of a quail.

She had no gowns, no jewels, nothing. And she loved nothing but that. She felt made for that. She would have liked so much to please, to be envied, to be charming, to be sought after.

She had a friend, a former schoolmate at the convent, who was rich, and whom she did not like to go to see any more because she felt so sad when she came home.

But one evening her husband reached home with a triumphant air and holding a large envelope in his hand.

"There," said he, "there is something for you."

She tore the paper quickly and drew out a printed card which bore these words:

> The Minister of Public Instruction and Madame Georges Ramponneau request the honor of M. and Madame Loisel's company at the palace of the Ministry on Monday evening, January 18th.

Instead of being delighted, as her husband had hoped, she threw the invitation on the table crossly, muttering:

"What do you wish me to do with that?"

"Why, my dear, I thought you would be glad. You never go out, and this is such a fine opportunity. I had great trouble to get it. Every one wants to go; it is very select, and they are not giving many invitations to clerks. The whole official world will be there."

She looked at him with an irritated glance and said impatiently:

"And what do you wish me to put on my back?"

He had not thought of that. He stammered:

"Why, the gown you go to the theatre in. It looks very well to me."

He stopped, distracted, seeing that his wife was weeping. Two great tears ran slowly from the corners of her eyes toward the corners of her mouth.

"What's the matter? What's the matter?" he answered.

By a violent effort she conquered her grief and replied in a calm voice, while she wiped her wet cheeks:

"Nothing. Only I have no gown, and, therefore, I can't go to this ball. Give your card to some colleague whose wife is better equipped than I am."

He was in despair. He resumed:

"Come, let us see, Mathilde. How much would it cost, a suitable gown, which you could use on other occasions—something very simple?"

She reflected several seconds, making her calculations and wondering also what sum she could ask without drawing on herself an immediate refusal and a frightened exclamation from the economical clerk.

Finally she replied hesitating:

"I don't know exactly, but I think I could manage it with four hundred francs."

He grew a little pale, because he was laying aside just that amount to buy a gun and treat himself to a little shooting next summer on the plain of Nanterre, with several friends who went to shoot larks there of a Sunday.

But he said:

"Very well. I will give you four hundred francs. And try to have a pretty gown."

The day of the ball drew near and Madame Loisel seemed sad, uneasy, anxious. Her frock was ready, however. Her husband said to her one evening:

"What is the matter? Come, you have seemed very queer these last three days."

And she answered:

"It annoys me not to have a single piece of jewelry, not a single ornament, nothing to put on. I shall look poverty-stricken. I would almost rather not go at all."

"You might wear natural flowers," said her husband. "They're very stylish at this time of year. For ten francs you can get two or three magnificent roses."

She was not convinced.

"No; there's nothing more humiliating than to look poor among other women who are rich."

"How stupid you are!" her husband cried. "Go look up your friend, Madame Forestier, and ask her to lend you some jewels. You're intimate enough with her to do that."

She uttered a cry of joy:

"True! I never thought of it."

The next day she went to her friend and told her of her distress.

Madame Forestier went to a wardrobe with a mirror, took out a large jewel box, brought it back, opened it and said to Madame Loisel:

"Choose, my dear."

She saw first some bracelets, then a pearl necklace, then a Venetian gold cross set with precious stones, of admirable workmanship. She tried on the ornaments before the mirror, hesitated and could not make up her mind to part with them, to give them back. She kept asking:

"Haven't you any more?"

"Why, yes. Look further; I don't know what you like."

Suddenly she discovered, in a black satin box, a superb diamond necklace, and her heart throbbed with an immoderate desire. Her hands trembled as she took it. She fastened it round her throat, outside her high-necked waist, and was lost in ecstasy at her reflection in the mirror.

Then she asked, hesitating, filled with anxious doubt:

"Will you lend me this, only this?"

"Why, yes, certainly."

She threw her arms round her friend's neck, kissed her passionately, then fled with her treasure.

The night of the ball arrived. Madame Loisel was a great success. She was prettier than any other woman present, elegant, graceful, smiling and wild with joy. All the men looked at her, asked her name, sought to be introduced. All the attaches of the Cabinet wished to waltz with her. She was remarked by the minister himself.

She danced with rapture, with passion, intoxicated by pleasure, forgetting all in the triumph of her beauty, in the glory of her success, in a sort of cloud of happiness comprised of all this homage, admiration, these awakened desires and of that sense of triumph which is so sweet to woman's heart.

She left the ball about four o'clock in the morning. Her husband had been sleeping since midnight in a little deserted anteroom with three other gentlemen whose wives were enjoying the ball.

He threw over her shoulders the wraps he had brought, the modest wraps of common life, the poverty of which contrasted with the elegance of the ball dress. She felt this and wished to escape so as not to be remarked by the other women, who were enveloping themselves in costly furs.

Loisel held her back, saying: "Wait a bit. You will catch cold outside. I will call a cab."

But she did not listen to him and rapidly descended the stairs. When they reached the street they could not find a carriage and began to look for one, shouting after the cabmen passing at a distance.

They went toward the Seine in despair, shivering with cold. At last they found on the quay one of those ancient night cabs which, as though they were ashamed to show their shabbiness during the day, are never seen round Paris until after dark.

It took them to their dwelling in the Rue des Martyrs, and sadly they mounted the stairs to their flat. All was ended for her. As to him, he reflected that he must be at the ministry at ten o'clock that morning.

She removed her wraps before the glass so as to see herself once more in all her glory. But suddenly she uttered a cry. She no longer had the necklace around her neck!

"What is the matter with you?" demanded her husband, already half undressed.

She turned distractedly toward him.

"I have—I have—I've lost Madame Forestier's necklace," she cried.

He stood up, bewildered.

"What!—how? Impossible!"

They looked among the folds of her skirt, of her cloak, in her pockets, everywhere, but did not find it.

"You're sure you had it on when you left the ball?" he asked.

"Yes, I felt it in the vestibule of the minister's house."

"But if you had lost it in the street we should have heard it fall. It must be in the cab."

"Yes, probably. Did you take his number?"

"No. And you—didn't you notice it?"

"No."

They looked, thunderstruck, at each other. At last Loisel put on his clothes.

"I shall go back on foot," said he, "over the whole route, to see whether I can find it."

He went out. She sat waiting on a chair in her ball dress, without strength to go to bed, overwhelmed, without any fire, without a thought.

Her husband returned about seven o'clock. He had found nothing.

He went to police headquarters, to the newspaper offices to offer a reward; he went to the cab companies—everywhere, in fact, whither he was urged by the least spark of hope.

She waited all day, in the same condition of mad fear before this terrible calamity.

Loisel returned at night with a hollow, pale face. He had discovered nothing.

"You must write to your friend," said he, "that you have broken the clasp of her necklace and that you are having it mended. That will give us time to turn round."

She wrote at his dictation.

At the end of a week they had lost all hope. Loisel, who had aged five years, declared:

"We must consider how to replace that ornament."

The next day they took the box that had contained it and went to the jeweler whose name was found within. He consulted his books.

"It was not I, madame, who sold that necklace; I must simply have furnished the case."

Then they went from jeweler to jeweler, searching for a necklace like the other, trying to recall it, both sick with chagrin and grief.

They found, in a shop at the Palais Royal, a string of diamonds that seemed to them exactly like the one they had lost. It was worth forty thousand francs. They could have it for thirty-six.

So they begged the jeweler not to sell it for three days yet. And they made a bargain that he should buy it back for thirty-four thousand francs, in case they should find the lost necklace before the end of February.

Loisel possessed eighteen thousand francs which his father had left him. He would borrow the rest.

He did borrow, asking a thousand francs of one, five hundred of another, five louis here, three louis there. He gave notes, took up ruinous obligations, dealt with usurers and all the race of lenders. He compromised all the rest of his life, risked signing a note without even knowing whether he could meet it; and, frightened by the trouble yet to come, by the black misery that was about to fall upon him, by the prospect of all the physical privations and moral tortures that he was to suffer, he went to get the new necklace, laying upon the jeweler's counter thirty-six thousand francs.

When Madame Loisel took back the necklace Madame Forestier said to her with a chilly manner:

"You should have returned it sooner; I might have needed it."

She did not open the case, as her friend had so much feared. If she had detected the substitution, what would she have thought, what would she have said? Would she not have taken Madame Loisel for a thief?

Thereafter Madame Loisel knew the horrible existence of the needy. She bore her part, however, with sudden heroism. That dreadful debt must be paid. She would pay it. They dismissed their servant; they changed their lodgings; they rented a garret under the roof.

She came to know what heavy housework meant and the odious cares of the kitchen. She washed the dishes, using her dainty fingers and rosy nails on greasy pots and pans. She washed the soiled linen, the shirts and the dishcloths, which she dried upon a line; she carried the slops down to the street every morning and carried up the water, stopping for breath at every landing. And dressed like a woman of the people, she went to the fruiterer, the grocer, the butcher, a basket on her arm, bargaining, meeting with impertinence, defending her miserable money, sou by sou.

Every month they had to meet some notes, renew others, obtain more time.

Her husband worked evenings, making up a tradesman's accounts, and late at night he often copied manuscript for five sous a page.

This life lasted ten years.

At the end of ten years they had paid everything, everything, with the rates of usury and the accumulations of the compound interest.

Madame Loisel looked old now. She had become the woman of impoverished households—strong and hard and rough. With frowsy hair, skirts askew and red hands, she talked loud while washing the floor with great swishes of water. But sometimes, when her husband was at the office, she sat down near the window and she thought of that gay evening of long ago, of that ball where she had been so beautiful and so admired.

What would have happened if she had not lost that necklace? Who knows? who knows? How strange and changeful is life! How small a thing is needed to make or ruin us!

But one Sunday, having gone to take a walk in the Champs Elysees to refresh herself after the labors of the week, she suddenly perceived a woman who was leading a child. It was Madame Forestier, still young, still beautiful, still charming.

Madame Loisel felt moved. Should she speak to her? Yes, certainly. And now that she had paid, she would tell her all about it. Why not?

She went up.

"Good-day, Jeanne."

The other, astonished to be familiarly addressed by this plain good-wife, did not recognize her at all and stammered:

"But— madame!— I do not know— You must have mistaken."

"No. I am Mathilde Loisel."

Her friend uttered a cry.

"Oh, my poor Mathilde! How you are changed!"

"Yes, I have had a pretty hard life, since I last saw you, and great poverty— and that because of you!"

"Of me! How so?"

"Do you remember that diamond necklace you lent me to wear at the ministerial ball?"

"Yes. Well?"

"Well, I lost it."

"What do you mean? You brought it back."

"I brought you back another exactly like it. And it has taken us ten years to pay for it. You can understand that it was not easy for us, for us who had nothing. At last it is ended, and I am very glad."

Madame Forestier had stopped.

"You say that you bought a necklace of diamonds to replace mine?"

"Yes. You never noticed it, then! They were very similar."

And she smiled with a joy that was at once proud and ingenuous.

Madame Forestier, deeply moved, took her hands.

"Oh, my poor Mathilde! Why, my necklace was paste! It was worth at most only five hundred francs!"

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10: A Scream in the Fog

Clarence Herbert New

1862-1933

Blue Book, Sep 1933

THE small house which Dr. Samuel Adams occupied in Chelsea had in its rear a garden-plot ending in a brick wall which ran along an alley connecting with a mews in the center of the block. The adjoining house on the right was supposed to be occupied by a well-known actress, who naturally slept late of a morning and was rarely seen by daylight. On the other side lived an attractive girl with red-bronze hair, a somewhat older companion who helped with cooking and housework, and a lodger who apparently was in and out at irregular hours, seldom exchanging any talk with his landlady or her companion. The fourth member of the family was a big black cat who evidently was a personage— sunning himself on top of the brick wall dividing the two rear gardens, proving quite affable when the Doctor first made tentative advances, and serving to introduce his mistress when she came out to see who was hobnobbing with him.

Adams liked the girl and drifted easily into a pleasant back-yard acquaintance with her; secretly he was pleased when he found that she'd heard of him as a prominent anthropologist and psychologist who had given up a fine practice in New York that he might devote all his time to these hobbies, and who lectured occasionally before distinguished audiences at the Royal Institute.

There was something about the young woman: which interested him scientifically, though he couldn't quite define it. Apparently she was a simple, unaffected type with a character which anyone might see at a glance— but in their second chat he sensed a strain which went a good deal deeper than that and was thoroughly under control. Adams accepted her as a young woman with reserves, and became interested in studying the possible direction in which any strong emotion might sway her. She did excellent work as an illustrator, and lived very comfortably on its proceeds.

Except for the local constables, the postman, the charwoman, and keepers of two or three small shops in King's Road, this about summed up the Doctor's circle of acquaintance in the neighborhood. He occasionally strolled along Cheyne Walk on a bright morning, and dined at his club, or with friends, in the evening— but in Chelsea, he worked or read indoors or experimented with plants and flowers in his garden. His man Jenkins, however, who had been with Dr. Adams upwards of twelve years, probably knew over a hundred persons within a few blocks' radius of the Redburn Street house— for it was a fixed belief with him that the more people one knew, the more valuable information was likely to be available in any unexpected emergency.

Redburn Street is a narrow side-eddy from the larger streams of London life— starting off Flood Street and running without a break to Troworth Square, a distance of three average city blocks. Consequently, it is to all intents a little world in itself— visited occasionally by taxies and private cars, but with no buses or trams nearer than King's Road or Pimlico Road. The alley from the mews in the rear of the dwellings comes out between two houses on Christchurch Street—so that the Doctor's garden, his study-windows and those of his sleeping room overhead, face the southeast, two blocks from the river. This means that they get whatever sun there may be, also the maximum density of river-fog even when it is comparatively thin around Kensington and Hyde Park.

One night a pea-soup fog had settled down upon Chelsea so thickly that if one opened a door or window, enough of it came in to stain curtains and make the room a bit misty until it settled. Taxi-drivers stuck to thoroughfares like King's Road where the powerful arc lights made luminous spots which one might see when directly under them, while householders living in the narrower streets felt their way home by railings with which repeated fogs had forced them to familiarize themselves.

It was the sort of a night which gets on a person's nerves. Some fogs are concentrations of chilly murk, with a vague suggestion of frightful things about to happen— fogs in which a breath of damp wind will moan in the chimneys like a human being gasping its life out, or a sudden gust will shriek like a lost soul, all the more startling from the fact that it dies away to a deathly stillness.

Doctor Adams had about as few "nerves" as any man in his profession. He knew perfectly well the scientific reasons for the effect such nights have upon the human system, and discounted it. But an hour after his dinner on this night, the sense of oppression was so strong that he stepped through his front door to see if he could make out any of the street lamps or hear anyone speaking along the sidewalk.

He had pulled the door shut behind him. Then he heard a window shoved up violently on the second floor of the actress' house next door— as if somebody, feeling faint, was trying to get outside air, even though it was heavy with fog. For a moment or two there was silence— the dead, heavy silence of fog. Then a frightful scream rang out, ending in a horrible gurgling moan. Then again silence— absolute silence.

IN any great city— particularly in London— one hesitates about interfering, unasked, in his neighbor's affairs. A person may be screaming from a toothache, or some other pain— or may have wakened from a heavy sleep with a nightmare. In such cases, one feels like a fool if he barges into the house. Again, he may be convinced that the screams come from a person being murdered— in which case, that particular house and room are good places to keep away from

until after the police arrive—for reasons of personal safety or to avoid the risk of suspicion. Doctor Adams, however, is the sort of man to whom this line of argument doesn't apply. From his professional experience, he knew that a woman in terror for her life had let out that cry— and that probably it was the last cry she ever would make.

Running down his own steps, he kept his left hand upon the railing until he reached that of the next house, where he tried the door. It was locked and bolted, as it usually was at night. He rang the bell and pounded— but with an ear against the door-panel, he could hear only a faint swishing sound, as of clothing brushing against the wall. He managed to straddle across to the sill of the parlor-window and tried to open it. The sash was securely fastened; and breaking the glass and forcing an entrance could be considered burglary, if the police wanted to look at it that way. With a dead body presumably in the house, it would look even worse. He tried the basement door— which also was locked.

He stood a moment or two, considering. Apparently nobody else had heard that scream. Feeling his way back to his own door, he ran through the house to his rear garden, picking up a flashlight on the way, hauled himself up to the coping on top of the brick wall at that side and dropped over into the actress' garden. Now he had but to follow the wall until he came to the little wooden penthouse at the rear door, which was unlocked. Inside, he found himself in a kitchen. Next to this was a room in the center of the house, used by the cook and the maid as a bedroom. 'There was a passage from the kitchen to the front basement-door,—a coal-cellar at the left——and stairs to the parlor floor. Hurrying up two flights, Adams entered the still-lighted front room—finding it misty with fog that had drifted in at the open window, which he hastily closed.

Here chairs were overturned—cushions from a divan lay upon the floor. A rug in front of the divan had been shoved into wrinkles, and bunched by struggling feet. A woman's high-heeled pump lay on the floor beyond it. A triangular Venetian stiletto with an ivory handle and a point like a needle lay in a crease of the upholstery at the back of the divan, but there was no trace of blood upon it. In the partly opened drawer of a small Chinese table at one end of the divan there was a small automatic, with the magazine fully loaded—the sort of weapon a woman might keep about her for defense. From the partly opened drawer, it looked as if some one had tried to get at it during that struggle in the room. On the floor partly behind the hall door, was an embroidered Spanish shawl with the usual wide fringe of knotted silk threads. This shawl seemed oddly familiar to Dr. Adams.

PRESENTLY he recalled that Miss Arleson, in the house on the other side of his, had worn such a shawl in her garden upon mornings when it had been unusually chilly. He couldn't swear to the flowers or the exact coloring of the

stripes along the fringe— but he seemed to remember that one of the roses had a splotch of ink on it which wasn't noticeable enough to mar the beauty of the garment, yet which unquestionably had fallen on it by accident. He bent down to look; the splotch of ink was there.

Miss Arleson, for all he knew to the contrary, might be an acquaintance of the actress— or Miss Arleson's lodger might have borrowed it for the actress, if he knew her. But there was certainly no doubt as to whose shawl it was. There was no body in evidence— no trace of blood— no suggestion of murder, other than the scream he had heard. But if some woman had been murdered in the house, this shawl was fairly strong circumstantial evidence against his attractive neighbor with the red-bronze hair— and he was oiled to roll it up and take it home with him, to keep until more was known of the case. On the other hand— suppose she really was a murderess? Would he go so far as to shield her? But she might be implicated yet entirely innocent of murder, And if he were going to call in the police, there was no question as to the advisability of leaving everything exactly as he found it.

But should he call in the police? What had he of real evidence to show them? He had not heard a sound in the garden, as he came in. Both street doors had been locked when he came up the stairs— one doesn't bolt a door on the inside after he is once outside. As far as Adams could surmise, there might be at least two persons in the house at that moment— possibly three— unless they had gone out over the roofs to some other house in the block, or through the rear door in the brick wall to the alley. He went silently into the other rooms on that floor—then up to the ones on the floor above. In a storeroom, there was a ladder going up to the roof-scuttle— but the scuttle was hooked fast on the under side.

As he came out into the hall and leaned over the stair-rail, he thought he heard the kitchen door pulled shut softly. In three seconds he was shoving up a window-sash in the rear hall-room, and leaning out directing the beam of his four-cell flashlight down into the garden. Probably it didn't even make a luminous spot in that fog to anyone looking up from below— and it was of no use at all to the Doctor. But this time, he distinctly heard the click of the latch as the alley-door in the wall was pulled shut. So somebody had been in the house— hidden in one of the dark rooms on the parlor floor, or possibly in the coal-cellar— while he was examining that room! Had it been Selma Arleson?

He made another thorough search from roof to basement, without finding a trace of anybody; evidently the cook and housemaid had been given an evening off— and considering the thickness of the fog, it was doubtful if they would even attempt to return before daylight.

Adams sat down in a chair by the table and surveyed that front room for the third time. Then he pulled the telephone across the table and asked the

operator to put him through to Victoria 7000. When the switchboard operator in the Commissioner's Office answered, he called for the Deputy Commissioner, Sir Edward Pelham. As that gentleman had just left Scotland Yard for home, Adams asked for Chief Inspector Beresford. When he came to the phone, the Doctor asked if he would call for Sir Edward, then come at once to the house next his own, on the right, in Redburn Street. When the two officials drove up in Beresford's speed-devil of a car three quarters of an hour later—his chauffeur knew the streets and curbs of London as well as his own face, fog or no fog—Adams let them in at the front door of the actress' house and took them up to the second floor.

"Now, gentlemen, tell me what you think of this! Nothing has been touched since I got in here— not even that stiletto on the divan or the pistol in that table drawer. If there are any fingerprints on the corpse, they're not mine!"

"Oh, aye—quite so! Are you pullin' our legs by any chance, Doctor? Where's the *corpus*?"

IN a few words Adams delineated the puzzling situation. "Now you tell one!" he ended his tale. "Who lives here?" asked Beresford.

"Some actress or dancer— sleeps most of the morning, as they generally do— drives away in her car either in time for dinner somewhere, or just before the curtain goes up at the theaters. I've never laid eyes on her, and don't even know her name. My man Jenkins probably would; he's of an inquiring turn of mind— gets to know most everybody."

"Hmph! .... If that's her picture on the cabinet over there, we'll not need to bother him! That'll be Feodora Lanova— quite popular as a dancer at the music halls. She's booked for a leading part in the new show Grossman is putting on Monday night; she's been rehearsing for a couple of weeks, which would indicate this woman must be Lanova— otherwise she'd be workin' now."

"How do we know she's not? We haven't the faintest idea who the woman was who screamed!"

"We'll settle that question in a few minutes— I'll get through to Grossman."

In five minutes, Grossman answered from the stage of the Globe Theater. "Aye, Chief Inspector— what should I do for you?"

"Tell me where Feodora Lanova lives— an' where she is now."

"You should tell me where she is by now, Chief Inspector! Me— I don't carry t'em aroundt in my pocket, you know. At eight o'clock tonight Madam Lanova shouldt pe here— readty for goin' on in that new part. I sendt to her house— but nopody couldn't find t'e place, in t'e fog."

"Very good, Grossman— call up the Yard at this time tomorrow night— or as soon as she turns up, anyhow. It's possible the woman may be missing."

Replacing the receiver on its frame, Beresford swung around.

"It was Lanova, doubtless, who screamed," he said briefly. "She lives here— no question as to that!"

"But— wait a bit, Beresford. That scream was a good two hours after she should have left for the theater! Why did she stay here without phoning Grossman, as she would have done if she were ill and couldn't go out? She certainly was alive when she screamed— what kept her here for two hours, without letting Grossman know?"

"She might have been killed shortly after seven. Then one of the servants comes in— sees the body— and does the screaming."

"If that were the case, the servant would have been killed also. That was a death-screech— I'll gamble on that! And if she let the servants go out for the evening before she left, there would have been nobody here to get her dinner. But she dined at home— the dishes stacked on the kitchen table prove that. If she deliberately stayed here, as all the evidence indicates, why didn't she phone Grossman?"

Dr. Adams' face lighted. "Hold on now, Beresford!.... I think I've struck it! Something which fits the whole proposition: Some man who has been pretty thick with her in the past writes or phones that he'll be here for a talk this evening. She doesn't dare defy him, but supposes they'll be through in time for her to reach the theater not more than a few minutes late. Has her dinner early— sends the servants out— lets the man in when he comes. They probably start the discussion quietly enough. Then he begins accusing her. She blazes out— not considering the possible consequences. They're at it, hammer and tongs. She's stifling with rage— flings up the window to get some fresh air. He pulls or picks up the stiletto— it may have been on the larger table as a paper-cutter— and jumps for her before she can get the pistol out of the drawer. It flashes through his mind that blood is messy, and reaches for her throat instead. That's when she Jets out that screech. After she's done for, the man beats it for the kitchen and alley-door. I'm inclined to think he must have known the locality pretty well. He's almost up to King's Road when it occurs to, him that it's a risk leaving the body there, and he hurries back as fast as he can make it in the fog— goes up through the house, picks up the body, and carries it down into the alley. I don't believe he'd got much farther than that when I came over the wall— it must have been a pretty near thing. Well, there's my hypothesis. Fits every question or objection we've raised, eh?"

"M-m-m— oh, aye— it might." Beresford lighted a cigar. "In a shillin' thriller, it would make a rather clever plot. But, d'ye see, Doctor— it's all pure theory, without one scrap of evidence to back it."

"Except logical probability," Adams countered. "What is there about this case, anyhow, but 'pure theory'? We have here a room in a state of disorder which might have been produced by any sort of physical struggle— not

necessarily fatal or even very injurious— especially considering these two lethal weapons, neither of which were used. You'd say, I suppose, that you've no evidence whatever as to a murder having been committed, wouldn't you?"

"Er— quite so. Can't take any other ground, you know! Not on the evidence, so far."

"On the other hand, I heard that scream— and I'm an experienced physician; I say that woman died right then and here!"

"So again, Doctor— that's theory, you know. You didn't see murder committed, or even hear anything but one scream. You're constructin' an hypothesis, an' then workin' backward. I'll not say that doesn't work sometimes; but it'll not do for a British police organization."

"Then I suppose you'll make a casual examination of the premises by daylight, and if you find no further definite clues, set it down eventually as another case of mysterious disappearance—let it go at that?"

"Don't see what else we can do, Doctor! Put yourself in our places— what do you fancy you'd be doing?"

"Working the probabilities out on a psychological basis— showing you this woman's body not much later than noon, I'd say!"

"Oh, come, old chap! You don't usually make as wild a statement as that! How can you possibly do anything of the sort— with nothing but what we see here, to go upon?"

"I'd use the old bean a bit, to start with. For instance—"

THERE came a quiet interruption which was nevertheless startling. A low, well-modulated voice came from the doorway— in which a handsome girl with red-bronze hair appeared as the three men jumped up and whirled about.

"I hope I don't interrupt a really important conference, gentlemen! You see, I dropped my Spanish shawl here, by this door—and I fancied I'd best come and get it. The shawl was a present from a man I cared for a lot, some years ago; I should very much regret losing it."

"Well, I'll be— You dropped that shawl *here*, Miss Arleson? When?"

"About an hour ago— just before you came in, Doctor."

"Are you a friend of Miss Lanova's?"

"Until I came in here this evening, I'd no idea that I'd ever seen the woman. You may have noticed that she didn't show herself in the daytime, beyond coming down the few steps and getting into her car."

"But you thought you recognized her this evening ?"

"I can't be at all certain— she was a— a horrid sight!"

"Then she really was murdered?"

"Yes; no question as to that! There was something vaguely familiar about her as she lay across that divan— like a woman I used to see several years ago; a

woman who was then making a hit as a dancer. But I'm not in the least positive this Lanova woman was the same."

"Then— you also heard that scream and got in the back way before I did?"

"I heard something half an hour before that.— These gentlemen are from Scotland Yard? Yes— I inferred that, from what I overheard on the stairs before coming in here. I fancy I'd best tell you what I know of the matter, I had come out for a moment on my doorstep to see how bad the fog really was. Suddenly I heard this window shoved up— then the voices of a man and woman, quarreling. Something about the man's voice seemed familiar— sounded like that of a man I'd been told had died from starvation and dissipation. It didn't seem possible it could be the same man— yet I'd almost have sworn to the voice. You see, I cared a lot for him— once. I went along, touching the railing until I was just under the window— which of course I couldn't see in this fog. One minute I was sure of the voice— the next, I was doubtful.

"Then the window was slammed down. On the chance that I might get in the back way, I ran through my garden into the alley, found her door unlocked, came in through the kitchen and was just starting up the stairs when I heard this window go up again. Then came that frightful scream. I'd hoped to reach the room before anything could happen. But when I knew by the sounds that he was choking her, it was fairly certain that he would kill me also if I caught him at it. There was nobody I could shout to for help. I had barely strength enough to slip into the rear drawing room, which of course was quite dark, when he ran down the stairs and out through the kitchen. I didn't get even a glimpse of him. My one idea at the moment was to hide. Instinctively I'd pushed the hall door nearly shut. When he'd gone, it struck me that the woman mightn't be dead— that possibly I could do something for her. So I went up these stairs and came in here, The room was bad enough, after what I'd just heard— but the body on that divan—" She halted, then went on determinedly.

"I just clung to the edge of the door and leaned my head against it— my shawl must have slipped off, then. Plainly, I could do nothing for the woman— and this house was no place for me to be found in! I managed to get out through the alley into my own house. Suddenly I realized that my shawl was gone— that I'd probably dropped it here. I hurried back, and up to this room. Then I was so thoroughly amazed that I forgot the shawl entirely— for there was no body on the divan, and no trace of it anywhere on this floor or on the one below! I had just looked around the drawing-room in the rear and turned off the light, when I heard Doctor Adams coming up the basement stairs. I supposed of course it was the murderer coming back; but the man came up to this floor and in the light which shone out into the hall, I recognized the Doctor. I didn't want him to find me in the house because it certainly would have looked suspicious— so I waited until he was searching the top floor. Then I slipped down to the

basement, and went home through the alley. There I sat down and thought it over. My shawl was still in this room and I really didn't wish to lose it. If the police were called in, they might keep it, if they considered it evidence. So I came back for the third time— heard who you men talking with the Doctor really were— and decided it was my duty to tell everything I knew about the matter. This covers it, I fancy."

SIR EDWARD, and Beresford, had been watching the girl as she was telling this amazing tale. There was a ring of truth and innocence in her voice—but police officials everywhere soon become highly skeptical. The Chief Inspector's first move was a check-up. "Er— Doctor— how close an estimate can you form as to how long it was from the moment you heard that scream to the time you started up those basement stairs inside the house?"

"Well— that may not: be as easy to fix within two or three minutes as it seems, Beresford. I didn't go down my steps, of course, until after I'd heard the scream. It's quite possible that I hesitated two or three minutes before deciding to investigate. Add another two minutes for feeling my way along and up these steps to the front door. One rings a bell— waits what seems a reasonable time for somebody to open the door. Rings again, much harder— waits again. Puts an ear against the panels and listens for perhaps two or three minutes— say eight or ten minutes, as far as I'd gone up to then. Straddling across to the window-sill and trying to shove up the sash— another two minutes. Feeling my way down to the basement-door and then back to my own— two minutes more. Looking about for the flashlight in my study, certainly a full minute. Getting over the brick wall, into the kitchen, and as far as the basement stairs— a good three or four minutes, because I was feeling my way at every step and trying to move without noise. Altogether, it would figure up eighteen or twenty minutes at the very least. Yes, twenty would be conservative— perhaps five more than that."

"VERY good! Then in twenty minutes, let us say, the man commits this murder, and looks about to see if he's dropped anything. Miss Arleson gets in an' hides on the floor below while he runs down the stairs an' out into the alley. She comes up and sees the murdered woman— takes a minute or two to steady herself— gets out an' goes back into her own house. Murderer returns and is carrying the corpse downstairs, presumably while you are listening outside the front door. Miss Arleson comes back an' finds the body gone— searches this floor an' is on the one below when you come up the basement stairs. All in the space of twenty minutes! Well— of course it could be done, because we do many things in less than half the time we suppose and others in three times as long— but I'd say on general principles that this schedule would have to be run on a prearranged synchronization to make it mesh so perfectly, just as we used

to compare watches before going over the top at the zero hour. It's not impossible, of course— but it's the most amazin' string of circumstantial actions which ever has come within my experience."

"I agree with you on that! But I may have been six or eight minutes longer than I figured."

"No. You're a man of science, Doctor— accustomed to exact calculations. I'd say your figuring would be very close to the mark."

"Then the murderer, on his second trip, must have come in the alley-door of this garden at about the same moment Miss Arleson passed through her own and was bolting it. He may have been in the back part of this garden with the dead woman in his arms when Miss Arleson went around through the alley and came in the second time— passing him in the fog— three or four minutes before I came over the wall. In fact, the actions of the three different individuals could only have taken place in a fog as dense as this without discovery!"

"IF you've figured the time correctly and Miss Arleson is quite sure she hasn't forgotten anything, that would come very close to what must have actually happened, Doctor. Er— now, Miss Arleson, I think we need a bit of supplementary information from you, if you don't mind. About how large a woman would you say Feodora Lanova was? How tall? How much would she weigh?"

"Well— she was lying diagonally on that divan with her feet over the edge of the seat a bit at the left end, and her head on the cushion in the right corner. If she'd been stretched perfectly straight on the divan, I fancy her head and feet would have come about an inch inside the arms at each end."

Doctor Adams took a steel tape from his pocket and measured the divan.

"Five feet eight inches, in the clear— which would make her about five feet six. How much would she weigh?"

"She was neither fat nor thin. Good muscular condition, I'd say, for a dancer. Around eleven stone, possibly."

"Hundred and fifty-four pounds. How old was she?"

"Difficult to say, from her appearance. If she really was the dancer I used to see, she'd be upward of thirty."

"H-m-m—average weight of a woman five feet six, at thirty, is ten stone. If she weighed over that, she was either taller than we're estimating, by at least an inch, or her bones and muscles were large."

"I fancy she'd weigh a bit more than ten—it's quite possible she may have been slightly taller—diffic'lt to judge Ha the way she was lying when I saw her."

THE Deputy Commissioner now began asking questions.

"How much of a family have you in your house, Miss Arleson?"

"My companion, who also does the cooking and half the housework— an old friend from Devon. A lodger— a man of forty— apparently decent and respectable. I fancy he does some sort of commission business in paintings and period furniture, for wealthy collectors— makes a good income— in and out at irregular hours; but he has his own key, so we rarely see or speak to him. He has been away since Monday— in Paris, very likely— goes over there several times a year, I believe. With myself and our cat Pluto, this covers the family."

"How large a man would your lodger be?"

"About twelve stone."

"Keeps pretty fit, I suppose?"

"We don't see enough of him to answer that question accurately, but I fancy he doesn't go in for sports at all."

"Is your companion a large woman?"

"Just medium— about my size."

"Go out much, of an evening?"

"Only to the cinema— occasionally goes to see a cousin, up Hampstead way. She's there tonight— but if she can get a taxi she'll be home by midnight."

"So that you and the cat have been alone all evening, eh? Nobody at home who would know anything of your movements ?"

"Not a soul. Martha left about five, and I got my own dinner."

"Can you prove this, Miss Arleson?"

"Quite easily. Martha's cousin would give you the time she reached their house this evening, and the time she left— if she leaves in this fog. And Martha can tell you that Mr. Smithers hasn't been in his room since Monday. She looks after it. Of course I see what you're driving at, sir— but the only one of us who has been in this house tonight is myself— and nobody outside of this room knows that, as yet. If you fancy I come under suspicion I'm perfectly willing to have you investigate in any way you wish. But I want to take my Spanish shawl home with me. Examine it carefully— there isn't a trace of blood on it; if there are fingerprints on the silk anywhere, they naturally would be mine. It is lying exactly where dropped it when I leaned against that door, and I can see that nobody has touched it since."

"How do we know it's your property ?" asked Sir Edward.

DR. ADAMS picked up the shawl— found the ink-spot and identified it. "Well— it's evidence, you know, Miss Arleson. Technically, we shouldn't let it go out of our hands."

"It is merely evidence that I was in this room tonight, if I choose to admit it— which I voluntarily came in here to do. Otherwise you couldn't prove that I hadn't loaned it to Miss Lanova, or had even had it stolen from me. Without my

explanation of what occurred, you've no evidence whatever that a murder has been committed. And I fancy you'll have diffic'lty in getting any further evidence. The body may have been taken a hundred miles from here in a car of some sort. Outside of the city there'll be not much fog."

"Oh, well—I can't see that the shawl is really important, in the circumst'nces. You may take it home after we've gone over it a bit. But we'd like to have you remain for a few days where we can see you again in case anything new comes up —and your companion also."

After Doctor Adams had said that he would stop in for a chat before morning, she left them, carrying the shawl. They smoked in silence for a few minutes. Presently Adams remarked that he was rather surprised at their letting her go until they had investigated further— everything considered.

"We'll prob'ly turn up more evidence by letting her imagine we don't really suspect her—an' she can't get very far," Beresford explained. '"There's a constable in front of this house with orders to shadow anyone coming out of it or within three numbers of it— another constable at the alley entrance on Christchurch Street. Even the little you said over the wire seemed to render that precaution advisable— and of course we have been in your house enough to know all about the mews an' the alley."

"Then— you do suspect her?"

"Now I ask you, old chap!" Sir Edward expostulated. "She told one of the most amazin'ly improbable stories I ever heard! Criminal actions simply don't synchronize like that in any such limited time!"

"It takes rather powerful hands to strangle a grown woman. Miss Arleson's are slender and delicate— the hands of an artist."

"Er— quite so; but we've not seen the body, as yet— have only her amazin' story to go upon. She had help in whatever happened— possibly her lodger— possibly the companion. What I really can't figure out as yet, is why they took away the body, if there really was a murder?"

"If there wasn't, why under the canopy would she come in here and tell us all about it? That's a pretty strong point for her, you know— in the total absence of any other evidence. As for removing the body— well, without a body, you've no case; what little investigating you do is merely perfunctory— gives the murderer ample time to get away. The longer you don't find it, the more secure he is. So we'd better be finding that body, right away!"

"Oh, I quite agree! But just where were you goin' to look for it, Doctor?"

"Well— let's project ourselves inside the murderer's brain and figure out what would occur to him after he gets the body down into this alley without being seen by anybody. The fog is greatly in his favor. There are four horses stabled in the mews, and six private cars garaged in some of the old stables—in

care of a watchman who sleeps there at night. No private-car owner would risk getting his auto banged up by taking it out on a night like this—so there would be no chauffeurs around the. mews this late, and the watchman is probably asleep. There's no question but that the murderer could knock that watchman unconscious and take out one of those cars with very little trouble. If he knows the alley and mews as well as the little evidence we have indicates, he's quite aware of how easily he can get one of those cars. Then his choice is disposing of the body within a radius of a few hundred feet or popping it into a car and taking it some distance away. Taking it on a supposition that he is a man of intelligence, Sir Edward— which would he do?"

"IF THERE chanced to be any place in this immediate vicinity that wasn't likely to be discovered— for some time at least— he'd decide on that," replied Sir Edward. "Because, d'ye see, the chap doesn't live around here himself. Once he's concealed the body an' gone out upon a main thoroughfare in this fog, there'd be absolutely nothin' to connect him with the crime. On the other hand, every move in gettin' the body away with a car is a risk— quite likely to leave clues which may be followed up knockin'-out the watchman is a risk— it furnishes the police an' news-sheets with a full description of the car, its license-number and owner— gets everyone lookin' for such a car an' tracin' its movem'nts soon after the watchman recovers consciousness. If he kills the watchman, it merely gives him the start he can get before the first chauffeur turns up at the mews.

"Then runnin' a car in this murk is risky business; a collision is likely at any moment, either with another car or some building on the side— which means investigation, detention by the nearest P, C., an' discovery of the body. To be sure, if he's not himself hurt, he can jump off an' disappear in the fog before anybody sees him. On the other hand, suppose he gets out in the country where there's little or no fog, an' is stopped for one reason or another by a P. C. In that case, he can't disappear.

"Then, if he abandons the car in a lane, somebody is almost certain to have seen him walking away in that vicinity. If he abandons the car within the city limits before the fog lifts, the body'll be found an' quite likely identified— which at once destroys much of the advantage he got by taking it out of this house. Even the brainiest criminals almost invariably make one serious mistake, after having provided for any other contingency. But if this murderer really is intelligent, he'd not take the body away in a car, d'ye see."

"GOOD! Logical reasoning, Sir Edward; precisely what I expected you to say," Adams applauded. "Very well— that leaves us with the body concealed within a few hundred feet radius of this house. To the best of my knowledge, there is just

one place in this neighborhood where a body might be concealed before the fog lifts, and possibly not discovered for several months, at least—and that's a sewer-connection under the two-foot grating in the center of the concrete draining-pavement in the mews. The wash from the cars and drainage from the stables all run down into it. To the best of my recollection, there's a circular brick pit under it which goes down into the top of a four-foot sewer, into which all these houses on both streets drain. I'm betting that we'll find the body there if you care to go and look right now. Eh?"

Beresford nodded.

"H-m-m— he could manage to lift that two-foot grating an' pop the body down, in this" fog, without bein' seen. We'll go down an' have a look-see, Doctor— at all events!"

It was a case of feeling their way along the alley in the murk, cautiously advancing down the graded concrete until their shoes touched the bars of the grating, lifting it off to one side, then lying on their stomachs and reaching down, at arm's-length, to throw the flashlight beam as far as the sewer. They saw a partly bare human leg and one hand— dimly white— in the sewer. The rest of the mass was dark and shapeless.

The Chief Inspector hurried back to the mouth of the alley on Christchurch Street, and told the P. C. who had been posted there to fetch a short ladder, a rope and another man. It proved a difficult job getting the body out, but fortunately no onlookers were about.

AFTER they had taken their ghastly burden back to the Lanova house, Beresford was reaching for the telephone to call the police surgeon, when Doctor Adams stopped him.

"Wait a bit! The woman is unquestionably dead— plenty of time for medical examination in the morning," he said calmly. 'What we want to do now is catch the murderer—which I imagine we may have the luck to do. Send the constables back to watch the entrance to the alley and Miss Arleson's house— keeping out of sight, and letting anybody go in, but arresting anyone coming out. Then we three go into Miss Arleson's house for a few moments."

"Er— what have you in mind, old chap? This is your show— we seem to be merely lookin' on from the stalls!" Sir Edward observed.

"Well— those marks on the woman's throat may have been made by a man with strong but tapering fingers, or by a woman with stronger ones than they appear to be. With a man's or another woman's assistance, Miss Arleson could have carried the body down these stairs and put it into that sewer. Just as a matter of psychological interest, I want to know whether she did or not. If she did— no use looking any further. If she didn't— well, I've a hunch that we'll get

the murderer in this house sometime before daylight. So we've no time to lose in settling the girl's innocence or guilt."

THEY found Selma Arleson reading. Her big cat Pluto was dozing comfortably on a table, near her shoulder. The Doctor stroked him gently until he rolled over on his back, opened one golden-amber eye, and began to purr loudly. When the intelligent beast was thoroughly awake, Adams quietly said: "Speak to him, Miss Arleson. They say cats are selfish creatures incapable of affection— but I've never believed it from what I've seen of them."

"You're quite right not to, Doctor. Just watch!" And she spoke caressingly to the big cat.

Pluto gaped luxuriously— took a long stretch, front and back, stepped daintily over and sat down with one paw on her shoulder, the other softly patting her nose. Then he commenced industriously licking her cheek with his rough tongue.

The psychologist laughed.

"Pluto gives you a pretty good character, Miss Selma. Well, I don't think we need trouble you any more tonight— we just wanted to be sure you were all right. Go to bed and get some sleep. Come, gentlemen!"

In the Lanova house again, Adams took them into the rear room on the second floor, where they sat down in the darkness— listening for any noise from below, while they discussed the crime in lowered voices.

"What was all that flummery about the cat, old chap? I can't see what you found out in there!"

"Know much about cats, Beresford? Like 'em— or are you a bigoted bird lover who distorts statistics to fit your prejudice? Ever live with cats for any length of time? You see, I move in the very best feline society— and that doesn't mean the long-haired, pampered Angoras, either. It means the everyday backyard cat who respects himself and earns himself a good home with appreciative humans because he loves 'em. If you only notice cats occasionally, you wouldn't know much about feline thoughts or intelligence. But over a period of many years I have never seen an intelligent cat show the slightest affection toward a man or woman who is instinctively cruel and brutal— a potential or premeditating murderer. That doesn't mean a person who kills another in self-defense— a cat himself will do that, if he's up against it. But he positively will not be even friendly with anyone who kills unconcernedly, as a matter of convenience to himself, or because he enjoys killing! If Miss Arleson had committed murder tonight, that black cat's instinct would have warned him of something deadly in her aura— in the scent of her. He'd have shied off and kept out of her reach. And he'd have known without any guesswork, either— he'd just have known! You'll say of course that that's no sort of argument for a

British jury— but it's good enough for me— assures me the murderer is somebody else, who may come into this house at any minute."

"Just how do you figure that out, Doctor?" asked Sir Edward, who knew a good deal about instinct among his dogs, but hadn't supposed cats were of equal intelligence.

"Psychologically. As a part of my investigations, I've kept records for some years of various reactions among murderers— finally separating them into not more than two main classes: those hardened, habitual criminals who kill casually, either as a matter of momentary expediency or from a paranoiac's curiosity to see life snuffed out of a human being— and those who kill in the heat of momentary passion or insanity and get the horrors when realization comes of what they have done. The one sort are abnormal perverts who scarcely think of a murder after it has been committed, and never dream of going back to the scene of one. The other kind are potential murderers only because they have the kind of temper which lets go when the strain reaches a breaking-point. These are drawn back to the corpses or scene of the crime by a species of horrible fascination which they can't resist. They must know if suspicion has been directed their way. They're obsessed with a fear that they may have left some betraying clue about. I size this murderer up as one of the second type—I don't believe he has self-control enough to keep away from this house as long as this thick fog will hide his movements."

For another hour they sat exchanging an occasional quiet word, and listening intently— but not smoking. Then a stair-tread creaked. Cautious footsteps, making the slightest possible rustle, crept up the treads to the second floor, went along the hall into that lighted front room where the corpse lay across the divan. In another second, there came a stifled cry:

"My— *God*!"

AFTER standing as if paralyzed for a second, the man whirled to go out— but the two officials were behind him with automatics— the Doctor stood between him and the windows. His arms were grasped and forced behind his back— handcuffs clicked around the wrists. They sat him down in a chair, in the best light— and looked him over. His face was adorned with a Vandyke beard, black like his hair, but showing a light brown at the roots— evidently dyed. A man about five feet nine, weighing a bit heavily. Reddish cheeks indicated a heart or lungs not quite up to the mark.

The Doctor seemed trying to recall a name. Presently he nodded.

"Well, Mr. Browning, I believe? Eh?"

The man's mouth opened in sheer amazement. Then he nodded.

"Oh, yes —though I'm damned if I can understand how you possibly knew— or how the police found that body so quickly in a— in a— place like that— in

this fog! News-sheets rag the Yard a lot— but— my word!.... I'd not have believed they were as good as this! I always kept out of sight in this neighborhood, Doctor— never around here in the daytime— though your man Jenkins would know me, I fancy—"

"Yes, I saw you talking with him in a little restaurant near here, one evening. He gave me your name. You don't live in the neighborhood?"

"No— I came down from my diggings at Golders Hill just to have that talk with Lanova and make her drop one of my young friends whom she was ruining, body and soul, as she did me. I'll sketch the story for you— as an explanation of what happened here. But I'd like to smoke a cigar while I'm telling it. You're three to one, and I've no weapon on me— can't possibly escape. Can't you risk taking off these handcuffs and letting me feel comfortable?"

The police officials glanced at each other. After all, he hadn't much chance to escape, so they unlocked the handcuffs. He selected a cigar from a silver case and fished in his waistcoat pocket for a patent lighter— a gadget with which he seemed childishly pleased.

"I met Lanova in Plymouth shortly after I married one of the sweetest girls that ever lived. Lanova was then plain Mary Scroggs and a big hit as a dancer in one of the local music-halls. There was a fascination about her— I can't describe it, but it bowled me over until I had no self-respect or decency left. I'd inherited money, so I took her to Paris— left my wife a check for two thousand quid. Mary began dancing in the cabarets— men went crazy over her. She was intimate with several, but stuck to me until she got my last penny, then went to Warsaw with a Russian— returned as Feodora Lanova, an' made a big hit in London. I tried to get a little money from her when I was pretty well down the grade, and sleeping in Hyde Park. She had me thrown out into the gutter. A rich American stopped his car and picked me up— took me home to his ranch in California, where I pulled up again and made a little money— let a story go round that I'd died in poverty. Got pally with Dick Stanford, my benefactor's only son. Before Stanford died he asked me to look after the boy, if he needed it.

"We came over here. Dick met Lanova in a night-club and she got him, as she'd got me— she bled him by the thousands, and he wouldn't listen to a word against her. I came here tonight to warn her that if she didn't drop Dick absolutely I'd publish enough to get her kicked out of decent society anywhere in the world. She defied me— said she wouldn't let up on Dick as long as he had a cent left. Then I saw red— and seized her by the throat. I was justified, gentlemen— my God, I was justified! Yet British law doesn't take much of that into account. So I suppose I'll be taking that nine o'clock walk to the little woodshed, some morning. Very good! I've at least saved my friend from her.

"But there's one thing I'd like to have you do for me if you will: get me away— before Miss Arleson gets any glimpse of me! Will you do that for me?"

HE was fumbling again in his waistcoat-pocket for the patent lighter; but when his fingers came out with it, they held something else which the other men did not see. He casually rubbed his nose, slipping something between his lips as he did so— and crushed the little cyanide capsule between his teeth. "Thank you, gentlemen! You see— Selma Arleson was the— wife— I left!"

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11: The Fylmire Diamond

Barry Pain

1864-1928

The Windsor Magazine Oct 1901

No 11 in the series "City Chronicles".

SIR GEORGE and Lady Fylmire were just finishing breakfast and a discussion in a small room on the ground floor at Fylmire Place.

"It's got to go," said Sir George doggedly. He was a tired man of about thirty three.

"It shan't, then," said her Ladyship. "I can't think how we come to be in a hole like this. How is it?"

''Don't know. Happens so. The farms don't let, or let for half nothing. We spend twice as much as the governor did, and we get half as much. Something of the kind. Why bother? We've got to make something to be going on with."

Lady Fylmire was young, beautiful, distinctly common, impatient, and impetuous. She tapped the table with her manicured nails. "What I want to know is, Whose fault is it?"

"Nobody's. No good worrying about faults. Of course, you throw it about a bit, and then I've been unlucky racin'. What's it matter? Two years ago it was the Romney. This year it's got to be the Fylmire diamond."

"No. You must sell another picture. And it's hateful of you to put it all on to me."

"Never put anything on anybody. It's no good making a fuss, Agnes. I can't sell another picture. There was too much talk in the papers last time— these confounded people won't mind their own business. The stone was valued for probate at fifteen thousand. Then we can each take some, and we can get on; and nobody will know, and nobody will talk. You must be sensible."

Lady Fylmire stamped her foot. "Don't go on talking like that. I tell you I won't have the thing sold. I've worn it everywhere, and I won't wear an imitation."

Sir George rose and paced the room with his hands in his pockets. "Yes," he said, "it's true enough that you've worn it everywhere. We can't have twenty people to dinner but you must have that great yellow pebble flaring in your hair. It ought to be at the bank— that's where it was always kept in the governor's time. That little safe in your room wouldn't stop a burglar long. Besides, you might lose it. I don't trust that ingenious removable setting. You know how careless you are, Agnes."

"Perhaps not quite as careless as you think."

"You wouldn't know the difference between the real stone and the imitation. They do these things awfully cleverly nowadays. Why, an expert can't tell without taking them into his back shop and testing them with a lot of acids and so on." This, by the way, is not a strictly accurate description of the methods employed for identifying precious stones.

"Is that what they did when they valued it?"

"Well, no. I don't know that they did anything. I suppose they took my word for it. It wasn't in dispute at all. It was the real stone."

"Well, I don't care. I like the feeling that I am wearing fifteen thousand in my hair, and I won't have the stone sold. You know I always have my own way when I've really made up my mind to a thing."

"Yes, you do when you can. This time you can't, I'm sorry to have to point it out, but the diamond does not happen to be yours."

Her Ladyship then observed that he was a brute and left the room. He yawned, lit a cigarette, and took up the *Morning Pos*t.

A month or two later Lady Fylmire showed herself more amenable to argument. She brought her husband a little account from her dressmaker (£453 17s. 9d.). She also kissed him on the brow and said he must do as he liked about the Fylmire diamond.

MR. JOHN DUFFEN REEVES was a dealer and expert in precious stones. He spoke Dutch fluently, and had an enlarged thumb, from which you might have deduced correctly, as he would have admitted, that at one time he had worked as a diamond polisher in Amsterdam. He had lived with preciousstones all his life, and had the knowledge of them that is not to be got from books, but only from incessant handling and observation. He was forty-five years of age and looked younger. He was a good-looking man of slightly foreign appearance, and had a quiet but authoritative manner. He was wealthy enough to have given up his business if it had not happened that his business interested him. In the practice of it his knowledge of human nature had increased and his belief in it had lessened. That was, perhaps, inevitable. He was reasonably honest, without any quixotic reluctance to make a good profit when he saw the chance. His discretion, as it had need to be, was remarkable and undoubted.

He had had dealings on several occasions both with Sir George and with his father, and a visit from the younger baronet came as no surprise to him. He received Sir George in his private office. After a little preliminary conversation Sir George said, "You know, it was on a business matter that I wanted to see you."

Mr. Reeves said that he was charmed. Was he to have the pleasure of selling Sir George another rope of pearls ?

"Well, no," said Sir George. "What I mean to say is the boot's rather on the other leg. I don't want to buy— I want to sell. This is all in confidence, you know."

"Of course."

"Well, you know the Fylmire diamond?"

Mr. Reeves did. He had had the privilege of seeing it several times. It was historical— a very fine yellow diamond. Surely Sir George did not mean to sell that ?

"Don't know exactly," said Sir George.

"You see, one reaches a point. One's got to have some money to— er— go on with, and landowning's no great catch. The question is, Could the stone be sold without giving the show away?"

"Without publicity? Certainly, Sir George. At any rate, for a time."

"And, coming down to figures, about how much would it— er— fetch?"

"It was valued some years ago at fifteen thousand, I think. That struck me at the time as being rather under the mark. Of course, .it is difficult to value these fancy stones. They are worth what you can get for them, and that varies with the state of the market."

"What do you mean by fancy stones?"

"Something out of the run. Any coloured diamond would be a fancy stone. The Fylmire diamond is a honey yellow, so far as I remember, as remarkable for its quality as for its size. It is without flaw, bright and lively, and has been very well cut. Of course, if it had been a sapphire-blue or a true red it would have been worth more. But it is a good and important stone, and I should be very glad to make you an offer for it."

"It could be copied, I suppose?"

"Quite easily and quite exactly. Well enough to take in anybody but an expert— and to take in the expert, too, if he only saw it by artificial light and not very near."

"I've got it with me," said Sir George, drawing a worn morocco case from his coat pocket. " I wish you'd have a look at it and give me a rough idea of what you would give for it. The setting unfastens, you know, so that you can take the stone out."

Mr. Reeves opened the case and took out the stone. He turned it over in his hand and smiled. "Yes," he said, "that's very well made."

"Made? How? What do you mean?"

"This is not the Fylmire diamond. It is not a diamond at all. It is a copy in strass."

"You are joking, of course?"

"Certainly not. Sir George."

"And you are quite certain?"

Mr. Reeves took the stone to the window and looked at it through a glass. "There can be no doubt about it. You supposed this to be the Fylmire diamond, then?"

"Certainly. I did not know that there was a copy of it in existence. How on earth?" He stopped short, and then suddenly blurted out, "That's Agnes!"

"I beg your pardon! But perhaps this is a subject it would be inconvenient to speak of further?"

"It's a delicate matter, and a pretty serious one. But as I tried to sell you that fraud, an explanation is due to you."

"I could not consent to hear it on those grounds. You require no defence."

"Put it, then, on the grounds that I have a good deal of confidence in you and in your discretion ; that I'm in a deuce of a hole and want your advice. My wife was very strongly opposed to the sale of the diamond. I pointed out to her that she could have the stone copied, and I'm afraid I rather exaggerated the way the imitation would take in an expert. It is possible, from something I said quite innocently, that she may have supposed that the stone would be bought on my assurance that it was the Fylmire diamond, without any very critical examination. She hates imitations, and likes to feel that she is wearing something really valuable. It is my conviction that she had the copy made and then tried to— well— er—"

"To play a little practical joke," suggested Mr. Reeves. " And do you suppose that she has sold the diamond, or perhaps borrowed money on it?"

"No. For one thing, I know she's got no money just now. Then she would not have parted with the diamond. That was her idea— she wanted the actual diamond. And when she has an idea, she is most remarkably "

"Remarkably firm about it. I'm inclined to agree with you that the diamond has not been sold. I don't think that it would have changed hands without my hearing something about it. Well, your course is clear enough."

"Blest if I see it!"

"Say— treating the matter lightly, of course— that the practical joke has failed."

"That would be all right if I knew that she had done this for certain. But suppose she didn't ? She was always careless about her jewels, and it is possible that the substitution of the sham for the real stone was made some time ago, not by her, and without her knowledge. In that case I should seem to be accusing her, and she would resent it— er— very considerably. If I were quite sure that the real stone was still in her possession, that would be a very different thing."

"It is quite simple. You will take this imitation back to her, and ^vvq any reason but the right one for not having sold it. Then wait for some occasion on which she would naturally wear the Fylmire diamond. If the real stone is still in

her possession, she will wear that and not the imitation. Of that I feel absolutely certain."

"So do I," said Sir George. "But you leave out one important point. I am not an expert. I should not know the difference between the sham and the real, even in the brightest light."

"True," said Mr. Reeves. "But I will show you how to tell the difference in the dark."

"Have you sold it ? " asked Lady Fylmire eagerly, at the first opportunity.

"Well, no," said Sir George languidly. "I've had a pretty good week racin', and they tell me there will be a better chance later on. I've left it over for a bit."

"I'm so glad. That's a weight off my mind. Now I shall be able to sleep."

"Don't know that it should take you like that, now that you've made up your mind to it. After all, it's only putting off the evil day."

Lady Fylmire recovered herself. "Yes, I know. But, you see, I was so anxious to wear it at the Sarrabuts' dance next week."

"That's it. I see." He was by no means sure that that was it, and he did not see. But he handed back to her the worn morocco case with the clever copy of the Fylmire diamond in it.

She opened the case, looked affectionately at the model, and kissed it devoutly. "I don't know how I shall bear to part with you," she said, with a sigh.

Sir George was more mystified than ever. He was fond of making a bet, but he would have been sorry at the moment to have been asked to stake any money on the question whether his wife did or did not know that the real stone had been replaced by a sham.

He settled the point easily enough on the night of Lady Sarrabut's dance. His wife was wearing what purported to be the Fylmire diamond, and in the dark brougham it was quite easy for him, following the instructions of Mr. Reeves, to decide that it really was the diamond and not the imitation.

The instructions had been simple enough. Many diamonds, though not all, are phosphorescent. The quality is specially possessed by yellow diamonds; as a rule the smaller stones are the more luminous. For a considerable time after exposure to a bright light they continue to glow. Mr. Reeves had had opportunities of observing the Fylmire diamond, and he had noticed that it possessed this quality in an unusual degree.

Sir George had already noted the appearance of the imitation in darkness and semi-darkness. This was quite different ; a yellow fire seemed to be floating over his wife's head. She sat upright in the brougham— her pretty hair had been exquisitely arranged— and he watched her intently. He said nothing— that was for the return journey. And he did not much like the idea of facing that return journey; he was quite certain there would be no end of a row. His partners must have found him very dull; he was never a brilliant man conversationally, and to-

night he was very absent-minded. He was glad when his wife decided to return immediately after supper; he was anxious to go through with it and get it over.

She leant back in the carriage now, since she was tired, and the arrangement of her hair no longer mattered.

Sir George began in a husky, unnatural voice that he hardly recognised as his own. (He had used it once before, however, when he had been called upon unexpectedly to read the lessons in a village church.)

"Look here, Agnes," he said, "I hate rows, and we have too much of them, anyhow, but there's something that I've got to say."

"I wonder what your excuse for a quarrel is to-night?" said Lady Fylmire querulously.

"I wish it was nothing more than an excuse. Here are the facts. When you handed me the diamond to sell, it was not the diamond, and you knew it was only an imitation. You are wearing the real stone to-night. Don't dispute it— it's true. And it's pretty low down. I couldn't have believed it if I hadn't seen and known it for myself." Then he waited for the outburst. None came.

"That is all quite true," said Lady Fylmire. " How did you find it out ? "

"The expert to whom I took it detected the imitation at once. Luckily, he has had dealings with me before— he had no doubt that I had offered it in the belief that it was the real stone. I knew you were wearing the real stone tonight, because the real stone declares itself in the dark. It is phosphorescent. Possibly you didn't know that."

He forebore to add that a week before he had not known it either.

"No," she said, " I didn't know it."

"And have you got anything to say?"

"Yes, I've a good deal to say. I've been a fool, George, but I haven't been quite as bad as you think."

Her voice shook a little, and her husband noticed with surprise that she was not showing fight.

"I don't say that I think badly of you, but I do think you— er— didn't exactly realise what you were doing."

"That's true. I didn't. Well, I'll tell you the story. You remember nagging me about being careless with the diamond?"

"Yes, I said something about it."

"Well, as it happened. Lady Sarrabut had talked to me about the same thing some time before. She had told me that I had much better keep the diamond at the bank, and have a copy made which I could wear. The copy was already ordered when you told me you meant to sell the diamond. Now, I didn't want you to sell the diamond— I think I said so."

"You did," said Sir George drily.

"Then I got that bill from my dressmaker woman, and she wanted her money at once; so I changed my mind and decided to let you sell the diamond. I did mean then to give the real stone to you. It was just at the last moment that I was tempted. There were the two stones together, and it seemed almost impossible to tell which was which. You were just driving off to catch your train, and I had no time to think it over properly. It was all done in a second— the real stone taken out of the setting and the sham put in its place. Oh ! what I've suffered ! Your cart hadn't got down to the gates before I'd repented. I thought of sending a groom after you, but I wanted to wear the diamond at this dance, and I was so distracted I didn't know what to do. I went upstairs and cried— I don't suppose you care, not now."

The light of a street lamp flashed into the brougham and showed her Ladyship, very pretty in her distress.

"Look here, Agnes," said her husband awkwardly. "That's all right. I see how it was. You needn't go on telling me and— er— working yourself up this way. As it happens, no harm's done."

"But I want to tell you. It wouldn't be fair to myself not to tell you. I had an awful day. I went a walk in the village, and the policeman stared at me, and though I know him, of course, and know what a fool he is, I was rather frightened. I felt as if he might perhaps know about it. And at last I quite made up my mind. If you had come back and told me that you had sold the diamond, I should have confessed everything at once. Don't you remember how glad I was when you came back and said you'd put off selling the diamond for a bit? That was because I could undo my wicked action, and would be able to wear the Fylmire diamond at the Sarrabuts' with a clear conscience, and wouldn't have to confess. Yoti do forgive me, George, deg,rest, don't you?"

"Yes, that's all right, now you've owned up."

"It might have been penal servitude?"

"Don't know, exactly. Sort of skating round the edge of it, I should think. I shouldn't get playing about like that any more, Agnes, if I were you."

Then Agnes completely broke down. She wept copiously, and between her sobs made sundry statements— as, for example, that she would never play about any more at all any way; that she wished the Fylmire diamond was at the bottom of the sea, and was prepared to throw it there herself; that perhaps if George had been kinder to her this would never have happened; and finally that she wished to give up the use of jewellery and other worldly trappings and, if possible, to enter a convent.

Her husband consoled her as best he could. Becoming gradually consoled, she said he would never know how deeply she loved him, and that she thought he had the finest and noblest character of any man in the world.

"Easy on, I say," said Sir George, modestly and— as I think— correctly.

A few days later Sir George again called on Mr. Reeves. He had the same leather case in his pocket, but its contents were different. He produced it with a hesitating —

"I've— er— brought that diamond I was speaking about the other day."

"Ah! yes," said Mr. Reeves, as he opened the case. "A fine stone— a beautiful thing!" But he said no more; he never even hinted a question. Sir George had imagined that it might be necessary to administer a slight snub to Mr. Reeves, but there was no opportunity. Mr. Reeves had given his advice; he now held the Fylmire diamond in his hands. He was content with that.

But Sir George, imagining what ghastly suppositions Reeves's discreet reticence might cover, felt the necessity of telling a plausible story.

"By the way, Mr. Reeves, you were all wrong last time."

"When you brought the copy of the diamond? Surely not. I am convinced it was the copy and not the original stone."

"No, I don't mean that. I mean your suggestion that— er— Lady Fylmire was playing a practical joke on me."

"This is too bad," said Mr. Reeves. "That was your own idea. Sir George. I have decided opinions about diamonds, but I don't know enough of the ways of great ladies to have the right to criticise them."

"Well, somebody said something, and it was wrong. It was a mere mistake. Acting on my advice, Lady Fylmire had a copy of the diamond made. Not being an expert, she was unable to distinguish between the two. She gave me the copy, fully believing it to be the original."

"Quite so. Perfectly natural. I think I remember saying at the time that the copy was particularly well made. Now, with regard to this stone, Sir George— do you think you could be tempted to part with it?"

Sir George thought he could. When he left, a few minutes later, he left the diamond behind him, and had Mr. Reeves's cheque in his pocket. He was a little pleased with the tact with which he had managed everything.

And Mr. Reeves sat and smiled pleasantly. It was not entirely because he had bought the Fylmire diamond for £13,000 that morning, and would sell it to a wealthy American for £20,000 that afternoon— though that in itself was pleasant enough. His profession brought before him many curiosities of human nature— his memory was a museum of them. To this museum he had just added one more exhibit.

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12: The Point of View

Ole Luk-Oie

Major-General Sir Ernest Dunlop Swinton, 1868-1951
McClure's Magazine May 1910
The Grand Magazine April 1913

THE SINKING SUN, seen through the overhanging cloud of dust and smoke, quickly lost its brilliancy and turned crimson before becoming obscured in the dust which hung over the battlefield. Irom the light which still remained in the sky it was evident that, though hidden, the sun had not yet set.

A dirty soldier in a once drab uniform stood in his niche in a zigzag trench. Bringing down his rifle— with which he had been doing some fancy shooting— in order to press in a fresh clip of cartridges, he noticed that the wood-casing near the foreend was again smouldering. Without troubling to extract the cartridges, he threw the weapon down, and stepping to one side took another from the clutch of a dead man on his left. The curious tinkling sound made when the gun fell or he moved his feet was due to the cartridgecases collected in the bottom of the trench, for fighting had been hard and continuous. Without delay, but without hurry, he adjusted the sights of the fresh rifle, saw that the magazine was charged, and again leant forward, his right cheek against the stock, his left teinple cosily against a boulder. No separate report could be distinguished in the general rattle along the trench, yet the action of his hand as he pressed trigger and opened and closed bolt showed that he was once more busy. He continued steadily firing. Here it was still a purely fire action, though at point-blank range; but the fixed bayonets and their condition showed that these men did not rely entirely on "fire-effect."

Just as the sun really set there occurred one of those lulls which sometimes take place for no apparent reason over large sections of a prolonged battle. Both sides, as if by mutual consent to salute the departing day, ceased firing, and the sudden comparative silence was more disturbing than the preceding din. It was but a brief hush. Anxious to make the most of the remaining daylight, one fired here, another there, then two or three, then dozens, until the noise of separate shots, save the nearest, was again lost.

From the right, close by the trench in which the drab soldier was so busy shooting, there rang out a report— that double note which is never heard from behind a firearm— and with a soft cough the man subsided in a heap on to the jingling cartridges below. His rifle, supported squarely on the parapet, remained where it was.

"Now we've got it in the neck again!" philosophically grunted his neighbour— from the shape of the niche in which the dead man had been so snugly ensconced he could only have been hit from a shot fired from behind. "'

Those brutes on the tight have gone too soon and given ‘1s away, and the sergeant has kept us here too long. Thought he would. Pity the little lieutenant is dead!”

He was wrong— the “brutes" on the right could not help going. They had in their turn been given away by the chain of circumstances, There was no anger in his voice, but a resigned annoyance, for the feelings of these men had become dulled. Desperate fighting, mostly ending in retirement, leads first to exasperation, then to uneasiness, and finally to dogged apathy, if not to soddenness, These men were now in a groove —the groove of duty; they fought all day, killed as many of the enemy as they could, and then, though it was understood to be an advance, nearly always retired at night; it had become mechanical. They had ceased to wonder when it would be their turn to attack; in fact, it would have been impossible at this stage to have got these men to assume the offensive, for a habit— especially of retirement—is only too easily acquired.

Several reports now sounded on the right, and one or two more men had fallen by the time that the sergeant in command made up his mind to go back. He whistled. The remnants of the company picked up their belongings mechanically, took the bandoliers and the bolts from the rifles of the dead, and then scrambled away among the boulders, the long grass and the scrub, up the hillside.

Three men stayed behind, crouching in the deserted trench, which, when empty, looked all the more squalid in its litter of food, scraps of paper, and empty cardboard boxes. Two busied themselves burying some things like ration-tins with short pieces of cord attached under little mountains of the brass cartridgecases; the third crawled along to the end till he came to the water-cans; one was still full. He put out his hand, then paused; he was an educated, thoughtful man. Why should he spill it? They had been on the advance, fighting as they came, all day, and must be half-dead from thirst. They had no trenches ready to retire to, no water placed handy for them. All they found to receive them was abandoned works half-filled with expended cartridges, expended human beings, and possibly a live grenade or two. Poor devils! Why should—? He heard a shout: “Come out, you fool! they’re lit!"— there was a fizzing noise. Habit was too strong; he did the right thing, and kicked over the can before he climbed out and followed the others. He had barely gone a hundred yards before the detonations of the exploding grenades overtook him. But the oncoming enemy had been caught before, and this time the shower of stones and hail of brass cases had nothing but corpses upon which to vent their spite. A few moments later and two or three crouching forms stole through the twilight and crept into the trench. They went straight to the water-cans.

Only when the artificial gloom of the smoke and dust-screen had been overcome by the darkness of night did the prevailing hellish noise finally abate. Even then the hush was relative, for wild bursts of musketry broke out in different directions, as attempts were made by one side or the other to advance under cover of darkness, or when bodies of men, unnerved by days of continual strain, started in uncontrollable panic to shoot at nothing. The closeness of the two forces in some places was marked by the shouts of hand-to-hand combat and the detonations of grenades. At some distance from the firing lines the intermittent reports and explosions were all that could be distinguished, but from closer the thud of picks was audible— the metallic jar of their steel points ringing out against flints— and the hoarse rasp of shovels. More prosaic work, perhaps, than much of that which had gone on before that day; but, to judge from the way in which weary men were digging after a long day's fighting, and from the fact that in some places where the soil was hard or the fire too hot they were using corpses as a parapet, it was not less urgent. Now and then a gun was heard.

As soon as the light faded altogether from the sky, the yellow flames of different conflagrations glowed more crimson, and the great white eyes of the searchlights shone forth, their wandering beams lighting up now this, now that horror. Here and there in that wilderness of dead bodies— the dreadful "No-Man's Land" between the opposing lines— deserted guns showed up singly or in groups, glistening in the full glare of the beam or silhouetted in black against a ray passing behind. These guns were not abandoned; the enemy's fire had stripped them of life as a flame strips a feather. There they remained inert and neutral, anybody's or nobody's property, the jumbled mass of corpses around them showing what a magnetic inducement guns still offer for selfsacrifice, in spite of the fact that for artillery to lose guns is no longer necessarily considered the worse disgrace.

Not far from the deserted zigzag trench stood two such batteries.

In proportion as the crash of firearms died away the less noisy but far more awful sounds of a battlefield could be heard rising in a wail from all sides, especially from the space between the lines. All through that summer night the searchlights glared on this scene of human woe ; all through that summer night tired and overwrought human beings dodged, dug, shot, stabbed, fell asleep or died where they happened to be.

Except in details this little scene of retirement was like many others taking place among the low hills to right and feft. All day the fight had swayed backwards and forwards with varying success, and now the enemy, pressing forward a counterstroke, had, after immense efforts, broken through, thus forcing the line on each side of them to curl back in self-defence. The troops

were not fighting upon fresh ground, for it was a bare two days since they had advanced, and now in their retirement they were using their old trenches.

It was the close of a July day, and this was part of the central section of the battle which extended for thirty odd miles— the central section of the great attack which had lasted nearly a week, and to the minds of all the soldiers and many of the officers in the section had failed miserably, It had now degenerated from attack into defence, for during the last two days the movement had been retrograde, and not at all what they had expected. To-day had been the culmination for those in this section; they had gradually been forced back almost to their startingpoint, and it seemed that the enemy's entire army had been concentrated against them, that someone had blundered, and that they were to be left to bear the whole brunt of the attack. All their efforts had been futile, the appalling slaughter without result— the enemy were still pressing on harder. This much every man could see for himself— and it was under the circumstances natural that those quite ignorant of what was happening elsewhere should imagine that the whole army was beaten.

To the battery commander, now lying wounded under an upturned wagon just on that knoll, it seemed the end of all things. He had lost nearly all his men, all his horses, and there— just over there— deserted save by corpses, were his guns. He could see them; no, he was no longer able to, for, though he knew it not, the mist of death was before his eyes. For him the immediate surroundings wete too strong; it seemed the end of the battle. The fighting of miles, his own personal hurt, were swallowed up in the sense of immediate, overwhelming disaster. Though an educated, scientific, broad-minded soldier, he died under the bitter sense of a great defeat. His comrade in misfortune, unwounded, perhaps felt the *débâcle* even more. The infantry brigadier, now resting in the same ravine as his men, was suffering similar mental agony. Of his splendid Eighth Brigade of strong battalions, the best in the army— nearly at full strength that morning— he had now left after that fatal counter-attack one battalion and some remnants. Even the divisional commander, a little farther away, at the end of a telephone wire, was puzzled and at last perturbed.

He realised that his was only a holding attack, and that his business was to occupy and to keep back the enemy whilst someone else struck. He had been holding for days, but was now no longer keeping them back. He knew full well that the battle would be decided miles away, and that relief would come from elsewhere. But when? When?

ii

ON THE AFTERNOON of that day two men stood talking under a trellis arch covered by a crimnson rambler at the corner of a lawn. One was tall and elderly,

with a slight stoop; the other, of middle-age, had an alert appearance, accentuated by the shortness of a tooth-brush moustache. Both were in officers' service dress; but though in uniform, the taller of the two wore slung across his back— not a haversack, binoculars, revolver, or any martial trappings— but an ordinary fishing-creel. On the ground at his feet lay something in a case which looked suspiciously like a rod and a landingnet. While he conversed he flipped slowly through the pages of a fat pocket-book. As the two stood there talking, the whole setting was suggestive of the happy opening scene of a play. The stagy effect of tle two figures in the sunlit garden was heightened by the extreme neatness of the uniforms— seemingly brand new— and the vivid emerald green of the gorget patches. The cheery tone of the conversation also sounded forced and not in accordance with the anxious faces.

The scene was real enough; the occasion intensely so; but the two officers were to a certain extent acting. They had to, in order to keep going, and it needed an effort.

"Wireless still working all right ? No interference?" finally said the elder. His note was now almost querulous, and he still fidgeted with his pocket-book.

"Quite, sir," replied the junior shortly, for the hundredth time, his brusquerie a great contrast to the other's slightly peevish tone. He was a specimen of the type of officer who is apt to confuse curtness and smartness; moreover, he had during the last few hours been much badgered by his superior. In spite also of his evident efforts to maintain the ideal demeanour of the perfect staff-officer, he was unable to entirely restrain his surprise at the fishing get-up.

"Well, let me know at once when they are ready to open the ball. You know where I am to be found?"

"In your office, sir." With that the man with the tooth-brush moustache clicked his heels precisely, saluted, and turned to go. But his eyes still fixed on the other's equipment, he awkwardly hit the trellis with his hand and brought down a shower of the crimson petals all over his senior. Greatly mortified at his clumsiness, he was about to apologise, when the General— he was a General— who had noticed and enjoyed the cause of the perfect staff-officer's discomfiture, remarked kindly:

"Crowned with roses! An omen, I hope. That comes of not keeping your eyes in the boat. Yes"— he held out rod and book and looked down at himself— "I am going fishing. I found these lying up in the house, no doubt left on purpose by the worthy owner, and it's a pity to waste them. I am going to take a rest from the office— a rest-cure for us all,eh? You will not find me in my office. You'll find me by the fallen log near the bend, over there"— he pointed down the garden; "let me know of any developments at once. By the way, what do you think of this for to-day?" And he gently pulled out of his book something which glistened in the sun and curled himself lovingly round his finger. It looked

like a violin-string with a feather on the end of it. He gazed up at the sky, "Too sunny, d'you think ? "

"Don't ask me, sir," was the teply. "I'm no fisherman."

The General did not answer; he stood quite still, apparently absorbed in his little book and the specimen he had extracted. He stayed thus for some minutes, staring at his hand and the gaudy little bundle of feather and silk in it, but he did not see them; his gaze was focussed far away, and his face wiinkled in thought. A petal fell on to the book and broke the spell. Starting, he said hastily, as if to excuse his momentary lapse, "Yes, I must have a try for that monster." The effect of the speech, however, was lost, for the other, with mingled feelings of relief and wonder, had noiselessly walked away over the grass and vanished within the house. He was alone.

A kindly-looking man, he had a thoughtful face and usually a gentle manner, which were at any rate in great matters rather misleading, for it was his fixed principle of life to endeavour to act on reason and not on impulse. This theory of action was based on an acute sense of proportion. Indeed, so frequently did he preach the importance of proportion in war that he was commonly known amongst his personal staff as "Old Rule of Three."

Taking off his cap, he carefully hooked the fly into the soft green band above the peak. Then he picked up the rod and net and strode almost jauntily down the sloping lawn, his feet rustling through the swathes of cut grass lying about. It possibly may have been owing to the drag of the grass on his feet, for he did not look a robust man, but by the time he had reached a point out of sight of the house there was no spring in his listless steps.

It was July, and the garden was looking its best. The shadow of the great cedar on the lawn had almost reached the flower-border near the house where the stocks glowed in the sunlight and filled the air with warm scent. From the house itself, ablaze with purple clematis and climbing roses, the lawn sloped down towards some trees, and through the trees could be seen the sparkle of a river and the shimmering water-meadows beyond, Between borders of aspen and alder flowed the stream, its calm surface only broken here and there by the rings of a lazily rising fish, or by the silvery wake leit by some water-vole swimming across. The meadows on the far side and the gentle hillside opposite were bathed in sunlight, and the distant cawing of rooks was the only sound to disturb the afternoon quiet, which lay 'softer than sleep '' over the landscape.

The General passed through the dappled shadows under the trees, and wandered for a short distance up-stream, until he came to a little clearing in the shade, where he sat down on a rotting log. Impressed, perhaps, by the scene, he sat quite still, so motionless was he that a brood of young dabchicks on a voyage of discovery began to peep out from among the broad-leaved weeds near his

feet. He did not notice them. His thoughts had again wandered far away, and, as his face showed, they were not pleasant.

Suddenly from the dark pool beneath the knotted roots of the hawthorn opposite, where the cloud of midges was dancing, there was a loud, liquid " plop." He started. When he looked up he was too late to see anything except a swirl and some quickly-spreading rings on the water, but his apathy disappeared. In one minute his rod was out and fixed; in two the fly was off his cap, and his reel was purring in little shrieks as he hauled out line in great jerks; in three he was crouching back behind an osier, watching his fly spin round in an eddy as it meandered down-stream.

The light on the hill grew more rosy, the shadows deepened and crept across the water, and yet he fished on— now without hat or coat. The fits of absence of mind or of depression to which he had seemed a ptey had quite vanished.

Who would have guessed that this man crouching there in the gloaming was the Commander-in-Chief of a large army?— at that moment engaged in one of the greatest battles of history. Indeed, the conflict was now well past the opening gambit, was nearing its final phase, and yet the man responsible for one side was calmly fishing ; not only fishing, but evidently miles away from the front. In no way did the fragrant garden or the little streams show the trail of war. An untrained observer would probably have been moved to indignation that such a thing should be possible; that while the fate of his army hung upon his actions, upon his decisions, the Commander should be engaged in sport; that while hundreds of thousands were fighting and meeting death in its most violent form, or toiling under the most awful strain— that of warfare— the leader should, with a chosen few, apparently shirk the dangers and hardships, and enjoy a secure but ignoble ease. Surely of all human enterprises a battle most needed the presence of the guiding brain on the spot! Even the most luxurious of the successful commanders of history— however great the barbaric splendour of their pomp and state— led their own troops in the combat and showed no lack of personal bravery. Possibly his verdict would have been that this was only one more sign of the times, an especially glaring example of the growing deterioration of the race, and of the decline of the military spirit amongst civilised nations.

But it would have been incorrect, for this curious scene was not due to any decrease in national fibre, nor was it due to the irresponsible vagaries of an individual degenerate. It was due to the fact that the advisers of the nation had some acquaintance with moder war, and a profound knowledge of the limitations of human nature. The absence of the Commander-in-Chief from the front, his presence at such a spot, the very detachment of his occupation, were part and parcel of a deliberate policy worked out by the same calculating brains that had worked out the national strategy. Those who were responsible for the

army— perhaps the finest instrument of destruction that the world had ever seen— were well aware that it was an instrument, and not, as it has often been miscalled, a warmachine; that an organisation, from top to bottom of which allowance has continually to be made for the weakness of human nature, resembles a machine less than most things. Consequently the material and psychological aspects of the art of war, and the action and reaction of the one upon the other, were fully recognised. From bugler to generalissimo, for every human being liable to stress, every effort was made to mitigate the results of such stress. This principle was carried out consistently all through the army, but reached its greatest development in reference to the Commander. In value he did not represent an individual; he represented an army corps, two army corps— who could estimate his value ? If the right man in the right place, his brain, his character, his influence, were the greatest asset of the nation. It was recognised as essential that the Commander should be in the best physical condition, and it was no part of the scheme that he should share the hardships of the troops, or any hardships. Even at the risk of the sneers of the thoughtless and ignorant, even against his natural tendencies, he was to be preserved from every avoidable danger which might lead to his loss, and from every physical discomfort or exposure which might injure his health, and so affect his judginent.

It was recognised that the days when any one man could by personal observation keep a grasp of the progress of the whole of a battle have gone. Modern fights may cover scores of miles, and no one man upon the scene can hope to obtain more than an infinitesimal portion of information by the employment of his own senses. Even if at the front, he would be dependent for any comprehensive view of events upon intelligence conveyed from other portions of the field. Indeed, the closer to the front the less in amount would he see, though what did come within his view might be very clear— probably far too clear. However well trained and experienced a general, he does not fight great actions every day, and would be liable, to the detriment, perhaps, of the main issue, to be influenced unduly by the near proximity of really minor events of which he should happen to be an eye-witness.

Indeed, were there not cases recorded where commanders, who should have been thinking in scores of thousands, had allowed their judgment to be warped by the fate of mere hundreds or dozens— actually witnessed. Better, therefore, that the Commander should receive all his information, and be placed in a position where he could reduce it to a common denominator and weigh the whole uninfluenced by personal knowledge of any separate portion of it. It is a question of mental optics; for the larger picture is required the longer focus. Isolation from sight does not mean isolation from immediate information, and it can be better acted on if received in an undisturbed place.

These considerations were thought to outweigh the objection against them that men will fight better for a General whom they can see— a well-known figure— than for one who remains aloof, safe in the rear, a vague personality. It was argued that the actual presence of the Commander has not its former wellptoved moral value, for he can at best only be in one small section, where his presence may be known to a few; that the men of huge conscript armies have not that personal affection for the Chief which used to be the case, and that his presence or absence would not influence them to the same extent even if they knew of it. Provided that their Chief organises victories, the men will worship him whether they see him or not. There was indeed one objection to this theory of the detachment of the thinking brain from the actual combat. When this brain is linked to a highly-strung temperament, it may be more disturbed by the pictures evoked by the imagination than by anything that could be actually seen.

It was partially so in this case. The man fishing was fully in agreement with these principles, but did not find them easy to carry into execution. To keep away from the front in itself needed a continuous strain. It needed far more moral courage than to lead the troops, for was it not certain to be misunderstood of many? Though he realised that a large part of his duty lay in maintaining himself fit and calm, and though he was trying loyally to keep his mind detached for the big questions, it was an effort both for him and his staff; hence the false note noticeable in the interview in the garden, and his strange reveries when alone. Even he, with his trained mind and experience, almost a faddist in his sense of proportion, could not keep his thoughts from the struggle being waged miles away. Everything was arranged, and his time for action would not come till his great enveloping, flanking movement now behind the enemy made itself felt, and yet he was worrying in spite of himself. He was conscious of beginning to interfere and to fuss his subordinates in their work. He was equally conscious of the fatal Tesults of such a course. Hence the borrowing of the fishing-tackle,

Though an ardent fisherman, it was not until the big trout rose that he obtained the mental distraction he sought. Then all thoughts of war, battle, envelopment, and possibilities left him in a flash, and his mind rested while he pitted his skill against the cunning of the fish— an old veteran himself. His present duty was to keep his own mind clear, and not cloud the minds of his subordinates. He was trying to do it.

iii

MEANWHILE the map-room on the ground floor at the side of the house facing the trees was, much to the annoyance of its occupants, already growing

dark. In it four officers were working, also coatless and absorbed, though not quite so pleasantly occupied as their General, whipping the stream down below. Two of them were standing up, treading aloud at intervals from pieces of paper, and two were sprawling on all-fours over a map Jaid out on the floor. Occasionally a noncommissioned officer brought in a fresh budget of papers. The map, too large to be hung up, was mounted on linoleum or some similar matcrial which held the pins of the coloured flags with which i: was studded. According to the intelligence read out, the two men on the floor moved the flags or stuck in fresh ones. Their attitude was somewhat undignified for the Brain of an army. It needed no glance at the green patches on the coats hung over the pictures to show that these four were officers of the Great General Staff, for they addressed each other by their Christian names or more often as "Old Boy," a sign in all civilised armies of the freemasonry and co-ordination of thought acquired by young staff officers who have been contemporaries at the war schools. All juniors, they were now, in a military sense, only deviling.

The atmosphere of the room was not only warm; it appeared somewhat electrically charged. There was little conversation, much grunting, and many a muttered oath from the crawlers. The only man who talked was a stout fellow, whose garments were strained to the limit of elasticity, if not to breaking-point, by his position. As he stretched to place a flag, and then crouched back to the edge of the map, his fleshy neck was forced against his collar and bulged out in a roll from which the short hair stood out like bristles from a brush. He was certainly stout, but, far from being choleric, appeared the most cheerful of the party. At last he looked up.

"All done?"

“Yes, for a bit,” was the reply of the man who had been reading out to him, so he at once heaved himself up with surprising agility, and, adjusting his collar, mopped his forehead with a bandana handkerchief of exotic hues.

“I say, old boy, it’s gettin’ beastly dark! What about a light, eh?” He looked up at the swinging oil lamp in the centre of the ceiling.

“You are always wanting something,” snapped the sour-faced man near the door. "It’s barely dark yet. Orderly!”

A soldier appeared, and the lamp was lighted with some difficulty, owing to the position of the map. The light showed up the faces of the party, all shining with heat, and all, except the fat man’s, worried in expression. His was round, and, though now congested from unwonted exertion, was eminently goodhumoured, He looked the type of person who proposes “The Ladies,” and always shouts ‘One cheer more,” on principle.

“Phew!” he whistled; "it’s hot!”

Quite unabashed by the absolute lack of response, he went on: "But the job’s nearly over. I say, what would you fellows say if you heard the tinkle of ice

against glass comin’ along the passage now, and if a charming wench appeared with a tray full of long tumblers, big green beakers of Bohemian glass full to the brim of hock-cup— bubbles rocketin’ up and clingin’ round the ice and cucumber, and winkin’ at you? Eh?” He made a guzzling and indescribably vulgar sound with his lips, indicative of lusciousness.

“Why the Bohemian glass? Why hock-cup? Give me beer— beer in a mug or a bucket, and a child could play with me.”

“Confound it! Shut up, both of you!" said a third in exasperation. “ How the devil can we do this if you will talk? Thank Heaven, here is some more stuff coming! That will! keep you busy for a bit.”

As he spoke a fresh budget of papers was brought in. The fat man turned to his former reader:

“Your turn to squirm, I think, old boy. Down you go, and this hero will intone for a bit! Interestin’ work, this; we are certainly in the know, and should be able to look at things dispassionately enough; but it is hardly responsible. We might as well be lickin’ stamps, or—"

“Oh, for the Lord’s sake keep quiet!” repeated the same officer as before.

“All right— all right! It’s lucky some of us can put a cheerful face on matters. What's the good of lookin’ like a lot of mutes, even if it is to be our own funeral? Besides me, the only true philosopher in this army is old Rule of Three himself, with his eternal cry of ‘Proportion, gentlemen! Proportion!’— God bless him!”

“He's been ratty enough the last few hours. I don’t know what's come over him,” one growled without looking up. ‘‘ He’s been fussing and worriting like any other man.”’

“Yes, he has,” was the reply. “But it’s only been while he has been waiting, with nothing to do, for the moment of the general advance. Anyway, he’s let us alone this sweaty afternoon. I wonder what he’s been after.”

There was no reply, and the work continued with intervals of waiting for messages and occasional interludes of grumbling, for even in this sheltered spot there were drawbacks, Perhaps a hand was placed on the point of a flag-pin, or one of the candles— stuck in bottles all round the edge of the floor in order to obviate the heavy shadow cast by the crawling men’s bodies— was kicked over by a careless heel.

The stout officer went on reading items of news in a steady voice, while his companion either made some alteration or did not, according to the information received.

“Two batteries of the 25th Artillery Brigade and three battalions of the— somethin’ Brigade— I can’t read the number— I wish to the devil they’d write their numbers instead of puttin’ figures," he continued in a monotone.

“Well?” said the flagger.

“It may be a three or it may be a five; I can’t tell which,” was the casual reply.

“Yes; but what is it? What has happened?”

“Practically wiped out,” in a calm voice.

“Where?”

“Near the bridge— there, square F17— by your hand; yes, that’s it.”

The flagger carefully examined his flags.

“It can’t be the third or the fiith; they are miles away. Is the place correct ?”

“Yes, there’s no mistake— 'south of bridge,' it says.”

“Then it must be the twenty-first, or the fifteenth, or— hold on!— what’s this?— the eighth brigade? The eighth is near the bridge; yes, of course it must be the eighth— an eight and a three—"

“My God!” was the startling interruption from the reader.

All those in the room looked up; but they were so accustomed to the speaker’s garrulity that they made no remark. His tone and his expression, however, quite spoilt the rdle of philosopher which he had claimed; his mouth was gaping, and he was feeling his collar nervously,

The flagger waited some time silently; he wanted facts.

“Well, let’s have it!” he said finally.

“Old boy, it’s awful!”

“Yes, of course it is, but it is no more awful than crowds of other messages that we have been getting. After all, what are two batteries and three battalions? Look at this"— he pointed to a large mass of their own flags well round behind one flank of the enemy’s position. "They must just be beginning to feel it now. They’re beginning to feel something nibbling at them behind, as it were.”

“Yes, yes, that’s all right enough, but this news— man— my regiment— that brigade— my own battalion!”

There was a chorus of sympathetic noises, varying from words to mere whistling.

“But your battalion may be the one which escaped.”

“Not a chance of it. You don’t know my battalion, or the old Colonel. He always was a perfect devil to be in the thick of things, and he will have been in the thick of this. Poor old chap!— poor fellows! And I here all the time. It’s awful!" He blew his nose hard several times. The flagger did nothing. As a matter of fact, he was waiting in sympathetic silence for the other to complete the message. He felt for him; indeed, he himself might be the next to hear that the unit in which he had in a military sense been born and bred had been destroyed.

“Well, man! Why the deuce don’t you move the flags?” said the late philosopher.

“I am waiting for more. So far there’s no reason for moving anything.”

“No reason! Good God! what more do you want? Two whole batteries! Three whole battalions! My batt—"

The thick, stuttering tones were cut short by a voice from the open French window. The General was standing there, calm and smiling. Over one arm he carried his coat; from the other hand hung some glistening object. Voices had been so raised that none of those in the room had heard him come up, and, astonished at his appearance and fascinated by this object, which appeared to be a fish, they remained open-mouthed, silent.

"What is it?” he repeated.

He was informed.

“Where? Just stand clear,” he continued, and from the spot pointed out his gaze swept slowly over the whole of the battle area until it finally rested on the mass of flags representing his great flanking movement. With his right hand, from which hung a two- pound trout, he pointed to it, and said quietly:

“Proportion, gentlemen! Proportion! No! It's not worth moving a flag.”

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13: Mr. Brisher's Treasure

H. G. Wells

1866-1946

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"YOU CAN'T be too careful who you marry," said Mr. Brisher, and pulled thoughtfully with a fat-wristed hand at the lank moustache that hides his want of chin.

"That's why—" I ventured.

"Yes," said Mr. Brisher, with a solemn light in his bleary, blue-grey eyes, moving his head expressively and breathing alcohol *intimately* at me. "There's lots as 'ave 'ad a try at me— many as I could name in this town— but none 'ave done it— none."

I surveyed the flushed countenance, the equatorial expansion, the masterly carelessness of his attire, and heaved a sigh to think that by reason of the unworthiness of women he must needs be the last of his race.

"I was a smart young chap when I was younger," said Mr. Brisher. "I 'ad my work cut out. But I was very careful— very. And I got through..."

He leant over the taproom table and thought visibly on the subject of my trustworthiness. I was relieved at last by his confidence.

"I was engaged once," he said at last, with a reminiscent eye on the shuv-a'penny board.

"So near as that?"

He looked at me. "So near as that. Fact is—" He looked about him, brought his face close to mine, lowered his voice, and fenced off an unsympathetic world with a grimy hand. "If she ain't dead or married to some one else or anything— I'm engaged still. Now." He confirmed this statement with nods and facial contortions. "*Still*," he said, ending the pantomime, and broke into a reckless smile at my surprise. "*Me*!"

"Run away," he explained further, with coruscating eyebrows. "Come 'ome.

"That ain't all.

"You'd 'ardly believe it," he said, "but I found a treasure. Found a regular treasure."

I fancied this was irony, and did not, perhaps, greet it with proper surprise. "Yes," he said, "I found a treasure. And come 'ome. I tell you I could surprise you with things that has happened to me." And for some time he was content to repeat that he had found a treasure— and left it.

I made no vulgar clamour for a story, but I became attentive to Mr. Brisher's bodily needs, and presently I led him back to the deserted lady.

"She was a nice girl," he said— a little sadly, I thought. "*And* respectable."

He raised his eyebrows and tightened his mouth to express extreme respectability— beyond the likes of us elderly men.

"It was a long way from 'ere. Essex, in fact. Near Colchester. It was when I was up in London— in the buildin' trade. I was a smart young chap then, I can tell you. Slim. 'Ad best clo'es 's good as anybody. 'At— *silk* 'at, mind you." Mr. Brisher's hand shot above his head towards the infinite to indicate it silk hat of the highest. "Umbrella— nice umbrella with a 'orn 'andle. Savin's. Very careful I was...."

He was pensive for a little while, thinking, as we must all come to think sooner or later, of the vanished brightness of youth. But he refrained, as one may do in taprooms, from the obvious moral.

"I got to know 'er through a chap what was engaged to 'er sister. She was stopping in London for a bit with an aunt that 'ad a 'am an' beef shop. This aunt was very particular— they was all very particular people, all 'er people was— and wouldn't let 'er sister go out with this feller except 'er other sister, *my* girl that is, went with them. So 'e brought me into it, sort of to ease the crowding. We used to go walks in Battersea Park of a Sunday afternoon. Me in my topper, and 'im in 'is; and the girl's— well— stylish. There wasn't many in Battersea Park 'ad the larf of us. She wasn't what you'd call pretty, but a nicer girl I never met. *I* liked 'er from the start, and, well— though I say it who shouldn't— she liked me. You know 'ow it is, I dessay?"

I pretended I did.

"And when this chap married 'er sister— 'im and me was great friends— what must 'e do but arst me down to Colchester, close by where She lived. Naturally I was introjuced to 'er people, and well, very soon, her and me was engaged."

He repeated "engaged."

"She lived at 'ome with 'er father and mother, quite the lady, in a very nice little 'ouse with a garden— and remarkable respectable people they was. Rich you might call 'em a'most. They owned their own 'ouse— got it out of the Building Society, and cheap because the chap who had it before was a burglar and in prison— and they 'ad a bit of free'old land, and some cottages and money 'nvested— all nice and tight: they was what you'd call snug and warm. I tell you, I was On. Furniture too. Why! They 'ad a pianner. Jane— 'er name was Jane— used to play it Sundays, and very nice she played too. There wasn't 'ardly a 'im toon in the book she *couldn't* play...

"Many's the evenin' we've met and sung 'ims there, me and 'er and the family.

"'Er father was quite a leadin' man in chapel. You should ha' seen him Sundays, interruptin' the minister and givin' out 'ims. He had gold spectacles, I remember, and used to look over 'em at you while he sang hearty— he was

always great on singing 'earty to the Lord— and when *he* got out o' toon 'arf the people went after 'im— always. 'E was that sort of man. And to walk be'ind 'im in 'is nice black clo'es— 'is 'at was a brimmer— made one regular proud to be engaged to such a father-in-law. And when the summer came I went down there and stopped a fortnight.

"Now, you know there was a sort of Itch," said Mr. Brisher. "We wanted to marry, me and Jane did, and get things settled. But 'E said I 'ad to get a proper position first. Consequently there was a Itch. Consequently, when I went down there, I was anxious to show that I was a good useful sort of chap like. Show I could do pretty nearly everything like. See?"

I made a sympathetic noise.

"And down at the bottom of their garden was a bit of wild part like. So I says to 'im, 'Why don't you 'ave a rockery 'ere?' I says. 'It 'ud look nice.'

"'Too much expense,' he says.

"'Not a penny,' says I. 'I'm a dab at rockeries. Lemme make you one.' You see, I'd 'elped my brother make a rockery in the beer garden be'ind 'is tap, so I knew 'ow to do it to rights. 'Lemme make you one,' I says. 'It's 'olidays, but I'm that sort of chap, I 'ate doing nothing,' I says. 'I'll make you one to rights.' And the long and the short of it was, he said I might.

"And that's 'ow I come on the treasure."

"What treasure?" I asked.

"Why!" said Mr. Brisher, "the treasure I'm telling you about, what's the reason why I never married."

"What!— a treasure— dug up?"

"Yes— buried wealth— treasure trove. Come out of the ground. What I kept on saying— regular treasure...." He looked at me with unusual disrespect.

"It wasn't more than a foot deep, not the top of it," he said. "I'd 'ardly got thirsty like, before I come on the corner."

"Go on," I said. "I didn't understand."

"Why! Directly I 'it the box I knew it was treasure. A sort of instinct told me. Something seemed to shout inside of me— 'Now's your chance— lie low.' It's lucky I knew the laws of treasure trove or I'd 'ave been shoutin' there and then. I daresay you know—"

"Crown bags it," I said, "all but one per cent. Go on. It's a shame. What did you do?"

"Uncovered the top of the box. There wasn't anybody in the garden or about like. Jane was 'elping 'er mother do the 'ouse. I *was* excited— I tell you. I tried the lock and then gave a whack at the hinges. Open it came. Silver coins— full! Shining. It made me tremble to see 'em. And jest then— I'm blessed if the dustman didn't come round the back of the 'ouse. It pretty nearly gave me 'eart disease to think what a fool I was to 'ave that money showing. And directly after

I 'eard the chap next door— 'e was 'olidaying, too— I 'eard him watering 'is beans. If only 'e'd looked over the fence!"

"What did you do?"

"Kicked the lid on again and covered it up like a shot, and went on digging about a yard away from it— like mad. And my face, so to speak, was laughing on its own account till I had it hid. I tell you I was regular scared like at my luck. I jest thought that it 'ad to be kep' close and that was all. 'Treasure,' I kep' whisperin' to myself, 'Treasure' and ''undreds of pounds, 'undreds, 'undreds of pounds.' Whispering to myself like, and digging like blazes. It seemed to me the box was regular sticking out and showing, like your legs do under the sheets in bed, and I went and put all the earth I'd got out of my 'ole for the rockery slap on top of it. I *was* in a sweat. And in the midst of it all out toddles 'er father. He didn't say anything to me, jest stood behind me and stared, but Jane tole me afterwards when he went indoors, 'e says, 'That there jackanapes of yours, Jane'— he always called me a jackanapes some'ow— 'knows 'ow to put 'is back into it after all.' Seemed quite impressed by it, 'e did."

"How long was the box?" I asked, suddenly.

"'Ow long?" said Mr. Brisher.

"Yes— in length?"

"Oh! 'bout so-by-so." Mr. Brisher indicated a moderate-sized trunk.

"*Full*?" said I.

"Full up of silver coins— 'arf-crowns, I believe."

"Why!" I cried, "that would mean— hundreds of pounds."

"Thousands," said Mr. Brisher, in a sort of sad calm. "I calc'lated it out."

"But how did they get there?"

"All I know is what I found. What I thought at the time was this. The chap who'd owned the 'ouse before 'er father 'd been a regular slap-up burglar. What you'd call a 'igh-class criminal. Used to drive 'is trap— like Peace did." Mr. Brisher meditated on the difficulties of narration and embarked on a complicated parenthesis. "I don't know if I told you it'd been a burglar's 'ouse before it was my girl's father's, and I knew 'e'd robbed a mail train once, I did know that. It seemed to me—"

"That's very likely," I said. "But what did you do?"

"Sweated," said Mr. Brisher. "Regular run orf me. All that morning," said Mr. Brisher, "I was at it, pretending to make that rockery and wondering what I should do. I'd 'ave told 'er father p'r'aps, only I was doubtful of 'is honesty— I was afraid he might rob me of it like, and give it up to the authorities— and besides, considering I was marrying into the family, I thought it would be nicer like if it came through me. Put me on a better footing, so to speak. Well, I 'ad three days before me left of my 'olidays, so there wasn't no hurry, so I covered it

up and went on digging, and tried to puzzle out 'ow I was to make sure of it. Only I couldn't.

"I thought," said Mr. Brisher, "*and* I thought. Once I got regular doubtful whether I'd seen it or not, and went down to it and 'ad it uncovered again, just as her ma came out to 'ang up a bit of washin' she'd done. Jumps again! Afterwards I was just thinking I'd 'ave another go at it, when Jane comes to tell me dinner was ready. 'You'll want it,' she said, 'seeing all the 'ole you've dug.'

"I was in a regular daze all dinner, wondering whether that chap next door wasn't over the fence and filling 'is pockets. But in the afternoon I got easier in my mind— it seemed to me it must 'ave been there so long it was pretty sure to stop a bit longer— and I tried to get up a bit of a discussion to dror out the old man and see what 'E thought of treasure trove."

Mr. Brisher paused, and affected amusement at the memory.

"The old man was a scorcher," he said; "a regular scorcher."

"What!" said I; "did he—?"

"It was like this," explained Mr. Brisher, laying a friendly hand on my arm and breathing into my face to calm me. "Just to dror 'im out, I told a story of a chap I said I knew— pretendin', you know— who'd found a sovring in a novercoat 'e'd borrowed. I said 'e stuck to it, but I said I wasn't sure whether that was right or not. And then the old man began. Lor'! 'e *did* let me 'ave it!" Mr. Brisher affected an insincere amusement. "'E was, well— what you might call a rare 'and at Snacks. Said that was the sort of friend 'e'd naturally expect me to 'ave. Said 'e'd naturally expect that from the friend of a out-of-work loafer who took up with daughters who didn't belong to 'im. There! I couldn't tell you '*arf* 'e said. 'E went on most outrageous. I stood up to 'im about it, just to dror 'im out. 'Wouldn't you stick to a 'arf-sov', not if you found it in the street?' I says. 'Certainly not,' 'e says; 'certainly I wouldn't.' 'What! not if you found it as a sort of treasure?' 'Young man,' 'e says, 'there's 'i'er 'thority than mine— Render unto Caesar'— what is it? Yes. Well, he fetched up that. A rare 'and at 'itting you over the 'ed with the Bible, was the old man. And so he went on. 'E got to such Snacks about me at last I couldn't stand it. I'd promised Jane not to answer 'im back, but it got a bit *too* thick. I— I give it 'im..."

Mr. Brisher, by means of enigmatical facework, tried to make me think he had had the best of that argument, but I knew better.

"I went out in a 'uff at last. But not before I was pretty sure I 'ad to lift that treasure by myself. The only thing that kep' me up was thinking 'ow I'd take it out of 'im when I 'ad the cash."

There was a lengthy pause.

"Now, you'd 'ardly believe it, but all them three days I never 'ad a chance at the blessed treasure, never got out not even a 'arf-crown. There was always a Somethink— always.

"'Stonishing thing it isn't thought of more," said Mr. Brisher. "Finding treasure's no great shakes. It's gettin' it. I don't suppose I slep' a wink any of those nights, thinking where I was to take it, what I was to do with it, 'ow I was to explain it. It made me regular ill. And days I was that dull, it made Jane regular 'uffy. 'You ain't the same chap you was in London,' she says, several times. I tried to lay it on 'er father and 'is Snacks, but bless you, she knew better. What must she 'ave but that I'd got another girl on my mind! Said I wasn't True. Well, we had a bit of a row. But I was that set on the Treasure, I didn't seem to mind a bit Anything she said.

"Well, at last I got a sort of plan. I was always a bit good at planning, though carrying out isn't so much in my line. I thought it all out and settled on a plan. First, I was going to take all my pockets full of these 'ere 'arf-crowns— see?— and afterwards as I shall tell.

"Well, I got to that state I couldn't think of getting at the Treasure again in the daytime, so I waited until the night before I had to go, and then, when everything was still, up I gets and slips down to the back door, meaning to get my pockets full. What must I do in the scullery but fall over a pail! Up gets 'er father with a gun— 'e was a light sleeper was 'er father, and very suspicious and there was me: 'ad to explain I'd come down to the pump for a drink because my water-bottle was bad. 'E didn't let me off a Snack or two over that bit, you lay a bob."

"And you mean to say—" I began.

"Wait a bit," said Mr. Brisher. "I say, I'd made my plan. That put the kybosh on one bit, but it didn't 'urt the general scheme not a bit. I went and I finished that rockery next day, as though there wasn't a Snack in the world; cemented over the stones, I did, dabbed it green and everythink. I put a dab of green just to show where the box was. They all came and looked at it, and sai 'ow nice it was— even 'e was a bit softer like to see it, and all he said was, 'It's a pity you can't always work like that, then you might get something definite to do,' he says.

"'Yes,' I says— I couldn't 'elp it— 'I put a lot in that rockery,' I says, like that. See? 'I put a lot in that rockery'— meaning—"

"I see," said I— for Mr. Brisher is apt to overelaborate his jokes.

"'*E* didn't," said Mr. Brisher. "Not then, anyhow.

"Ar'ever— after all that was over, off I set for London.... Orf I set for London."

Pause.

"On'y I wasn't going to no London," said Mr. Brisher, with sudden animation, and thrusting his face into mine. "No fear! What do *you* think?

"I didn't go no further than Colchester— not a yard.

"I'd left the spade just where I could find it. I'd got everything planned and right. I 'ired a little trap in Colchester, and pretended I wanted to go to Ipswich and stop the night, and come back next day, and the chap I 'ired it from made me leave two sovrings on it right away, and off I set.

"I didn't go to no Ipswich neither.

"Midnight the 'orse and trap was 'itched by the little road that ran by the cottage where 'e lived— not sixty yards off, it wasn't— and I was at it like a good 'un. It was jest the night for such games— overcast— but a trifle too 'ot, and all round the sky there was summer lightning and presently a thunderstorm. Down it came. First big drops in a sort of fizzle, then 'ail. I kep'on. I whacked at it— I didn't dream the old man would 'ear. I didn't even trouble to go quiet with the spade, and the thunder and lightning and 'ail seemed to excite me like. I shouldn't wonder if I was singing. I got so 'ard at it I clean forgot the thunder and the 'orse and trap. I precious soon got the box showing, and started to lift it...."

"Heavy?" I said.

"I couldn't no more lift it than fly. I *was* sick. I'd never thought of that I got regular wild— I tell you, I cursed. I got sort of outrageous. I didn't think of dividing it like for the minute, and even then I couldn't 'ave took money about loose in a trap. I hoisted one end sort of wild like, and over the whole show went with a tremenjous noise. Perfeck smash of silver. And then right on the heels of that, Flash! Lightning like the day! and there was the back door open and the old man coming down the garden with 'is blooming old gun. He wasn't not a 'undred yards away!

"I tell you I was that upset— I didn't think what I was doing. I never stopped-not even to fill my pockets. I went over the fence like a shot, and ran like one o'clock for the trap, cussing and swearing as I went. I *was* in a state....

"And will you believe me, when I got to the place where I'd left the 'orse and trap, they'd gone. Orf! When I saw that I 'adn't a cuss left for it. I jest danced on the grass, and when I'd danced enough I started off to London.... I was done."

Mr. Brisher was pensive for an interval. "I was done," he repeated, very bitterly.

"Well?" I said.

"That's all," said Mr. Brisher.

"You didn't go back?"

"No fear. I'd 'ad enough of *that* blooming treasure, any'ow for a bit. Besides, I didn't know what was done to chaps who tried to collar a treasure trove. I started off for London there and then...."

"And you never went back?"

"Never."

"But about Jane? Did you write?"

"Three times, fishing like. And no answer. We'd parted in a bit of a 'uff on account of 'er being jealous. So that I couldn't make out for certain what it meant.

"I didn't know what to do. I didn't even know whether the old man knew it was me. I sort of kep' an eye open on papers to see when he'd give up that treasure to the Crown, as I hadn't a doubt 'e would, considering 'ow respectable he'd always been."

"And did he?"

Mr. Brisher pursed his mouth and moved his head slowly from side to side. "Not 'IM," he said.

"Jane was a nice girl," he said, "a thorough nice girl mind you, if jealous, and there's no knowing I mightn't 'ave gone back to 'er after a bit. I thought if he didn't give up the treasure I might 'ave a sort of 'old on 'im.... Well, one day I looks as usual under Colchester— and there I saw 'is name. What for, d'yer think?"

I could not guess.

Mr. Brisher's voice sank to a whisper, and once more he spoke behind his hand. His manner was suddenly suffused with a positive joy. "Issuing counterfeit coins," he said. "Counterfeit coins!"

"You don't mean to say—?"

"Yes—It. Bad. Quite a long case they made of it. But they got 'im, though he dodged tremenjous. Traced 'is 'aving passed, oh!— nearly a dozen bad 'arf-crowns."

"And you didn't—?"

"No fear. And it didn't do '*im* much good to say it was treasure trove."

———————

14: Misleading Lady

Mark Hellinger

1903-1947

Sunday Times (Perth) 6 Jun 1943

ARTHUR— real name deliberately changed— is a motion picture actor. He's not a star, but you know him well as a popular leading player.

Our friend had been married eight years. His wife, a non-professional, was well liked around Hollywood— and when the ceremony took place, even the gossip columnists approved.

And that's exactly what Arthur and his wife enjoyed— until Arthur began to stray....

NOW don't get me wrong. Arthur wasn't the type who set out to break all Hollywood straying records. That is to say, he didn't have more than one new love every two years or so.

The most pleasing thing that Arthur did was to return to his wife after each romance had gone the way of all flesh. And it was a genuinely beautiful return, too.

He would meet his wife in their huge living-room, and she would look at him reproachfully. Arthur would always speak first.

"Marjorie," he would cry, "I have been a fool. I'm not fit to kiss the ground you walk on. I'm weak. Marjorie. Just a poor, weak fool.

"I'm begging you to forgive me. On my knees, I beg you. Because it's you I love, dearest. You, and nobody else in the whole, wide world."

AND, believe it or not, It worked. His plea may sound very phoney to you, but it must have done something to Marjorie: For all in all, his wife forgave Arthur four times during the eight years they were married. She always agreed to forget the past and think only of the future.

On the last occasion, however, the lady grew just a trifle weary. She was evidently growing tired of her husband's explanations.

"Arthur," she said, "you are doing this to me for the last time. And I mean every word I am saying. I'm tired of being pointed out as a sap by other women. I'm sick of being laughed at by people who think I'm crazy to go on living with you.

"You may not believe it, Arthur, but there's a limit to the things that even I can stand, I'm giving you your last chance. You will either change your ways or we're through."

ARTHUR was the last word in pictures of downcast husbands. He gave a performance better than anything he has ever done on the screen, before or since.

"Dearest," he replied, "I give you my sacred word of honor that, from this moment on, I am through with other women. If I ever do another wrong thing I want you to divorce me. And with that as a possible punishment I cannot go wrong, I'm going to be decent, Marjorie. Because I honestly do love you."

Strangely enough, on this occasion, Arthur actually meant every word he said. And to make the strangeness a little more complete, he really kept his word. He ran away from other women.

Well, let's not go too far. Let's say he walked away.

SOME six months later, Arthur and his wife were sitting, in the main dining-room of a Hollywood Hotel. It had been six months of happiness for both of them. In fact, Arthur was so attentive that no one would ever dream that Marjorie was his wife.

As Arthur sat toying with his menu, he suddenly smiled. For walking through the doors were two San Diego aircraft men whom he knew intimately. And with them, although both were married, were two girls whom Arthur had never seen before.

Arthur didn't rise and greet his friends. There was a slight gesture of recognition, but no more. Arthur knew the racket. He had been through it plenty of times himself.

The evening moved along. The two aircraft officials were dining smoothly with their attractive companions. Everything seemed to be going nicely— but it was only the calm before the explosion. Into the room stepped the wife of one of the aircraft men. And on her face was the look that would chill the blood of a Boris Karloff.

Arthur leaped to his feet to warn the unsuspecting husband. As he did so the husband saw her. He jumped from his chair, dug his hand in his pocket, and handed Arthur a slip of paper.

"Keep it for me, Arthur," he breathed. "It's the name and address of the dame I'm with. Here comes my wife and there's gonna be a scene. The girls will probably blow and I don't want to lose track of mine. Keep it for me. Call you tomorrow. Thanks loads. Here she is. Oh, Lord!"

The scene wasn't very much after all. The two girls left. The wife sat down with, the two air-craft men and talked vigorously. Finally the three left together— and the erring husband never glanced in the direction at Arthur's table.

Not a real blow had been struck. A promising situation had come to a dull ending. Like so many of Arthur's pictures...

THE following evening, when Arthur returned home from the studio, his wife didn't waste any time at all.

"I found it, Arthur," she said quietly, "and you know what it means. I'm suing you for divorce immediately."

Arthur attempted to stammer his innocence.

"Wait, honey," he cried. "That slip of paper was handed to me by my friend last night. Don't you remember—"

Her interruption was a laugh. And what a nasty laugh!

"I remember everything," she said "And just to refresh your memory a little, there's a note on this slip of paper in addition to the name and address. "I think the world of you, sweetie pie," it says. "Don't forget to call" She glared at him. "Sweetie pie, eh?

"I told you six months ago, Arthur, that your next offence would be your last. I meant what I said. And don't tell me you'll call your friend and have him prove you held the note for him. With you cheats one is as bad as the next.

"We're through, Arthur."

TODAY Arthur is broken-hearted. His wife divorced him in Reno. He swears fervently that he'll never help another pal.

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15: Val

May Wynne

1875-1949

Sunday Times (Perth) 31 Jan 1932

Popular English author of many novels and short stories

VAL EMERTON was riding home alone. She had said goodbye to Bobby Anstruther at the cross-roads. It had not been a very easy task. On Sunday her banns were going to be read for the first time. She was marrying Max Frandell, and £10,000 a year.

In the twilight Val's face looked pale, but lips a trifle vicious— picturing their owner's mood.

What a glorious gallop she and Bob had had over the moors. She had hated that halt at the cross-roads. But it had to be gone through with. Bobby's income was £500 a year, and he was off to try his luck at farming and horse breeding in Canada. She had just been wishing him the best of everything— but she had faltered, ashamed of the conventional words.

Bobby had so evidently been putting furious restraint on himself. He had suffered badly in the ordeal, and it was her fault— entirely hers. She was a selfish little beast! Val decided that, and sent Babette forward by a dig with the spur. She hated using the spur— and had not meant to drive it in so sharply. It hurt— her.

Then, back crept unwilling thoughts to Bob. One can't say goodbye to the man one has loved, man and boy, for eight years, without regret. Val's mood was bitter, defiant and suffering. Bob had looked so splendid, his handsome head flung back; his hazel eyes meeting her own in a gaze which stabbed her. He was thinking he hid his secret— and he had failed.

"I'm afraid I'll be on the briny before your wedding, Val," he had said, "but you know I'm wishing you luck— the very best of luck. After all, if you're happy, it doesn't matter. "

But she had know it did matter to him— tremendously. She had known it always would matter, and had ridden away in a reckless mood, which she realised might end in mad folly. For— she did not love Max Frandell, though she meant to marry him in three weeks' time. She was trying to persuade herself that she was not to blame. Her mater and the girls had pointed out the way of wisdom so convincingly.

To begin with, her tastes were expensive. The tastes of the poor generally are so. It is only your multi-millionaire who thoroughly enjoys the simple life, and grows anxious about waste in smallest detail.

Val had entirely agreed with Muriel, her eldest sister, that plenty of money for dress, hunting, tennis, motoring, and the like was essential to happy married life. She admitted that she adored spending money; travelling in comfort, dainty meals, whilst she thought to be mistress of a big house was the right her pretty face claimed, and so on, till Max Frandell appeared in the light of the perfect lover.

She had accepted him just after a stormy scene with the mater over an unpaid bill, and had become quite a family heroine in consequence. She had enjoyed the experience — and ever since had tried in quite a wonderful way to study and review her good luck. She ought to have had no misgivings, for all her friends told the same story! She was the luckiest girl in creation. She almost did believe it when Max gave her Babette— the perfect horse. If only he could have stopped at that, and not wanted to give her— himself! People said he was the ideal lover— but then tastes do differ so tremendously. He was handsome, generous, gifted— and she knew his world. That was the "character" with which she would, have labelled him. Val read and tried to believe. She herself was a beauty. At 18 she was the belle of the country and, oddly enough, did not trouble overmuch about the fact. Admiration was not the "breath of her nostrils," though she was too true a woman not to enjoy the sense of power. But, on the whole, she would rather have a man as a fellow sport than a worshipping slave. She was a keen, all-round sport, herself, and fearless as rider, swimmer and shot.

It all looked smooth, since Frandell was undoubtedly in love, but— Val did not feel smooth about it at all. She had not known how much she loved Bobby till it came to hurting him badly.

And the thought of his courage in congratulating her— his generosity in never uttering one word of reproach shamed her. It may have been tears blinding her eyes— it may have been that thoughts crowding in on her mind made her slacken attention— but a second later she was reining Babette back on her haunches as a gate clicked and a baby girl of two or three came toddling out after a gaily-painted ball. It was a terrible moment, for the horse swerved, its front hoof swinging within a few inches of the child's head before the animal went crashing back into the ditch. A woman had run out, and caught up the sobbing baby, whilst Val, managing to dismount in spite of the pain of a damaged wrist, dragged the frightened horse back on to the road.

It only took seconds to enact, and a lad of some seventeen years in gaiters and breeches came out from a woodyard and took Babette's bridle.

With strained muscles and aching wrist, Val stood, as near to fainting as ever she had been in her life, then rallied and slowly made her way into the cottage. A Mrs. Dare— widow of Lord Denward's huntsman— lived there; she knew her by sight, and was glad when the woman— without the child— came to the door,

helping her in, offering her milk, thanking her for her brave act. Poor soul! she was terribly agitated, her limbs trembled, there were tears in her eyes.

"Was it your child?" asked Val, but Mrs. Dare shook her head.

"I'll fetch the mother in," she replied. "She'll want to thank you."

Val rested back; she was annoyed to find she, herself, was unnerved. Till now she had believed herself to be superior to such weakness. She tried to find the funny side of the situation, her creed being that the funny side was always discoverable. But she failed to find it now. The "parlor" with masses of cheap china, its needlework atrocities, its ancient books and priceless bed warmer might have found food for satire some other time, but now the scene at the cross-roads, blending with the horror of nearly killing that pretty baby left Val— wretched.

The door opened and a young woman came in. She was very young— and quite obviously the mother of the child. Val thought she had never seen a more vivid type of loveliness— but the dark blue of the mother's eyes told of storm and tragedy, there was trembling and twitching of the pretty lips suggesting tempest and the breaking of some frozen depths.

"I can only thank you, madam," she said. "I love my child— my little Violet. I love her. I think if you had killed her I'd have killed you! But you are good. I see that. You are good and kind. I— thank you. "

How oddly she worded it! The speech seemed dragged from her— and yet hinted of other words being forced back. There were strange lights in those pretty eyes betraying changing moods.

Val smiled. She had a pleasant smile, kindly and frank.

"I'm sorry I can't shake hands," she replied. " I've hurt my wrist. I just can't tell you how thankful I am I got my horse into the ditch in time. I think I understand what you say about wanting to kill me if the kiddie had— well, if anything had happened. "

The girl drew a deep breath.

"No madam, " she said, " you do not understand those wicked words— but you shall do. That is all I can do. If I may I'll come up to The Warren this evening— to thank you. I can't do it now." She left the room hurriedly, hugging the child close.

Val rose. The gaitered lad had hailed Farmer Wiggins as he drove past, and she could get a lift home. The lad would be bringing Babette. Of course, they all knew Miss Emerton, of The Warren. She was glad to go, thanking Mrs. Dare, and lingering to remark on the beauty of the girl, asking who she was. The huntsman's widow shook her head.

"Annette was my girl's friend," said she. "Elsie's married and gone to Canada. I think Annette will be going out to her. Good-day, miss— and we're glad you're better."

It was rather a curt farewell— a shutting-the-door-in-one's-face grat-tude! Val's lips twitched in a smile as she sat in the farmer's cart, being driven home at a jog-trot.

Of course, on arrival she met with reproaches! Her mother demanded the tale and remarked that she might have been killed— criticising the folly of hunting— and of impetuous action. Val, whose head ached badly, found herself tempted to ask if her duty had been to let the curly-wigged baby take her chance of a broken back. She was glad to go upstairs and rest. If it had not been for the coming of Violet's mother, and the fact that Max would be dining and making final arrange-ments for the honeymoon she would have gone to bed.

As it was she dressed, putting on, for some cranky reason. Bob's favorite frock of periwinkle blue charmeuse. She was pale— but it suited her... that at least gave her satisfaction.

"Don't say anything to Max about the accident," she pleaded. "He's not keen on hunting and it might end in a row. I'm a bit edgy. After all, it was Max who gave me Babette."

Her people took the hint, knowing Val and her views as to the necessity of hunting in a life scheme.

Frandell arrived, sleek, handsome, perfectly groomed— an expression Val hated. He brought diamonds for his fiancee, and a honeymoon programme that enthralled her. After all, life was worth living, and she must have sense enough to blot out the memory of cross-roads. It was Hunter the parlor maid, who came into the garden-room where they were seated so busily dis-cussing a route to Egypt.

"I'm sorry to interrupt, miss," said Hunter, who had grown quite respectful to Val since her engagement to a man who understood the value of "tipping," "but a young woman wishes to see you particular. She's out in the hall. Shall I ask her in ? "

Frandell rose— he always did the right thing.

"I'll finish my cigar on the terrace, Val," he said. "Perhaps you will come out to me there. If the young woman encroaches I shall come and fetch you."

He stooped— since Hunter had left the room— to kiss the fair curls cluster-ing in the nape of her neck.

"My darling," he whispered, "come out to me, and we will dream of the golden moon to be."

Val did not reply... but sat wondering whether she had been born without sentiment, since somehow that speech had jarred just as had the kiss. And once again she sensed the mighty grip of Bobbie's two hands.

It was the mother of Violet who came quietly in and closed the door. How white she looked— dead white— but it suited her vivid coloring. Val wondered

whether she had been very long at Matrick Lodge, and what her history was, since obviously she had one.

"You ought not to have troubled to come," she said. "You look tired."

The girl did not smile.

"I had to come," she said. "I owe it to you. I— I will tell you exactly why I have come. Please will you not speak till I have finished? To begin with, I want you to know I have come to confess a wrong I intended against you. I pictured you hard, calculating, caring only for pleasure and for wealth. I heard you were marrying for money, though you love a poor man. You'll be surprised to think a girl like I am— a stranger— should have heard your secrets discussed. But people talk— and think. They just say what they think— sometimes it's right, sometimes it's wrong. I hated you before I saw you."

"But why?" asked Val. "I think you are mistaking me for someone else—"

The girl shook her head.

"You are the lady who is to marry Max Frandell," she said. " At least, that's what you believe. But you would never have been his wife."

" I don't understand, " said Val, white, wondering. "Mr. Frandell and I are certainly—"

The other made a gesture.

"You would never have been his wife, " she repeated, "because he married me nearly four years ago. "

Val felt as if someone had hit her a terrible blow; she experienced a stunned sensation which silenced her. She sat looking at the girl who stood so pale and tense just opposite.

There was something so quiet, so repressed about that other— a concentrated force of feeling which had been kept under control too long for expression. Neither spoke for a time. Then Val said two words:

"Married you."

A faint tremor convulsed the other's lips. But she replied:

"I have the papers. It is all quite straightforward. I was maid to Lady Ardfold at the time. We were in France. But the marriage was a legal one. I've seen lawyers. My Violet is Max Frandell's daughter. He has never seen her. He deserted me, and I was very ill for two years. Then I met Elsie Dare again, and she was good to me. I took a situation, not knowing where my husband was, till I saw his name— and yours— in the paper. I came here, and heard all about the engagement, and how it was money, they said, tempted you. I hated you for that, and I said in my wickedness, 'Let the wedding take place. Later on will be time enough to show the grand lady my marriage lines.' But Mrs. Dare calls it Providence, since she's a good living woman, and I told her the story tonight before I came to you. She says it was Providence sent you along the lane to-day. You spoke kindly and acted bravely. I couldn't let you make your life a hell after

I'd seen you. So I came. They tell me Max is here. If you wish you can call him in. He thinks he'll never see me again— that I don't understand my rights. He believes he paid me enough to send me out of his life for good."

Val did not reply. Her throat was dry, her pulses raced. She dared not think of what her danger had been. But, as she looked at the white face and burning eyes of the girl opposite, she shuddered. That girl hated the man who was her husband. Just as she must have come to hate a man who wrecked her life. But— she had escaped. The wonder of it thrilled her. She felt she must have finished instantly with this nightmare.

"Val," said a voice, and Frandell stepped back through the open casement.

Val did not move. She was only called to witness a scene she never forgot. She heard Frandell's oath, and the groan which accompanied the curse. Then again— silence.

The girl, who was Violet's mother spoke at last.

"This lady," she said, "saved our daughter's life. You ought to be thanking her, Max. I've done my— best."

Then a cry broke from her.

"How dared you!" she sobbed, "how dared you? And me your wife— me, your wife."

"Ridiculous," muttered the man. "You know that's a lie. Val, you must listen. I own—"

But Val had grown up to something more dignified than a care-free girl who had made some big mistakes— and learned her lesson in time. She saw his road clearly enough now— and there was only the one.

"Your wife, Mr. Frandell," she said, "has so great a claim on you that we cannot hope any longer for the pleasure of your society. I advise you to leave explanations to my mother for me to give. Good-night."

She turned— having no pity for him, though his face was livid and his rage barely controlled. She would never have spared him a pain or a stab— if he suffered torment she was glad.

The woman came to her— standing close.

"Are you satisfied?" she asked. "I have paid a debt."

Val caught her hands.

"With all my heart I thank— and pity you," she said, and Annette Frandell stepped out through the open casement followed by the man who was her husband. He dared not look towards the woman who dismissed him. When they had gone, Val came back to the centre of the room. She was thinking of the cross-roads.

"He will buy a special license to-morrow, and we will sail for Canada on the 14th," she whispered, and laughed a curious, deep-throated laugh which held joy.

It was so wonderful a thought too, that everything else became insignificant— even to the telling of the news to those who would rage in impotent wrath.

After all, the new honeymoon was easy to plan — a golden road set in silver and star-shine.

Was she growing sentimental?

"Do I owe it all to Babette?" she asked aloud. "If so, I shall not return the gift. He can have his diamonds.

And the child— the little child? How wonderful it is— Love and hate— but love won my victory. "

Then she sat down to write an invitation to the man who had said good-bye at the cross-roads.

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16: Whose Aunt?

G. A. Birmingham

James Owen Hannay, 1865-1950

Sunday Times (Perth) 15 Feb 1931

THOMAS HARDIMAN, the house surgeon, sat back in his shabby armchair with his legs stretched straight in front of him.

His white overall, the uniform of his active hours, hung on a peg behind the door. His tweed jacket and waistcoat— he was in his shirt sleeves— lay on a chair beside his writing table.

The evening was hot, stifling hot. Dr. Hardiman would, gladly have discarded more cothes if he dared. But he was by no means sure that his day's work was over. Indeed, if he had been asked to bet on the matter, he would have laid odds against his chance of even one quiet hour. A whole evening undisturbed was certainly too much to hope for.

There was a tap at the door. Dr. Hardiman, without stirring in his chair or moving his pipe from his mouth, grunted "Come in."

"An accident," said Nurse Spence, who was not officially entitled to be called "Nurse," being no more than a probationer. "Just brought in by the ambulance," she panted.

Being a new probationer, she was not yet used to accidents..

"Motor bike?" said Dr. Hardiman, with a note of bitterness in his voice. He had every reason to dislike those vehicles. They were responsible for a large part of the extra, strictly unnecessary work thrown on him.

"No," said Nurse Spence. "At least I don't know. It's an old woman. She was run over."

"Most likely by a motor bike," said Dr. Hardiman.

He owned one himself, but in his opinion he was the only man in England who ought to be trusted in the saddle of a motor cycle. Every other rider— experience led him to believe— was either an incompetent fool, a homicidal maniac, or a deliberate criminal.

But for once Dr. Hardiman was wrong. The old lady had been knocked down by a heavily laden waggon, drawn by two slow, though powerful, horses, driven by an elderly man who, as it turned out, was perfecty sober.

"Old women like that," said Dr. Hardiman, "ought not to be let out by themselves."

Next to motor cycles he regarded old women as the most fruitful cause of accidents. This time it seemed that his opinion was justified. Sarah Johnston, a gentle, well-meaning, short-sighted old lady, had tried to cross the street at a busy corner. Panic-stricken by the sight of an approaching car, she had rushed to and fro like a frightened hen, and had finally come up against the shaft of the

horse-drawn waggon. The result was a fractured skull, complete unconsciousness, a journey in an ambulance, and the ministrations of Dr. Hardiman.

"Not much to be done for her," he said, when he had done all he could. "Get her to bed. Accident Ward No. 2. If she recovers consciousness— but I don't think she will—"

Then the sister in attendance, with the help of the nervous probationer, took charge of the old lady, and Dr. Hardiman returned to his room in the hope of being able to finish the pipe he had been smoking. The hope was vain. He had not even laid aside his white overall when he was summoned again. Another old woman, with another fractured skull, had been brought in by another ambulance. This time a motor cycle had been responsible for the accident. The driver of a charabanc said so. The cyclist, riding far too fast, had rushed round a corner and headed for a charabanc full of tourists on their way home from a day's outing. The charabanc driver, desperately anxious to avoid a collision with the cycle, had struck a telegraph post. The cyclist escaped unscathed. The charabanc very little injured, had gone on its way leaving behind in the care of a policeman the old lady with a fractured skull, the only passenger who had suffered anything worse than a scratch.

Once more Dr. Hardiman did what he could, knowing quite well that neither he nor any one else could do any good. The sister in attendance, with the help of Probationer Spence, who was now very nervous and upset, put the old lady to bed in Accident Ward No. 2. Her name was Mary Thompson. This was discovered by the Sister who took charge of her, and duly written on a card above her bed.

During the night both old ladies died, and in the morning their bodies were removed to the mortuary. Dr. Hardiman, swamped by a new day's work, forgot all about Sarah Johnston and Mary Thompson. The Sister in charge of the ward, having ministered to them with cool efficiency to the last, saw them carried out of the region of her care without emotion. Even Probationer Spence, though a little shocked by two deaths in one night, became cheerful again after her morning sleep.

Other people interested themselves in the two old women. The coroner recommended two juries to bring in suitable verdicts of accidental death, and suggested to one of the two that something should be said about motor cycles. The police busted themselves with discovering the relatives of the two women. They succeeded without much trouble in discovering a nephew for Sarah Johnston, who was a native of Ebbersford and had some papers in her handbag which directed the police straight to her house. The nephew, Thomas Johnston, a working man with a wife and family, made no pretence of being overwhelmed with grief, but he readily promised to be responsible for the funeral when the

time came. As the only near relative of the dead woman he expected to inherit her small property, and felt that a decent funeral was due to an aunt who had left behind her some good household furniture and a comfortable sum in the Post Office Savings Bank.

It took longer to trace Mary Thompson, who had come from a distant village for a day's outing in Ebbersford, travelling by a charabanc, which picked up passengers along the countryside

in the morning and dropped them at their different villages on the way home. The driver of the charabanc remembered where Mary Thompson had joined his party, and after inquiry by the local constable, a nephew was found for her.

Henry Smith, a farm laborer, was strictly speaking no relation to old Miss Thompson, but he had married her niece and had been always in the habit of calling her "Auntie." No other relative was forthcoming, nor was any special effort, made to find one. Henry Smith was quite ready to arrange and pay for the funeral. It was understood in the village where she lived that old Mary Thompson was very well off, possessing not only household furni-ture but a number of savings certifi-cates in various stages of maturity. She had actually made a will in favor of Hilda, her niece, the wife of Henry Smith, and mother of four children.

When the coroner had finished his business, the two nephews were in-formed that they might bury their aunts. Thomas Johnston arrived first with a hearse, a mourning carriage and a handsome wreath. He came early, for, though he wanted to do the funeral properly, he was anxious to get it over before dinner-time. There seemed no sense in losing more than half a day's work over the business. The hall porter at the hospital asked Johnston whether he would like to see his aunt before the lid of the coffin was screwed down. Thomas Johnston refused the offer. The hearse and the mourning carriage had been a little late in starting. The purchase of a wreath had taken longer than he expected. He had little time to spare if he was to get home for dinner and back to work for the second half of the day. The coffin, adorned with a neat brass plate, bearing the name of Sarah Johnston and the date of her death, was carried out, put into the hearse and driven off to the municipal cemetery, where it was duly and properly buried.

An hour and a half later Henry Smith arrived with Hilda his wife and two eldest children. They had a motor hearse, the look of which filled Henry Smith with pride, a motor car, which was a source of undissembled delight to the two children, and a wreath which Mrs. Smith carried. She alone of the party was a little red-eyed, and though her pride in the motor hearse was as great as her husband's, she was undoubtedly sorry for the loss of her aunt.

The hall porter handed to Smith the coroner's order for burial, as he had handed a similar document to John-ston earlier in the day. Then he asked, as he had asked before whether the mourners would like to see the body before the coffin lid was screwed down. The Smiths, who were In no hurry, said they would. The two children were put into the motor car and told to wait there. The Smiths, husband and wife, followed the porter into the mortuary. The coffin, decently covered with a sheet, stood on trestles at the far end of the room. The porter lifted the sheet and then turned his back on what might be an affecting scene.

He was startled, though not much startled, by a little shriek from Mrs. Smith.

He was much more startled when Henry Smith tapped him on the shoulder and spoke.

"Here, I say," he said. "That's not my auntie."

"Yes it is," said the porter.

"I tell you it isn't," said Henry Smith.

Hilda Smith, who had begun to cry supported her husband.

"It's not Auntie Mary," she said. "It's not. It's not—"

"It's Mary Thompson," said the porter. "Whether she's your aunt or not I can't say."

"Mary Thompson's my auntie, right enough." said Henry Smith, "isn't she, Hilda?"

"She is," said Hilda, "and what's more she always was ever since I was a little girl."

"Do you think we don't know our own auntie?" said Henry Smith. "Seeing as how she's had her Sunday dinner with us ever since we were married it would be a queer thing if we didn't know her."

The porter was a little shaken by the vigorous agreement of the two Smiths; but he felt that he had the authority of the hospital behind him, and that, if it came to a tussle, is the authority of the whole medical pro-fession. Doctors are less tolerant of contradiction than any other body of men, and our hospitals are probably the most autocratic corporations in England to-day. It is doubtful whether even a government department, the Commissioners of Charitable Bequest,! for instance, could make headway against a Royal United Hospital.

"The sooner you take your aunt out of this and bury her," said the porter, "the better I'll be pleased. I've more to do than to stand here talking to you all the morning, so get on with it and clear out of this.

But the porter, in asserting himself, had forgotten the traditional and hereditary obstinacy of the English farm laborer. Henry Smith was not a highly educated. He was a slow thinker but when he had once made up his mind about anything he was exceedingly difficult to move.

"We'll have our own auntie," he said "or we'll not have an auntie at all."

"What's the use of saying that she's not your aunt when she is," said the porter. "If you won't believe me maybe you'll believe your own eyes"

"My own eyes is what I am believing." said Henry Smith.

Besides the coffin, standing on it's edge, was the lid. The porter turned it over and displayed a brass plate with an inscription cut on it: ''Mary Thompson, died June 8th, 193—."

"Now," said the porter, "look at that."

Henry Smith looked at it. The let-tering was clear. There was no pos-sibility of mistaking the meaning of the words. They brought, not conviction, but a certain bewildered uncertainty to Henry Smith. The printed word has this effect on our minds. The word graven on brass is more impres-sive even than the word in print Henry Smith turned to his wife.

"What about it, Hilda?" he cried.

Hilda, because she was crying and dabbing her eyes with her handkerchief, did not see the inscription very distinctly and was, therefore, less impressed than her husband.

"It's not Auntie Mary," she sobbed "And it's not like Auntie Mary. My auntie," she said, turning to the porter, "was as big again as that woman."

His wife's confidence restored Henry Smith's.

"You may put what you like on the coffin lid," he said, "but I'll not bury some other fellow's auntie. And what's more if you put my Auntie Mary's name on some other lady's coffin I'll have the law of you."

It happened that the hall porter had a daughter who had achieved the high position of stenographer in the office of the *Ebbersford Times*. He had heard her mention with respect, the law of libel. He did not know— nor probably does anyone else— whether it is libellous to put a wrong name on a coffin lid. It is quite possible that the owner of the name might recover damages. It is even possible that the relatives of the body which was given the wrong name might be able to take an action. The porter hesitated.

"I'll get the sister." he said, "that was in charge of the ward. She'll know."

The sister, when the porter reached her, was exceedingly busy. She was also ruffled in temper by the incompetence of one of her probationers, not Miss Spence. She was in no mood to listen calmly to the complaints of a farm laborer who, though given a aunt, was unreasonably dissatisfied.

"What do you want?" she said to Smith.

"I want my auntie."

"You've got her," said the sister "You can't expect us to give you two."

"I don't want two," said Smith "What I want Is my own."

"That," said the sister, pointing to the coffin, "is Mary Thompson, and Mary Thompson is your aunt"

She spoke as firmly as she could, but a horrible doubt was beginning to creep into her mind. The two women, aunts both of them, brought in the night before, had Iain in adjacent beds. She had seen them both and ministered to them. She had looked, though without special interest at the names over the beds. She was not sure that the woman before her in the Coffin was the one over whose bed the name "Mary Thompson" had been hung. It was possible that a mistake had been made when the bodies were removed from the ward to the mortuary. She sent for Miss Spence.

Miss Spence, the probationer, had been far more agitated on that night than the sister was, because was was new to the work. She had been greatly shocked by the two deaths which occurred within a few minutes of each other. So it happened that she was quite clear in her recollection that the woman in the coffin was Sarah Johnston and not Mary Thompson. She whispered her opinion to the sister.

"If you please, miss, will you get my auntie for me," said Henry Smith, speaking civilly, without a trace of the obstinacy with which he argued with the porter.

"I'll go and tell Dr. Hardiman what has happened," said the sister.

Dr. Hardiman took the matter in hand with his usual vigor and promp-titude.

"You say that the other man, Johnston, or whatever his name is, took away his aunt without looking at her. Allowed the coffin lld to be screwed down and so forth. Is that it?"

"So it appears," said the sister.

"Well, he's got to bring her back again," said Dr. Hardiman. "He can't bury someone else's aunt."

But like a good many other things which are impossible, this had been done. The messenger sent from the hospital found Thomas Johnston at dinner, eating with a good appetite, satisfied that he had done his duty by his aunt when he laid her in a grave in the municipal cemetery. He intended to go back to his work as soon as he had finished his dinner. It was with the utmost difficulty that he was persuaded to return to the hospital. He was in a very bad temper when he arrived there, and was shown into the waiting room. There, seated uncomfortably on chairs, were Henry Smith and his wife. Henry had returned to his mood of stupid obstinacy. John-ston glanced with contemptuous pity at her, and then stared at Henry Smith, wondering why the man looked so sulky.

Dr. Hardiman came in. "Mr. Johnston?" he said. Johnston nodded.

"I don't know what you want with me," he said, "but I can't stay long to oblige you. I have to get back to my work. I've lost half a day already, and I'm not going, to lose another half."

"I want you to come with me for a minute," said Dr. Hardiman.

He led Johnston into the mortuary, and showed him the coffin.

"Is that your aunt?" he asked.

Johnston stared at the dead woman in amazement.

"It's my aunt right enough," he said. "But whom did I bury?"

"The fact is," said Dr. Hardiman, "that an unfortunate mistake has occurred. Luckily we found it out in time, the matter can easily be adjusted. Will you be so good as to bring back the coffin you took away this morning, Mr. Johnston?"

"I cant do that," said Johnston. "I've buried it."

Then, at length, Dr. Hardiman realised the extreme seriousness of the situation. Nothing short of an order from the Home Secretary will make it possible to dig up a coffin once buried. Such an order could not be obtained without a certain amount of publicity, and such publicity would certainly injure the reputation of the hospital. But Dr. Hardiman was a man of energy and resource. He took Johnston by the arm and led him back to the waiting-room.

"There has been," he said, "a little mistake, most unfortunate, of course but I think not irremediable. Mr. Johnston," he said to Smith, "has accidentally buried your aunt. The obvious thing for you to do is to bury his."

Hilda Smith wailed loudly. Her hus-band's face was set in an expression of bewildered but dogged obstinacy.

"I'll not bury her," he said. "If she's his aunt, let him bury her himself."

"It's not to be expected of me," said Johnston, "that I'd have two funerals in one day. I couldn't afford it for one thing, and I'd lose a second half day's work for another."

"I'll bury my own auntie," said Smith, "but I'll not bury yours."

"I've buried one aunt," said Johnston, "and I'm hanged if I'll bury another."

"Come now, gentlemen," said Dr. Hardiman. "We'll never get anywhere by talking that way. I suppose your funeral was all right, Mr. Johnston, nicely conducted with proper respect and so forth?"

"It was as good a funeral as any one could want." said Johnston. "I couldn't have done better if it had been my own wife. I put a wreath of flowers on the grave myself."

"You hear that Mr. Smith," said Hardiman. "Your aunt has had a first rate funeral, as good as she could have got anywhere, probably better than you'd have given her yourself. You'll do your best for Mr. Johnston's aunt, I'm sure. If there's any difficulty about a wreath—"

"I have a wreath," said Smith, "but it's for my own auntie, not for his."

"That'll be all right." said Hardiman.

"The wreaths can easily be changed. You've no objection to changing wreaths, have you. Mr. Johnston?"

"None," said Johnston. "All I object to is being expected to pay for two funerals. Come now. Doctor, I put it to you. Is it fair?"

"I'm prepared to provide two extra wreaths myself," said Dr. Hardiman, "one for each of your aunts. Large wreaths, made of roses or any other flower you like."

"I'll not bury another man's auntie," said Henry Smith obstinately.

"If you don't," said Dr. Hardiman sharply, "you'll not have any aunt to bury at all. How will you like that?"

Henry Smith, a slow thinker, stared at the doctor in stupid amazement Hilda, quicker witted than her husband, saw at once how very awkward it would be to go home again without a coffin. The grave was dug. They had seen the clergyman before they left home. The clergyman was waiting for them, perhaps already habited in his surplice. The village people, their neighbors and friends, were at that moment beginning to gather in the churchyard, out of respect for an old lady whom they had all known. The bell would very soon begin to toll, and the boy who tolled it would have to be paid. To go back and announce that there was no funeral would cause a scandal and start a flow of gossip, which the Smiths might never be able to check. All these possibilities float-ed through Hilda's mind.

She took her husband by the arm and talked to him In a low voice, very earnestly, for some time. Only the last words reached Dr. Hardiman's ears.

"And the motor hearse, and the motor car," she said. "Everybody about the village was talking about the motor hearse."

Henry Smith was a good and faithful husband, accustomed to being guided by his wife in practical matters, having great respect for her wisdom.

"If the doctor will stick to his offer of a wreath—" he began.

"I'll order it at once," said Dr. Hardiman. "Sister, please telephone to the nearest florist's and order two large wreaths to be sent down here at once."

"He can have them both," said Johnston generously, "for I've no time to be running round cemeteries putting wreaths on the graves of women I know nothing about. What I want is to get back to my work before I lose another half day."

17: Tea for Two

Anonymous

Sunday Times (Perth) 13 Feb 1938

There are many short stories with this title!

WHEN Arthur Buxton died, close upon the triumphant success of his novel, *The Strangefleet Case*, among those who spoke of his departure with regret was the beautiful but disquieting Mrs. Enderby.

"You see," she would say, "there was something about him." And she would gaze into the distance as if she saw, outlined on the remote wallpaper, the embodiment of that indescribable something. "It was a brief thing— our friendship," she would add. "On Thursday afternoon we met, and on the following Wednesday morning they found him dead"

That Arthur Buxton had come to tea with her at her flat on the afternoon preceding that fatal Wednesday morning was a detail which she never found convenient to mention.

The rooms which Mrs. Enderby called her flat composed a small apartment overlooking the river. Buxton was impressed by the flowery coziness of them. He had travelled widely while gathering material for "*The Strangefleet Case*," but he had never seen anything more charming. He said so.

"Now, you must make yourself comfortable while I get you some tea," she said. "My little maid is out today, and we can be quite alone."

She retired into the small kitchen, leaving Buxton to luxuriate in the contemplation of how softly, yieldingly feminine she appeared in the lustrous gown in which she had draped her small, ripe figure; of how definitely she had made it plain that he was to regard this visit as something essentially private, between themselves, and of how admirably she had insured that privacy.

He congratulated himself upon these harbingers of an imminent romance.

Emerging from the kitchen with tea things, Florence Enderby talked about tea, both as a beverage and as a social institution. She deplored the American cocktail and deprecated the failure of the Continent to recognise the importance of tea-time. Abroad, one missed the coziness, the informality of tea-time; but there, Mr. Buxton could understand. Extensively travelled as he was, he was a true Englishman. His books showed lt. He loved it; that she knew— and sugar?

"One," said Buxton.

"Loaf sugar," she remarked, "is an English custom which no other country has copied yet"

"You feel my book captured something of the English atmosphere?" he questioned flatly.

"It made me feel I was back," she smiled, "in a small village I knew in Cambridgeshire. How was it you knew the people so well?" Her hazel-green eyes smiled directly into his as she handed him the cup and saucer. "The cakes," she explained, "are something I make myself. Not those. Let us save those for later."

She had an odd, girlish quality, he decided, that belied the deep sophistication of her glance, and he consoled himself with a piece of substantial, plain cake with caraway seeds in it.

"But your book was cruel," she said.

"Cruel?" Buxton mouthed the word fondly. All authors like to be considered cruel.

"You see," she said, "I think you're a very clever person, and I think you know a very great deal more than even your lovely book betrayed. But the deadly logic with which you hounded poor Eva Tredgold down and made them hang her in the last chapter struck me as gorgeously ruthless."

"Life," the delighted Buxton reminded her, "is ruthless."

"I'm afraid I've never given it that much thought," she said. "But, you see, I was in Cambridgeshire at the time of that hideous Armitage case, so I know where you got your plot." She sparkled upon him mischievously, like a schoolgirl. "Only poor Mr. Armitage," she pointed out, "went all alone to the gallows, while the lady of his heart was acquitted without even her name being brought into it. That makes you just twice as ruthless as life, does it not, Mr. Buxton?"

Buxton smiled Indulgently.

"A novelist," he explained, "must be true to himself. I admit *The Strangefleet Case* was based upon a very close study of the Armitage case, but I may say in confidence—" he assumed an authoritative air— "that I had access to private information which was not introduced at the trial; and according to the evidence it provided I had to find Eva Tredgold guilty, and I had to condemn her."

"But what of the poor woman in the original case?— Do try another bit of seed cake!— Of course, it's perfectly obvious that she loved poor Mr. Armitage much too entirely— but, after all, it was proved, wasn't it, that she had sailed for America—wasn't it some time before the poison was actually administered to poor Mrs. Armitage?"

"But supposing she hadn't—" Buxton leaned forward, cake in one hand and teacup in the other. "Supposing it happened as I worked it out in the book? Supposing this Madame X., as they called her throughout the trial, had booked her passage for America and actually sailed from Cherbourg on a boat that stopped at Southampton? She leaves the boat, runs up to Cambridgeshire for that night-time call on Mrs. Armitage of which poor Armitage knew nothing, and then sails to America on a fast boat from France.

"Armitage returns in the morning, as my book described it, to find his wife dying, and because Madame X. is never suspected the authorities accept her elaborate plans for sailing, the passenger list of the Southampton boat, and her appearance in America as evidence of her having sailed before the administering of the poison." Buxton became very excited indeed, but Mrs. Enderby appeared unimpressed.

"Ingenious, yes," she smiled. "But, after all, she had been honorably dismissed from the case; they had even refused to bring her name into it. It seems so exquisitely cruel to drag her out of retirement and pin the crime on her."

Buxton permitted himself a superior smile.

"You don't seriously believe," he said, "that she had nothing to do with the case?"

"The Courts believed it," she replied. "But do let me pour you another cup of tea."

"The Courts!" He spoke scornfully. "Supposing I were to tell you that I possessed evidence which conclusively proved that unnamed lady's complicity?"

"No!" Her eyes widened in charming incredulity. "Not all that business of the boats! You did it beautifully, Mr. Buxton. It was a triumph of imagination, but—"

"It wasn't!" he cried recklessly. "It was true! It actually happened!"

Like all good novelists, Buxton was prepared to lie to the last ditch in defence of his novel's verisimilitude.

"I have traced that woman's movements, Mrs. Enderby, from the boat to the Armitages' and from Cambridgeshire to America. If ever the real Eva Tredgold is found I have evidence which can bring her to justice as surely as—"

"As your tea is cold as ice!" she cried gaily, "Let me take it!"

Her hand snatched his cup with the graceful flight of a swallow.

"Oh, it's all very delightful and mysterious." she exulted, rising with teacup in one hand and teapot In the other, "but how you unearthed secrets that even the Scotland Yard men missed is beyond my poor comprehension."

Buxton was wondering about that himself, but then, as she stood gazing down at him with starry eyes, he had it.

"Mrs. Armitage," he said.

"But she was dead."

"Not when Armitage found her," he reminded her. "And she told him of the woman's visit."

"She told him! But he'd never have—"

"He did!" Buxton was Inventing recklessly now, his mind working very fast, "The poor devil was as Infatuated as that. He knew she had poisoned his wife—and he kept silent. He died for her."

She was gazing at him with puzzled unbelief.

"How could you know it?" she asked him reproachfully.

"He wrote it down," Buxton maintained stoutly. "And the manuscript came into my possession. You see, I bought up all his belongings I could."

"How lovely!" she cried. "But I must make you another cup of tea!"

Again she retreated to the kitchen. Again, there was talk of tea as a beverage, tea as an institution.

Again her pretty hands fluttered over the sugar bowl and he was persuaded to eat of the very special cake which she had made for him. But the room was dim before she returned again to the subject of his novel, and then, to his chagrin, she used it to dismiss him.

"You know," she exclaimed, "it has been such a treat having that look behind the scenes. We must meet again and talk longer."

It seemed that she had to dress, now, for a dinner party, and he must go. He went reluctantly, feeling a strange heaviness, an increasing uneasiness as he walked the few streets to his own flat.

It was not until he had removed his coat and flung himself upon the bed that the pain seized him, and it was not until he curled up despairingly in an excruciating fore-knowledge of his doom that he realised his irremediable mistake.

18: The French Model

C. Fox Smith

Cicely Fox Smith, 1882-1954

Sunday Times (Perth) 28 Feb 1932

IT was in the main street of Old Wattleford that Peter Everard came across the little french model.

Not a likely place, to be be sure, for French models of any kind. Old Wattleford— if you are lucky enough to find it, lying as it does well aside from all the main motor routes, amid a tangle of narrow winding lanes— is the very quaintest and quietest of tiny market towns. Once during the week, on Friday, it is busy enough, with herds of bullocks and flocks of sheep jostling each other in its narrow streets, and shabby cars rattling in from outlying farms, piled with boxes of eggs and crates of squawking poultry; perhaps even a cheap jack or two bawling their wares in the market place to an audience of open-mouthed yokels and laborers' wives in their dusty best.

That is on market day; for the rest, of the week. Old Wattleford relapses, into slumber. Hardly a sign of life in its sunny little market place but a cat fast asleep in the corn chandler's window among the samples of wheat and packets of parrot-food, and the butcher's dog. stretched out on the pavement, now and then twitching a drowsy, ear and lifting his head to snap at the flies. Hardly a sound but the buzz of the wasps among the baker's wares, and the faraway mellow notes of the church chimes, spelling out the tune of "Begone unbelief" as they have done for centuries gone by.

It was in this latter mood that Peter Everard found the place, one summer afternoon in the course of a happy-go-lucky, follow-your-nose motoring holi-day which he was taking from the architect's office in which he was a junior partner.

He ran his car into the yard of the Lamb— the White Hart was really Old Wattleford's "gentry" inn, but the Lamb's oak beams and casement windows took his fancy— and after a real country luncheon of boiled ham, pink, delicate, and alluring, crisp salad from the Lamb's own gardens, and raspberries and cream, the whole washed down with old ale from the wood, strolled out to see the sights.

And one of the very first things his eye fell on was the little French model. It wasn't, perhaps, quite so surprising a sight as a creation— say— by Molyneux or Poiret would have been in

Old Wattleford, but in a way it was almost as unexpected— one of those dainty little, bone models of ships with the making of which the French prisoners in the days of the Napoleonic Wars so often used to beguile the enforced leisure of their captivity. It was a beautiful little specimen of its kind, too, a marvel of intricate workmanship in its wealth of tiny detail, and mellowed

by age to the warm tint of old ivory. There it lay, amid a jumble of miscellaneous odds and ends of uninteresting second-hand furniture, almost hidden away behind a massive Victorian marble clock and some wax flowers under a glass shade; and to Peter, who made a special hobby of ship models, it said "Please buy me" as plainly as if it had spoken.

The dealer, a depressed-looking person with hay-fever, named a price a good deal lower than Peter, considering the quality of the piece, had dared to expect.

"That's a hantykew," he observed between sneezes, "that there is! Come out of an old lady's 'ouse just again' the church. Miss Burns— used to teach music an' that. 'Er and a niece, there was. Don't know wot become o' the niece, for sure, after the old lady died. All the stuff ' was sold. I bought that there ship and a few other things. Them flars Them's hantykews, too. An' that photo. Them anythink in your line?"

Peter disclaimed the "flars" but lingered a little over the "photo," which was a water-color drawing of a girl in the high-waisted muslin and ringlets of the early eighteenth century. The execution was amateurish, but the unknown artist— Peter noted the initials "R.K." in the corner— had caught with surprising skill the expression— half wistful, half ardent— of the girlish face. He laid the picture aside and returned to the inspection of his purchase.

"There's a name somewhere on the stand," said the dealer, "name o' the ship, I reckon it'll be."

Yes, there it was, sure enough. In small fine letters on a slip of bone among the elaborate inlaying. Peter studied it closely through his glass.

"*A Sophie*."

Not a very, likely name for the ship, on the whole, for her figurehead represented a classical warrior, bearded and helmeted and brandishing a short sword-some *Hector*, *Achille,* or *Vengeur*, more like, Peter thought.

He left the man packing his purchase to stand the journey in the car. And continued his tour of the town. He saw the old Butter Hall on its quat wooden, pillars, and the balcony above whence election results, used to be announced in the days when Old Wattleford sent its two members to Parliament. He saw the battered relics of the stocks and whipping post. And finally he passed into the cool semi darkness of the noble old Norman church, with its ancient brasses, its three-decker pulpit, and the glorious carving of its bench ends and font-cover.

He lingered long enough to get rubbings of the brasses, and went out into the shady churchyard just as the chimes stumbled out "Begone unbelief" preparatory to striking the hour of 4. And as he strolled along the path towards the lych-gate, glancing idly at the inscriptions on the stones as he passed, a name, startlingly unusual among the surrounding Josephs, Elizas, Thomases, and Janes, caught his eye.

He stopped to study the stone more closely,

"In memory," he read*, "of Raoul Kermadec. Prisoner of War, a Lieutenant in the French Navy, who died at Old Wattleford on the 18th of July, 1811.*

"He was a prisoner of war.
But death has set him free."

"Raoul Kermadec." Why, he must be the "RK" of the dealer's "photo"— the same, very likely, who had made both ship and picture. And was she the girl, half wistful, half ardent, the "Sophie" for whom the model had been made? "Very likely," Peter reflected, "I wonder if the lady was faithful to his memory. Or if she married, had a crowd of jolly youngsters, and forgot all about him..."

It was another stone, not many paces from the resting place of the poor French prisoner, which unexpectedly gave the answer to his question.

"Sacred to the memory,"its inscription ran, "of Miss Sophia Burns, a young lady whose character, and attainments endeared her to a large circle of friends, but whose sensibilities were such that she could not endure the shocks of this transitory life, and died of a decline on January 2, 1812, in the 19th years of her age."

So that was the end of the little love story, then! Peter went back to the shop to collect his bargain, and on the impulse of the moment bought the little picture too. It seemed, somehow, unkind to part them.

A few days later, back in his flat in the Temple, Peter was busy on one or two little repairs to the rigging of the model when Tom Ferris, the young barrister on the landing below, came in, and with him his wealthy client, da Silva, the Brazilian millionaire.

The South American was a bit of a mystery. His money— which he undoubtedly possessed a great deal— was said to have been made in rubies and rubber: but he was also credited with some less legitimate activities, including the running of several cabaret shows of a rather dubious type in the South American capitals. Incidentally, he was a collector of many things, ship models among them; hence his visit to Peter's flat.

He was a great, heavily-built lump of a man with the physique of a prize-fighter, and the profile of a dissipated, Napoleon, and Peter took a dislike to him at sight.

"Nice little bit you've got there," he said, taking up the little bone model and turning it over critically in his hands. "What do you want for it?"

"It's not for sale, thanks," said Peter brusquely. It filled him, some-how, with a sort of inexplicable blind fury, to see the dead Frenchman's love sift in those gross, masterful, acquisitive fingers. He held out his hand for the model, almost rudely.

"All right, all right," drawled da Silva, patronisingly. I've handled plenty of these." He went on inspecting it, carefully, appraisingly. "I'll give you a hundred and fifty for it," he said at last.

"Thanks," said Peter again, "It's not for sale."

Da Silva laughed, and put the little model down. But the laugh had an ugly note on it.

"Perhaps you'll change your mind, later. Mr. Everard," he said.

"I think not," said Peter.

The Brazilian stayed a few minutes longer, and then took his leave. At the door he turned back to remark:

"Come, Mr. Everard! I give you two hundred for the little ship."

Peter shook his head.

"I'm not a dealer, Mr. da Silva," he said, "it's not for sale, as I told you before. If you think I said so to force your price up you're mistaken."

"No offence, no offence," said the South American. But his dark eyes smouldered.

"None taken," rejoined Peter cheerily.

"I SAY, you were an ass!" said Mr. Ferris, popping his head in at the door a few minutes later. "You could have stuck da Silva no end for that bit of a model. Of course, I know he's a swine. But, after all, his money's as good as anyone else's. And who knows? he might be wanting an architect to design him a country, house."

"Sooner design a country house for a pig!" said Peter. "The great brute sickens me. I hope I never see him again."

But see him again he did— and that before very many days had passed.

Peter had been out into the country to look after some alterations that his firm were carrying out in a Queen Anne mansion, and on the way back to town he stopped at the Anchor, at Milford Bridge for dinner.

The Anchor, which has been a favorite resort of at least two famous poets, and has its own private ghost of a highwayman, is a popular objective for motorists on summer evenings. But just now it was getting late in the year, and on this particular evening, which was chilly and cloudy, with a hint of impending rain, there were only two diners besides Peter in the long, low room overlooking the river and the ancient bridge.

One of the two was da Silva; the other was a girl. Just for a moment her face seemed vaguely familiar; but her eyes rested on Peter's face for a moment with a total lack of recognition, and he saw that he was mistaken.

"Doesn't look da Silva's sort, somehow," was his reflection.

Her face, bright, eager, vivid, bloomed in the dark room like a flower. She could not, Peter thought, be much more than 20, and her fresh, clear

complexion neither asked nor got any aids from artifice. What was she doing with a blighter like that? It worried him somehow, much as it had worried him to see his little ship in da Silva's possessive grasp. Oh, well, it was no business of his, anyway. These modern girls knew how to take care of themselves.

The couple had evidently just finish-ed dinner, and without in the least wishing to overhear their conversation. Peter found himself an involun-tary eavesdropper.

"I'm sure it's time for me to go." the girl was saying. "My train—"

"Plenty of time!— plenty of time!" said the Brazilian, easily. "You've—"

And just then the sound of a church clock striking the hour broke in on his words.

The girl jumped up with a little startled cry.

"Oh!" she exclaimed. It's eight o'clock. My train's gone. Oh, dear what—"

Her voice trembled. Modern or no, she was evidently very near tears.

"All right!— all right!" came da Silva's smooth voice. "No need to be upset. I will inquire."

He padded out on soft cat-like feet, to return presently with a reassuring "All right, you see— another train in one hour"

Peter finished his meal and called for his bill. The little scheme had interested him in spite of himself, and although he told himself again that the whole thing was no affair, of his, he did not feel quite happy as he crossed the yard to the garage to get out his car.

A garage attendant who looked like an ostler came out whistling.

"Bit o' funny business goin' on 'ere!" he confided with a wink, and a nod towards a superb tourer which was the only other occupant of the place. "Bloke wot owns 'er, 'e says 'Somethink wrong with the car,' 'e says. Can't get "er put right till to-morrow nohow,' 'e says, an 'e slips me a fiver. W'y, there ain't no more wrong with 'er nor wot there is with me! Only wot 'e done "imself."

"Whats that?" asked Peter.

"W'y, the tappet wot he took out 'isself an'put in 'is own pocket," re-joined the man, "that's wot's wrong with 'er-an' not a thing else. No; there's summat rum goin' on, you mark my words."

"H'm," said Peter, "by the way, when does the last train leave?"

"Gorn," said the man laconically. "That was 'er went out just afore eight. Nothin' now till ar'pas seven in the mornin'."

"H'm," said Peter again, as he let in the clutch. He was thinking hard as the car slid across the yard and under the archway where the highwayman's ghost lingered on dark nights. He couldn't get one or two things out of his mind. One was that little bone model in the grasp of a pair of strong, brutal, possessive hands that looked as if they could crush it to fragments in an instant if the fancy

took their owner. The other was a chance remark of Tom Ferris': "He's a chap that'll stick at nothing if he wants anything."

It was no use. He'd got to see this thing through! He put the car into reverse and backed her up to the door of the Anchor.

He'd probably only get a snub for his pains. But he was going to chance that.

The girl was still there when he re-entered the dining-room, and for the moment, as luck would have it, she was alone.

Peter marched straight up to her and stood with his hands planted on the table.

"Look here," he said, I expect you'll think this frightful nerve. But— I suppose you know there isn't another train out of here to-night."

The girl bit back a cry and clenched her hands.

I've got my car here," Peter blundered on. "and I'm going straight up to town. So if you'd care to— as it were— come along sort of thing— it'll perhaps save you a whole lot of unpleasantness. That blighter told you a thumping lie about the train and he's put his own car out of commission-"

There— it was done! How would she take it? Thank goodness, modern girls didn't have hysterics!

"Thanks— thanks awfully," She said. She jumped up and began to gather together her possessions with hands that shook a little despite her gallant attempt at nonchalance. "Let's go before he comes back!"

And just at that moment da Silva re-entered the room, with that soft padding tread of his, so amazingly light for so heavy a man. He glanced first at the girl, and then at Peter, and the half-smile faded from his fleshy lips.

''Good evening. Mr. da. Silva," said Peter. "We've met before."

"Yes," said da Silva, "yes— well?"

"This lady finds she has missed the last train," Peter went on, "so I'm going to drive her up to town."

Da Silva's passionate Latin temper blazed up suddenly.

"You are, are you?" be snarled. "And who asked you to interfere with my guest, may I ask?"

"Nobody," said Peter, coolly, "but, you see, you were— shall we say?— making a mistake when you told her there was another train."

"Well, you can clear out, you interfering puppy!" shouted da Silva. "Do you think I can't entertain a lady without your assistance?"

"To judge by your behavior at this moment," rejoined Peter, "the answer is decidedly in the negative."

Da Silva spat out a vile epithet and rushed at him head down, like an infuriated bull.

The argument was short and sharp. The Brazilian was much the heavier man of the two, but his way of living was against him, and it was not many seconds

before he was sprawling on his back among the ruins of the dinner table, while Peter shepherded the girl, between laughter and tears, to the waiting car.

"I say," she said breathlessly, a few minutes later, when they were at last speeding London-wards through the drizzly autumn twilight, "that was most frightfully decent of you! I'm no end grateful. And, oh— your knuckles! You've hurt them! They're bleeding!"

"I hurt his dentures worse," laughed Peter. Surprising how he'd enjoyed that little dust-up!

"I am an idiot," she went on, "I don't know what Jimmy'll say."

"Jimmy! Who was Jimmy, then? Confound Jimmy!" reflected Peter ruefully. "I wish he'd look after his own feminine belongings."

"I suppose I oughtn't to have gone, really," the girl went on, "but it seemed such a chance. I sing a bit, you know. And he— the da Silva person heard me at a studio party. He said he liked my voice immensely, and he'd like to arrange a tour for me in South America."

Peter said nothing. But he remembered those cabarets he had heard about in Buenos Ayres and Rio, and— Jimmy or no Jimmy— he grudged his broken knuckles not at all!

"So he asked me to come out here to dinner with him, so that we could talk things over— and then— oh, well, you know the rest! I— I was most horribly worried really. I was nearly making a bolt before you came. Only I couldn't think where to go."

Peter had a momentary vision of a small, forlorn figure trudging along a wet road in the rain. And once again he was glad of those damaged knuckles of his. All the same, the rest of the drive home was rather silent. Until, when the lamps were casting quivering shadows along the wet streets, Peter drew up in the mews to which his companion had directed him.

"You will come in, won't you " she said. Jumping out and running up to the door without waiting for a reply.

'Jimmy, oh, Jimmy!"

"Confound Jimmy!" said Peter to himself again. He didn't want to meet Jimmy at all!

A girl's face, pale, plain, and marked by a gamin-like shrewdness, poked round the door.

"Hullo, Sophy, that you? I was getting worried about you, my child. Thought your Dago millionaire had kidnapped you. Oh, sorry! have I dropped a brick?"

"Not at all," said Peter. So this was Jimmy, this girl with the sharp, gamin face. And he'd been wishing no end of hate on her! He was suddenly feeling tremendously pleased with everything again. "I'm not a Dago millionaire."

"You don't look like one. I must say," said Jimmy.

She bustled out to make coffee,

"I say," said Peter, suddenly, "didn't she— your friend— call you— "

"Sophy? Yes!"

That was what it meant then. That was why he had felt he knew her that look, half wistful, half ardent, on the face of the living girl and of the long dead girl of the portrait! That was why the thought of the little French model had so persistently haunted him— had made him turn back at the last moment rather than leave her to the tender mercies of da Silva!

"Why, look here," he said, "you must come from Old Wattleford!"

''Old Wattleford! Of course, I do. I lived there always. Until— until Aunt died—"

"And you had a little bone ship?"

"Yes, The Ivory Ship.' I called it. It stood in the drawing room."

"And the picture the French prisoner painted—"

"Great-aunt Sophia, the one who died when she was young."

"Well, I've got them," said Peter. "I've got them both. And what's more, if I hadn't, I don't believe I should ever have got to know you."

"SOPHY," said Miss Jimmy Feather, as the sound of his departing car merged itself into the roar of London, "that young man's a case."

"Rot," said Sophy, blushing a becoming red, "why, I hardly know him!"

"Well, he is," said Miss Feather, "you mark my words!'' And inwardly she added, "And a good thing, too. That child's much too Victorian to look after herself."

WELL, TO MAKE a long story short, a certain rising young architect was married not long ago to Miss Sophia Burns, formerly of Old Wattleford, Hampshire. They had a charming house at Putney, and he is doing exceedingly well in his profession— but it is to be feared that he will never make his fortune as the designer of a country seat for the well-known Brazillian magnate, Senhor Manoel da Silva.

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19: The Million Pound Contract

T. C. Bridges

1868-1944

Sunday Times (Perth), 17 Mar 1935

"OUVRY," said Mr. Murdoch, "you drive a car?"

"Yes, sir," Jack Ouvry answered, and tried not to show his surprise. It was the very last question he had expected when called into the inner office, and wondered rather uneasily if his chief objected to a junior clerk being a motorist.

"You have a small car of your own?" continued the other.

"Yes, sir." Mr. Murdoch nodded and fingered the papers on his desk. Jack thought how worn he looked and noted how grey his hair had grown.

"You know about this Birkendale Contract?"

Again Jack felt a shock of surprise but hid it and answered promptly.

I know it's a big thing, and that you are tendering, sir."

"I am." Mr. Murdoch paused and his tired face hardened. "Between ourselves, Ouvry it's a matter of life or death to this firm to get it. The estimates are just finished, and I believe my bid will be the lowest. But I believed the same with regard to the Rylstone Contract and I was underbidden. And I lost the Langley Bridge in the same way. Only by a small margin in each case, but that was enough. Do you know who got those contracts?"

"Skardon's," said Jack promptly. "Skardon's had them both."

"And they'll have this one, too, if we are not careful," said his chief, grimly. "There's a leak somewhere, and if it's not stopped it will sink the ship. The fact is, Ouvry, I dare not trust the post. I wonder if I can trust you."

Jack reddened.

"I hope so, sir," he said, curtly.

"Oh, it's not your honesty I'm talking about. You wouldn't be here if that wasn't above reproach. It's your discretion. Can I trust you to deliver the documents to Mr. Franklyn?"

"I'll have a jolly good try, sir."

Mr. Murdoch pursed his lips.

"I'm going to let you try, but don't think it's easy. Skardon's have no scruples, they'll spend money like water to get this contract. Every employee of his firm is watched. Now listen. I don't want you to go by train. I suggest that you should start off in your car as if on holiday. Make south for Brighton or Eastbourne. As soon as you are sure you are not followed you can turn north. But keep to by-roads. And remember, Eric Skardon is the man you must look out for. Have you ever seen him?"

"No, sir."

"He's easy to recognize. Middle height, big nose, grey eyes, bull neck, fairish hair, but the one thing about him you can't mistake is his left ear. The lobe is missing."

Jack nodded.

"That's a pretty good trade-mark." He grinned. "I suppose I have a free hand sir?"

"Two if you want them. Don't worry about a fine for assault. Hit first and talk afterwards. I'm backing you to the limit."

"Thank you, sir," said Jack. "And when do I start?"

"Now." Mr. Murdoch opened a drawer. "Here are the papers fastened in this body belt. Go into my private room and put the belt on. Then go out to lunch. After lunch get your car and start. By the way, have you a pistol?"

"A sort of a one, sir, but I much prefer my fists."

The other's eyes rested a moment on the sinewy frame of his clerk. Jack Ouvry was not a big man but he had the broad shoulders and slim waist of an athlete. With his clean-cut face and clear grey eyes, he had a distinctly dependable look.

"That's one reason why I chose you for this job. Here's money. Don't be afraid to spend it. And if you get this thing through you may, as the lawyers say, hear of something to your advantage."

"Thank you, sir," said Jack, as he picked up the belt and went into the inner room. When he came out Mr Murdoch was still in his chair.

"Good luck to you, Ouvry," he said as he shook hands. "But look out for Eric Skardon."

"I'll do that, sir," said Jack, and next moment the door closed behind him.

ii

JACK grinned happily as he left London behind him. The sun shone, the two seater was running like silk, and he was intensely proud of the trust his chief had placed in him.

"My chance at last," he remarked as he slowed a little and cast a glance behind him. So far he had seen nothing suspicious, though, while he lunched, he had an idea he was being watched. There was nothing in sight except a motor cycle which was coming up behind him, and he accelerated again. A mile farther and he noticed the motor cyclist was still just the same distance behind him.

He began to smell a rat, and dropped to twenty-five. So did the cyclist, and Jack's suspicions grew. But he wanted to be certain. A cloud covered the sun, rain began to fall sharply and Jack saw his chance. Hidden by the downpour he switched his car into a by-road and drove fast up it. When the shower had passed there was no sign of his pursuer.

But Jack did not flatter himself that he would get rid of the man as easily as that, and spotting a convenient gate leading into a rough pasture, got out, opened it, drove the car in and hid behind the hedge. Then he waited. Ten minutes later the cyclist, a tall, dark man, came roaring past. Jack chuckled softly.

"Pertinacious beggar, but I think I've cooked his goose." He waited till the fellow was out of sight, then drove his car back to the main road and turned north. Presently he left the main road and made away towards Maidenhead.

He had escaped one danger, but that was only a beginning. Finding he had lost his quarry, the cyclist would, of course, seize the first chance of telephoning headquarters, then the hunt would he up. So Jack avoided Maidenhead itself and twisted north along by-roads in the direction of Aylesbury.

For two hours nothing happened; then as he was crossing the Chilterns near Wendover he saw his petrol-gauge reading was low and stopped to refill his tank. He had purposely taken plenty of petrol for the whole trip so as not to have to pull up at any filling station. He had just finished the job when a closed car came along and pulled up.

"Can you direct me to Little Kimble?" asked the driver. Jack gave him a quick glance, and did not like his face. Still that was no reason for refusing to answer his question, especially as the man appeared to be alone.

"You ought to have turned left a mile back," he said. The driver unfolded a map.

"I don't see how I missed that turn," he said, frowning. Evidently he expected Jack to come forward, and look at the map, but Jack was wary. He glanced round, and that was just as well, for a second man, who must have slipped out unseen, by the far door, was sneaking round the back of the car.

Hit first, talk afterwards. That had been Murdoch's advice, and Jack look it. With one jump he was on Number Two, and his fist socked home on the fellow's jaw with a jar that Jack felt clear up to his shoulder, and which laid the other out as senseless as cold mutton. But before Jack could turn the driver was out, and on him. The man, charged, head down, and wrapping his long arms round Jack's body, drove his knee upwards at his stomach. Jack went down in agony, the other on top of him.

But Jack was not done yet. Somehow he managed to get his right hand into his coat pocket, and pull out his pistol. Thrusting the muzzle into the other's face he pulled the trigger. There was no report, yet a heavy bullet could hardly have had a more instant effect. With a howl of agony the man released his hold on Jack, and covering his face with his hands rolled in the road.

"I'm blind! I'm blinded," he screamed.

"Serve you right if you were, you dirty dog," growled Jack, as he got slowly to his feet, "But it's only ammonia, and you'll see again in less than half an hour. I

wouldn't have done it if you'd played the game, but I'm not going to stand for being kicked in the stomach." He limped to the ditch, wet a handkerchief, and brought it back to the sufferer.

"Next time we meet you won't get off lightly," were his last words as he climbed back into his car.

"So much for Act Two," he said as he let in the clutch. "I wonder what the third will be?"

iii

JACK had left Buckingham behind him before anything else happened. Then in a quiet lane beyond Stowe he saw a small car standing at the side of the road. The bonnet was open, and a girl was examining the engine.

She looked up hopefully at Jack's approach, and Jack saw a charming oval face with very clear grey eyes under a neat hat. He saw also, that the girl was rather tall, slim, and very well turned out.

"Surely not one of the Skardon crowd," said he to himself as he slackened up. "Still one never can tell." The girl stepped out to meet him, and he had to pull up.

"My engine has conked," she told him. and her voice matched her appearance "I've been here half-an-hour, and you're the first person to pass. I wonder if you can tell me what is wrong." Jack gave her a second look, decided that her distress was genuine, and got out.

"I'll have a look," he said, pleasantly, and got to work. Within a couple of minutes he had located the trouble.

"The magneto spring is broken. Have you a spare?"

She shook her head. "I'm afraid not."

"Well, she won't go till a new one is fitted," Jack told her.

"And I'm twelve miles from home," said the girl ruefully.

"Which way?" Jack asked.

"I live beyond Towcester," she said.

Jack looked at her a third time. She was charming— a gentlewoman if ever he had seen one. He made up his mind swiftly.

"Towcester is on my way. I can drop you there at a garage, if that's any use."

"All the use in the world," she said gaily. "We deal at Ansell's. He will send for the car." The next few miles of Jack's journey were the pleasantest of the day. Stella Kane, for that was the name she gave him, was much more than pretty. She was both clever and charming, and talked delightfully. It seemed no time at all before they were at Towcester. When they reached the garage Stella did not get out at once, but glanced at her wrist watch, then turned to Jack.

"It's five and I'm longing for my tea. I'm sure you want some, too. Do let me offer you a cup." Her smile was charming. Jack would not have been human if he had refused.

"That's awfully nice of you," he said frankly. "But I've a long way to go and I can only spare half an hour."

"You can drink quite a lot of tea in half an hour. We'll go to the Chequers. Just wait one minute till I see Ansell then you can drive me up."

The Chequers was a nice old-fashioned place, and tea was served in a low-ceilinged, raftered room where polished brass winked pleasantly. An excellent tea with savory sandwiches and scones with Aylesbury butter and jam. Jack was hungry enough to enjoy his meal thoroughly, and the minutes flew fast in Stella's delightful company. Jack had never met a girl who appealed to him so intensely, and began to wonder how he could possibly meet her again.

Owing perhaps to the showery weather they had the room all to themselves, but just before Jack's half hour was up a man came in.

"Hullo, Stella," he exclaimed. "I never expected to see you here to-day. I thought you were at home."

"So I would be only my car broke down, and this kind gentleman gave me a lift." She did not offer to introduce Jack. The other nodded.

"Well, I hope they're treating you properly," he said, and passed on.

Jack had been watching the man keenly. He wore the leather helmet and coat of a motor cyclist, but he was certainly not the man Jack had dodged earlier in the day. He had been tall and slim; this man was shorter, broad in the shoulder, powerfully built. But his eyes were grey, and for a moment Jack's ever ready suspicions boiled up. Could he possibly be Eric Skardon? Certainly he answered to Murdoch's description.

A moment later Jack was smiling at himself. There must he hundreds of men of stocky build with grey eyes and if this one was a friend of Stella Kane, that at once exonerated him. Jack glanced at the clock. Half-past five. He got up.

Time for me to go, Miss Kane, its a business appointment so I know you'll understand."

"Of course," she said, readily. "Well you've been awfully kind, and I'm really grateful to you. Good luck, and a pleasant journey."

Jack hesitated.

"You'll be all right?"

"Quite. I shall wait here till Ansell brings my car." She gave him her hand and Jack had no excuse for staying longer. Yet as he went out his spirits were low and he felt inclined to curse his job. But for that he might have given her his name and asked if there was a chance of meeting her again.

He had left his car in the yard behind the hotel, a narrow place surrounded by a high wall. The first thing he saw as he came into the yard was a man leaning

over the two-seater and apparently examining it closely. It was the same stocky man whom he had seen inside. He was no longer wearing his helmet and the very first thing Jack saw was that the lower part of his left ear was missing.

"No you don't, you dirty thief!" he exclaimed as he sprang forward. The other straightened and swung round. There was an ugly glint of anger and surprise in his grey eyes.

"What the devil are you talking about?" he answered, harshly. "Can't I look at a car in my own yard?"

"Don't bluff— it's no good!" said Jack, crisply. "You see, I'm wise to your dirty tricks!"

"I don't know whether you're crazy or drunk," retorted the other, "but nobody's going to call me a thief without getting it in the neck. Put up your hands!"

"Hit first and talk afterwards!" For a second time Murdoch's advice came back to Jack. He felt he had already done too much talking. He leaped in, hitting as he came.

Luck was with him, for the other man, not expecting such a lightning attack, failed to guard that first terrific smack. Jack's fist landed on his jaw, and next instant the other was on his back on the gravel, as completely out as if a mule had kicked him. Jack stood a moment looking down at him.

"So much for Eric Skardon!" he said bitterly. He glanced round. There was no one about, and apparently there had been no witnesses to the brief affray. He climbed into his car and drove off, feelingmore upset than he ever remembered feeling in all his 26 years. It was not Skardon he was worrying about, but Stella. The idea that a girl like Stella Kane could have lent herself to such a deception made him perfectly sick.

iv

IT would have gone ill with anyone who had tackled Jack Ouvry during the rest of the day, but no one did. He finished his journey without the slightest interference, and just after ten that night reached Birkendale, delivered the tender to Mr. Franklyn at Oak Bank, his private house, took his receipt, and went to a hotel to sleep.

Soon after lunch next day he was back in Mr. Murdoch's office, relating his adventures. But there was no zest in his story. He had done his job; his success did not seem to matter. Life was drab and dull compared with what it had been twenty-four hours ago. The treachery of Stella Kane had hit Jack very hard. His chief listened in silence. He did not say a word until Jack came to his arrival at Towcester and his encounter with Eric Skardon. Then he broke in suddenly.

"Eric Skardon!" he repeated. "You say you knocked out Eric Skardon?"

"Yes, sir; but it was just the luck of getting in the first blow."

"It couldn't have been Eric Skardon."

"It was, sir! He answered exactly to your description. A bull of a chap with grey eyes, big nose, fairish hair, and the lower part of his left car missing."

The older man's eyes widened.

"But Eric Skardon is down with 'flu. I got the news not an hour after you left."

"He made a pretty quick recovery sir!" said Jack, drily.

Mr. Murdoch shook his head.

"It's impossible. He is in a nursing home in Hendon. He was taken there the night before last. He is very ill."

Jack drew a long breath.

"There couldn't be two of him!" he objected.

"There must be, or rather you have been deceived by a curious resemblance.'

"But the car, sir!"

"I can't help that. It wasn't Skardon. That's definite." He laughed. "Under the circumstances, Ouvry, I think you had better keep clear of Towcester for some time to come."

A queer glow shone in Jack's eyes.

"On the contrary, I'm going back there my first free day."

"To apologize?"

"Yes, sir."

"I wish you luck," said his chief, drily. "To-morrow is Saturday. You can take the day."

It was barely eleven next morning when Jack stopped his car at the Chequers and went in. "Who owns this place?" he asked of the porter.

"Captain Fred Beverley, sir."

"Is he a square-set youngish man, with part of his left ear missing?"

"That's it, sir. Do you want to see him?"

"I do."

"I think you'll find him outside, either in the yard or in the garden." Jack thanked the man and went out. Sure enough, Mr. Fred Beverley was in the yard in his shirt sleeves, busy on a car which Jack saw was the same make one horse-power as his own. At sight of Jack he came forward.

"Oh, so you're here again," he remarked, grimly, and Jack did not half like the look in his eyes.

"It was all a mistake," said Jack quickly. "I've come back to explain."

"You can explain after I've finished with you!" answered Beverley, and Jack seeing there was no help for it, waded in. But this time the result was different,

and though Jack put up quite a good show, the elder man's science was too much for him. A crashing left reached his chin and the world went black.

When Jack came to he found himself on a sofa in a small room that looked like an office. Beverley was standing over him with a queer look, half-grim, half worried, on his square face.

"Pasted you harder than I thought," he growled. "You've been out for five minutes."

"It was a devil of a sock," agreed Jack ruefully, feeling his jaw. "You've got a useful left."

"Used to be boxing instructor in my regiment," Beverley grinned.

"Then I was darned lucky to knock you out the other day."

"What did you do it for?" asked the other.

"Sit down and I'll tell you," said Jack. It was almost comic to see the changes of expression which crossed Beverley's face as he listened. When jack had finished he was grinning broadly.

"Gosh!— I don't wonder you socked me. Of course, you thought the whole thing was a plant."

"Can you blame me?" Jack asked.

"No, I can't; and just to show there's no ill-feeling, you'll stop to lunch and we'll split a bottle. I own this pub, and there's still something worth while in the cellar."

"I'd like to," said Jack, simply. "Only I've another job to do before I get back to town."

"What's that?"

"Apologize to Miss Kane."

Beverley chuckled.

"That's easy! The Kanes live only three miles out. I'll drive you over there to tea. Now have a nip of this whisky, and we'll totter in to lunch."

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20: No. 233

J. J. Bell

1871-1934

Sunday Times (Perth) 17 Jul 1932

ON a bright spring afternoon, a girl, the darkness of her fine eyes emphasised by the lack of color in her face, alighted from a taxi at the door of the Planet Hotel, hurried into the hall, and at the bureau asked for the key of No. 232. Hardly looking at her— though she was well worth looking at— the young clerk turned from a heap of letters which he was diligently redirecting, took a key from its pigeon-hole and, courteously enough, handed it to her. With a murmured, "Thank you!" she turned and made for the lift. As she entered it she threw backward a glance of apprehension.

In a corridor on the third floor she came to the door of room No. 232,

The key went in easily; but refused to act. She glanced up at the number on the door. Yes, her number right enough. She withdrew the key, and examined its tag.

No. 233! The clerk had blundered!

Her gaze searched the corridor. It seemed as though she did not wish, or dare, to descend in order to get the proper key.

A sound— the lift coming up! Her eyes were bright with panic. Darting to the next door on her left, she sent the key home, turned it, opened and entered, softly closing the door behind her.

Within the minute she was once more in the corridor—still pale, but in command of herself. She was soon back in the hall. The young clerk, still engrossed in his redirecting, received the key with a murmured acknowledgment.

The girl, whose name, as inscribed in the hotel register, was Ethel H. R. Somerset, with a home address in Suffolk, entered a telephone box, and, giving a number, was shortly engaged in a brisk conversation.

"It's you, Anna! Oh, I'm so glad! It's awfully urgent! I came up to town by the early train, and may be staying till to-morrow— at the Planet... Yes, the Planet... It was the only place I could think of. Daddy used to stay here when— when things were different. Poor Daddy at this moment imagines I'm safe in your happy home. Listen! I want you to come and join me here— at once! Bring things, in case we stay the night. You'll be here in about an hour! You are a friend! Now I am going to engage a room for you, next to mine. The number will be 233. Remember that, in case I should not be free at the moment to receive you. No. 233! Just give your name and that number, and go up and wait till I join you. That's all. Good-bye, good-bye!"

She was half-way to the bureau when she hesitated, then turned to the stalls, where they sold sweets and flowers. At the one she bought a box of "bon-bons; at the other a big bunch of Parma violets, and gave her pretty head a little wag over the depleted

state of her purse.

Then she turned back for the bureau. There were two reception clerks, and one was attending to a fair young man of grave, not unattractive, countenance, accompanied by a porter carry-ing a couple of much-travelled suitcases.

"I should like." said Ethel, "to reserve a room for a friend— Miss Hillgate— who will be arriving shortly; and I should like it to be No. 233, because mine is No. 232. And I should like to have its key, just for a minute. It is a little celebration, and I wish these small gifts to be awaiting her."

The clerk referred to the lists. "We can give your friend a room next to yours—"

"The number of your room, sir," said the other clerk to the grave-faced young man, "is 233."

"Thanks. You might have my things sent up. I'm going out now for a few minutes."

And out he went, EtheL barely re-fraining from running after him. She heard her clerk say, "No. 231," man-aged to utter a "thank you," and betook herself to the palm lounge, where she sank weakly into a chair.

From her place in the lounge she had a view of part of the hall, including the bureau; and now at the bureau arrived the man, the thought of whom had been her dread on her recent entrance into the hotel. So far as appearance went, there was nothing alarming in the man. He was still young, not ill-looking, though there was something not quite pleasant about his eyes and mouth, and he was dressed like a gentleman.

When he was near, she said coolly: "Would you mind telling me, Mr. Brewster, how you managed to find me?"

This time he smiled, the smile suggesting self-satisfaction. "I'm not quite a fool. Ethel—"

"Miss Somerset, please!" He frowned, and said:

"When you bolted, locking the door, I naturally went to the window. There I saw you take a passing cab, and I noted the number. As soon as your aunt's servant unlocked the door, I remembered that there was a cab-stand at the far end of Gloucester Terrace, and, instead of ringing up the police, I went there, on chance! I was lucky! A man informed me that the cab with the number I named was located at the stand, and before very long the cab in question returned. I engaged it, and the driver is now waiting outside, to identify you, if necessary."

"Quite clever of you," she said lightly. "And now what next?"

"You are just as well aware as I am that the matter is very serious," he said stiffly.

"Well, what about it? What do you want?"

"I want the necklet"

"H'm! By the way, how did you come to turn up at my aunt's house while I was engaged in private business with her?"

"Your aunt phoned me. As you know, I never miss an oportunity of seeing you."

She may not have heard. Her gaze was on the bureau. The person whose advent she dreaded was the young man who had obtained Room No. 233. Suddenly it occurred to her that her friend Anna could be of no use now: her arrival might only complicate mat-ters. Perhaps there was still time to

stop Anna.

"Would you mind my leaving you to send a phone message?"

"Once you have handed me the necklet." he replied, "you are at liberty to do what you will."

"I am at liberty now!"

"You are nothing of the sort, Miss Somerset! Kindly let me have the necklet."

"I haven't got it"

"Lies won't help you."

Her color rose. "I've a good mind to ask a porter to put you out," she said.

"It is nonsense for you to say you have not got it! I saw you take it in its case, from the table, where your aunt was showing it to you—"

"Thinking to bribe me into promising to marry you! Yes, I admit taking it from the table; admit bolting with it and locking you both into the drawing-room; but—"

"You left the house with it in your possession. I have questioned the taxi-driver and learned that he did not stop on the way here. Therefore—"

"I tell you, I have not got it!"

"This is mere prevarication," he said, hotly. "If you have not got it on you at this moment then it is in your room-number 232. as I heard the clerk tell the page-boy. It is worth at least £12,000."

"I know! I shouldn't have taken it if it had been worth a guinea."

"Your aunt" he went on, ignoring the remark, "is furious. I assure you that if driven, she will appeal to the police."

"I don't believe that!"

"You may not believe it but it is true." He restrained himself. "Come, be reasonable! where is the necklet?"

For a moment she turned her glance to him. "I'll tell you something." she said; "I'll tell you why I took the necklet. I came to my aunt to-day to implore her to help my father, who is in a great difficulty. My father had asked in vain, but I

thought I might be able to move her. All my father needed would scarcely affect her income— but she would do nothing... except advise me to marry you. So I took the necklet— as a sort of hostage, of course."

"Let me tell you," he said solemnly, "that you are putting yourself in a very dangerous position, and I shall stay here until I get the necklet."

"Then you had better engage a room! But I'll tell you a better way. Mr. Brewster. Go back to my aunt; advise her to write a cheque for £5OO0. payable to my father— her own brother— as a loan; bring the cheque to me, and— "

Brewster took out his watch. "I give you," he said sternly, "two minutes to surrender the necklet, or confess its whereabouts, failing which I shall ask a porter to fetch a police officer."

"Don't be silly!" she said, though she could hardly doubt he was in earnest.

Her gaze went back to the bureau. Strange to say, her solitary hope now was in that grave-faced young man whom she had seen for about three seconds, and who, for all she knew, might not have noticed her at all

"One minute gone!"

As he spoke. Ethel saw the grave faced young man come into the hall and approach the bureau. Brewster. intent on the dial of his watch, did not notice her face quiver— and then set in determination. He was unpre-pared for her sudden rising, and was taken aback by her casual remark:

"Excuse me for a moment. I wish to speak to a friend."

She left him and overtook the stranger, who, key in hand, was moving towards the lift

"How do you do?" she said clearly, holding out her hand; then in a lowered voice: "Please recognise me. I'm in an awful difficulty."

One would need to have been quick to catch his fleeting look of astonishment and suspicion. "Why, this is a surprise!" he said pleasantly, with a warm clasp. "When did you come to town?"

"Only this morning. Are you taking the lift?"

By this time Brewster was on his feet. For a moment or two it looked as though he were about to dash in pursuit: then, with a shrug, he sat down again. After all, friend or no friend, she could not leave the hotel without his knowledge. But who the devil might her friend be? His presence might be troublesome, though it could make no real difference in the end.

He was still on his feet, however when the lift started, and the girl peeping through the grille, experienced once more the feeling of panic. Was he about to come up?

When they stepped out on the third floor her companion inquired:

"Was that fellow downstairs annoying you?"

"I'll tell you everything if— if you will take me into your room for a minute."

"H'm!" He regarded her narrowly yet not unkindly. It was plain that the words had cost her an effort. "Why, certainly. My number is 233."

No more was spoken till they stood together behind the closed door.

"Bolt it, please," she said, and went over to the dressing— table, where she drew out a draw and beckoned him to it.

"What's this?" With something like eagerness he took out an oblong jeweller's case in dark blue leather.

"Open it."

"Good— heavens!"

In the afternoon sunshine, diamonds blazed at him.

"I say, they are beauties!" he said in a hushed voice. "Ten thousand at least! Who are you? How—?"

"Listen, please!" And rapidly, without rambling, she told her story.

While she did so his gaze was oftener on the necklet than on her face. Judging by the look in his eyes, you would probably have assumed that he found her tale a little disappointing; but, at the end of it, there was no doubting his admiration in the solitary comment:

"Plucky, by Jove!"

She shook her head wearily. "I'm at my wits' end and the end of my courage," she said. "But I don't want to be beaten by that creature downstairs and I believe I can beat my aunt, who is crazy about her jewels, in the long run, if only—"

He shut the case with a snap. "Miss Somerset, what do you want me to do?"

"I want you, if you will, to— to keep it it till I ask for it— not in the hotel, but somewhere— oh, anywhere, where it will be safe. I know it's an incredible thing to ask a stranger; still— "

She did not notice his brows go up in amusement.

"Aren't you too trustful?" he said "You don't know anything about me."

"I believe you to be a gentleman."

"H'm!" He appeared to consider before for said: "Suppose I do what you ask, what is to happen to you? What about the— er— gentleman downstairs?"

"Nothing matters if I can force my aunt to help my father."

"And you say you are at the end of your courage!" He looked into her eyes. A small sigh escaped him. "Miss Somerset," he said abruptly, "you have trusted me, and I hate to refuse you—"

"Don't say it!"

"Well, I don't refuse absolutely. But I confess, I'm afraid of the— the responsibility."

"You feet it is dishonest?"

"I'm not worrying about that, I sympathise, and would like to see you win. Only, there's always the chance that I might not be able to put these diamonds

in a safe enough place. Be sides," he went on, without giving her time to speak, "it seems to me that we ought to try the simplest method first,"

"I don't understand."

"Tell me— how long is it since you took possession of the necklet?"

"It seems an age, but it can't be more than an hour."

"Not very long; still, your aunt may have cooled down. Frankly, I can't believe— in spite of the threatening gentleman downstairs— that she would actually resort to the police. If only for her own sake, she would hesitate to make an awful family scandal— "

"By to-morrow, yes! But now— "

"Let us chance it now," he said firm-ly, and pointed to the telephone. "Should she prove unreasonable, then we can try a less simple way. Kindly give me her number— and, of course, I should require to know her name."

She gave both, and sank into an easy chair as one exhausted. Before long she was aware that he was talking her her aunt.

"No, madam, not Mr. Brewster. A friend of Miss Somerset, your niece, is speaking... Where? Why, at the Planet Hotel! Yes, it's about your necklet, of course... No, it has not been handed over to Mr. Brewster. Your necklet is a thing of some value, and Mr. Brewster ought to have brought your written authority to receive it... Not necessary? Well, one can't be too careful, can one? But we need not go into that. The necklet is not going to be handed over to Mr Brewster. Allow me! Has Mr. Brewster your authority, as he suggests he has, to bring in the police?... Not exactly? Still, you have given him carte blanche. H'm! Kindly figure to yourself what will happen should Mr Brewster bring in the police. Eventually you would behold your niece in the dock and find yourself and Mr Brewster in the witness-box. Whatever the verdict, you would regret the prosecution, for, whether or not your niece went to gaol, she would be a heroine, while you would leave the court with an ugly stain on your character— the wealthy lady who would not help her own brother."

He paused, covering the mouthpiece to whisper. "Cheer up, Miss Somerset! I believe we are making progress."

Then—

"You see my point, madam? Thank you so much! Yes; publicity can be very horrid, especially for those who fancied they were in the right. No, no: I'm not saying you were altogether in the wrong. Still— yes? Yes? No; I regret I cannot advise Miss Somerset to come over in person and hand you the necklet in exchange for your promise of silence on the whole matter. That, to put it baldly, would be hardly good enough. As a matter of fact, the necklet can be restored only in exchange for your cheque for £5000, payable to Miss Somerset's father— your own brother. Preposterous? Well, hardly! I assure you I was never more serious. I am Miss Somerset's friend, but if I cannot serve her by inducing

you to grant the cheque. I shall serve myself by keeping your diamonds. What do I mean by that? Let me briefly describe the situation at this end. Miss Somerset and I are in a private room on the third floor. Downstairs, in the lounge Mr. Brewster— somewhat peevishly. I imagine— is playing sentry. Here Miss Somerset is resting in a chair, while I, as you know, am at the phone. Your necklet is in my pocket."

He halted to smile reassuringly to the girl.

"I have only," he resumed, "to walk out of this hotel, by a side door, and your diamonds are lost to you for ever. Who am I? Well in addition to being the friend of your niece, whom I have known for ten short minutes, I am what is popularly known as a crook— c-r-o-o-k— crook! In passing— pray keep calm— I may mention that I have handled jewels, compared with which yours are as dirt. Still, yours are quite worthwhile, and. as I've said, if you won't let them serve Miss Somerset, they shall serve me. Your protests are natural in the circumstances, madam; but now I must ask you, without delay, to decide, one way or the other. Will you agree to receive me, say, 15 minutes hence, and, in exchange for the necklet, hand me the cheque? Yes, or no? I'm trusting you not to have a detective under the table, so you may trust me not to come with a revolver. You want your diamonds; I want your cheque. That's all. Yes, or no?"

At last he put up the receiver, drew a breath of relief— or was it resignation?— and turned to Ethel.

"I had the feeling that she would fall to my little argument about the police," he said.

"She agrees?" "She agrees!"

"Oh, how clever of you to pretend you were a—"

"Pardon, but we must not lose time. I suggest that you return to the lounge and have tea, which. I am sure you need, and be nice to Mr. Brewster. Wait there, and in half an hour or so, I shall hope to fetch you the cheque."

"What am I to say to you?"

"Make sure of the cheque first!" His smile was rather dry.

He was holding open the door. As she passed out. he said, softly. "Thank you very much for trusting me."

She was in the lounge when he re-turned.

"Miss Somerset," he said, "your aunt has entrusted me with this cheque, which is to be delivered by you to your father."

"Oh!" whispered Ethel, staring at the big "£5000" and her aunt's heavy signature.

"Your aunt," he added, "is still a bit ruffled, but I fancy she will settle down to it before long."

"Won't you sit down?" said Ethal, breaking the silence. "You've overwhelmed me, but I do want to try to—"

"Alas, I dare not stay." ho replied "An urgent business call"— his mouth gave an odd half-humorous, half-pathetic twist— "and I'm leaving at once."

"Oh, dear! I— I'm sorry. May I know your name?"

He hesitated; then, for the second time, his eyes looked into hers.

"Miss Somerset, if you should remember me at all," he said, bowing over her head, "remember me kindly as No. 233."

He was gone: as through a mist she saw him pass through the hall a porter behind with his suitcases.

And all at once she understood. He had not lied to her aunt.

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21: Harringay's Choice

Otwell Binns (as by "Ben Bolt")

1872-1935

Sunday Times (Perth) 19 Jul 1931

HARRINGAY was the unholy limit and knew it. To some men self-knowledge such as his would have meant the illegitimate use of a razor, a pistol bullet or a stretch of hempen rope as the easiest and surest way of ridding themselves of such dire knowledge; but Harringay did not care. He accepted the facts and kept a Sigurd's sword between them and his peace of mind— a sword which took the form of a bottle of golden arrack which is potent stuff, capable of keeping troublesome thoughts at bay and indeed thrusting them into outer darkness. In a past that was not very remote, but which when he chanced to remember it seemed centuries away, he had been a gentleman; and in some things remained one, clinging as a man will to such rags of honor as he may.

He was careful for instance that none of those who would have been grieved by his swift descent to Avernus should know anything about it whatever— his widowed mother; the young brother still at Eton who bore a title to which he had no right whilst Harringay lived; the girl-wife whom he had married and three or four years ago left to a grass widowhood, which she believed had now lost its greenness and donned the crepe of the real thing.

For to all these, Harringay was dead. He had been at some pains to assure that. There had been a circumstantial account of his death from fever, in a Singapore paper, a precis of which had appeared in "*The Times*"; and since his grave was in the jungle of mid-Borneo, it was, safe from the visitation of even the most devoted widow. And now— one of the dead in life— he drifted up and down the Eastern Archipelago, on a buoy of arrack the long-distance toper, whom nothing but a shortage of his favorite tipple could dismay. In hackneyed words he had done with hope and honor; but the equally hackneyed phrase about dropping down the ladder rung by rung did not apply to him. He had slid down the ladder without using the rungs in one fierce glide; and now he was in the mud at the very bottom— he steamy malodorous mud of the East which is unrivalled in the two hemispheres. And somewhere in that mud he had left his trousers, the last rag of respect to which a white man clings, and now he was content with a disreputable sarong, which is something like a petticoat though on occasions it is a sash; and this garment was rounded off by native sandals, a dirty dungaree tunic without buttons and a grass hat with a crown that was like a steeple. But for his beard, which was of fiery hue, and his bleared eyes of a light blue, he might have passed for a coolie anywhere, for his face was tanned to the color of mahogany; and his polyglot tongue ran oftener to native speech than to that of his homeland; whilst he thought quite naturally in half the

dialects of the Archipelago according to the place where he chanced to be at the moment.

That is a picture of him, sketchy perhaps, but still a faithful likeness; and you can so behold him, loafing down the Jalen Pantai of Ternate, a trifle muzzy with arrack on which he had breakfasted, and enjoying equally the shade of the tamarind trees, and the splashes of hot sunlight which came through. He was in funds, and the funds meant arrack; and the arrack meant peace with all the world, watching the praus flitting like dark birds on the sea of cobalt; the scarlet lories screaming in the trees, under the clear hot sky which was stained by the smoke of a steamer that was making the anchorage below him.

Pausing, between the trees he watched the steamer for a little while, speculating on her identity. The K.P.M. boats were much of a muchness, but this one looked like the *Mangkasser*, on which he himself had begun his long pilgrimage through the islands, though now he was a stranger to her cabins, preferring the native praus or the crazy Chinese junks when he was perforce obliged to travel; as sometimes disgruntled authorities with no sympathy for down-and-out white men commanded.

As he watched the steamer idly, he had no regrets. He wondered whether Mynheer Gisbert was still her captain, and if the fat Dutch engineer who had introduced him to some of the mysteries of the East at Palembang still ran her engines; and then forgot both as he moved on, lurching a little in his walk.

Presently he reached the ancient jetty to find the steamer just tying-up, and took his stand with a number of native onlookers— merchants of sorts, with odd things to barter from pearls and gems to shrieking lories; and from old coins of the Dutch East India Company to Malay krises and birds of paradise plumes. He himself was no merchant, but sometimes he acted as interpreter; and could grow eloquent for his clients when there was a bottle of arrack in the offing. He had his standing there, and he waited with them, incuriously, on the off chance of a deal when the passengers landed to view the town.

They came at last, to be instantly surrounded by native vendors. There were less than a dozen of them; he surveyed them with lack-lustre eyes. There were, he noted, no less than seven ladies, five of them English, and two of them from their ample proportions unmistakably Dutch; and it was the English who fell victims to the vendors, for the Dutch women as he guessed were the wives of officials, with stolid souls not to be moved by the most curious of curios.

The five women were bunched together, and by them stood a tall young man in immaculate white ducks, who watched the scrimmage with laughing eyes; unmistakably an Englishman from canvas shoes of ultra specklessness to the crown of his expensive topee. Shouting voices drifted to Harringay as he waited. It was clear that the bargaining was fast and furious; and then the thing happened for which he waited. One of the merchants shouted to him, waving a

skinny brown arm, and he lurched forward towards the scrimmage which was opening out a little.

The man who had signalled him was engaged with a girl dressed in white silk; in whom the tall Englishman seemed to have a special interest; for now he stood by protectingly, albeit with laughter still lighting his grey eyes. The girl as Harringay approached had her head bent over a string of crystals— red Tourmaline, which his client had for sale; and Harringay was the medium through which its priceless value was to be explained. He began like any cheap jack at a fair, in a common voice that he used on such occasions, which had the advantage of arousing no particular interest in himself.

"Yo" can't beat 'em, miss. They're red Tourmaline, an' the best at that— no common green or black which are nearly as plentiful as bunker coal... An' the price... cheap as dirt. An' on a neck as pretty as your-"

He broke off sharply as the girl lifted her head; and under the topee revealed a cameo-like face of delicate beauty, with eyes that were dark as violets. She looked at him, and considered his beggar's raiment, then she asked austerely:

"You're English, aren't you?"

Harringay gasped at the question; and a little flurry of apprehension showed in his eyes as he hastened to deny the truth.

"Nope. U.S.A. Born an' reared in Cicero. Chicago."

Deliberately he gave the words a Yankee drawl, and as the girl continued to stare at him in something of a panic he jerked the steepled straw further down, over his eyes.

"A white man, anyway!" said the girl with a touch of contempt. "And Jackal to a Malay!"

Under his mahogany tan, Harringay flushed as he had not flushed for years. The tone cut like a whip; but he was not resentful; only afraid lest those violet eyes should flame with sudden recognition.

"A guy must live, an' even in Ternate—"

"A guy," she broke in, "must drink, I suppose."

"All show for raisin' a thirst," he owned with an affected brazenness.

"Faugh!" she made an indescribable little gesture that Harringay remembered only too well; having seen it for the first time, when he had reeled into his house in Cadogan Square, to face an indignant four-months' bride.

"And there's no Volstead Act here," he laughed thickly, deliberately stirring her disgust. "Yo' get the hooch anywhere you like. Prime liquor—"

"Oh, you are hopeless!" The lady stamped her foot in some indignation. "A disgrace to the whole white race—"

She broke off, and turned away, but the gem-merchant clung to her, jabbering to her about his wares in his native tongue, and finally she halted,

looked at the string of crystals a little covetously, and then glanced at the tall Englishman.

"Shall I buy them, Myles?"

"No, my dear!" laughed the man. "If your heart is set on them, I'll buy them for you."

The lady stretched a delicate hand and fingered the red crystals. Harringay watched that hand like a man fascinated. There was a wedding ring of platinum upon the ring-finger where he himself had once placed a circle of gold, and into his bleared eyes came the look of one staring into an unexpected abyss.

"God Almighty!" he muttered under his breath. "God—"

He looked at the immaculate Englishman. A clean-bred man, he decided, unimaginative, observing all the conventions of his class, and game to the finger tips. What would he say no, what would he do, if he knew the truth? The fellow was eyeing him with the cool insolence of his type. No doubt he was thinking here was a piece of dirt cast up by strange tides on this ultimate shore. If he were to beg he would throw him a guelden as he might throw a bone to a dog.

The thought angered Harringay mightily. He had had guelden— even less coins tossed to him in his time, and he had not shrunk from stooping to pick them from the dust; but if this fellow who had slipped into his shoes dared— He laughed ferociously at the thought of what he would do. He would blast the man with the truth, shrivel that white girl like a flower in a hot wind; light fires of horror in the violet eyes that he remembered so well and—

The man addressed him, breaking in on his insane thoughts.

"I say, fellow, how much does that man want for those beads?"

His tone was supercilious, his manner something beyond all condescension; plainly in his eyes the beach-comber was no more than part of the machinery of barter.

Fellow! Harringay surged with sudden heat; and volcanic words leaped to his lips. Then he caught sight of his own grimy sarong, the decrepit sandals on his feet, and saw himself through the other's eyes. The vision chilled the heat of wrath; froze on his lips the words that would have blasted the man like lightning: and he turned meekly to the vendor of gems, addressing him in fluent Malay. After a moment he answered the tall Englishman's question.

"Forty rix-dollars!"

"Offer him half," said the other, taking out his purse.

The offer was made. The gem-vendor protested violently, but finally closed the deal at thirty rix-dollars, and the necklace changed hands. The Englishman paid, then with a guelden held between finger and thumb looked at Harringay, who watched the coin with burning eyes. The other spoke.

"I suppose you're really the dealer's partner?"

"Do I look it?" snapped Harringay.

"By Jove, no; now you ask, you don't. You work on commission, perhaps?"

"Oh," laughed Harringay harshly. "I get my rake-off."

The tall one looked at the coin in his hand, then changed it for a larger one.

"If a rix-dollar would be any use to you—"

He stopped as he caught the look in Harringay's face— a look of almost demoniac rage. The blue eyes were flaming, the mouth under the red moustache working with strong emotion; and suddenly the words came fiercely, emphatic as an oath.

"Keep your blasted charity!"

The Englishman was amazed, as perhaps he had reason to be. But he merely shrugged his shoulders, dropped his coin back into his purse, and turned away.

"Come, Kathy."

His air of proprietorship was like a blow to Harringay, who took a sharp step forward as if to intervene, but a second later thought better of it, and halted, standing still as an image watching the pair walk away.

"Kathy!" he muttered to himself, "Kathy!"

It was odd, he thought that the second man should use the pet name that he had used; and ironic that fate should arrange that he should hear it and be stirred to envy by the hearing. Then he looked at the pair walking away— the white girl who was his wife, the upstanding, spruce Englishman who thought he was her husband, or so he guessed.

But perhaps it was as well to be sure; for here was a complication that had not occurred to him when he buried himself in that non-existent grave in the Borneo bush. Then, as the thought came to him there happened a thing which provided him with an excuse to ask his question.

A Malay, walking on the quay, got in the way of the pair, and with the arrogance of his race made no haste to step aside; instead he stood there and nonchalantly spat a whole mouthful of the juice of the betel-nut he was chewing almost at the lady's feet. The tall Englishman flamed at the insult. With sudden heat he lifted an arm and swept the native aside.

"Out of the way you filthy swine!" The Malay crashed: some of his fellows laughed, and he picked himself up convulsed of face, gesticulating in an odd way. Then took to his heels, running along the wharf and up the Jalen Pantal like a man with a very definite purpose.

Harringay watched him go with a calculating eye. The laugh must have stung, and a Malay, as he well knew, was a man of immense pride and self esteem. There was that in the Malayan make-up which forbade the calm acceptance of the insult he had suffered. One might kick a Javanese into the gutter and walk on unconcernedly; but a Malay was a different matter. The pride of kings was his and he was liable, on insult to that pride, to go off on the deep end in a most unreasonable way. The tall Englishman, with that half-blow

awakening deadly passion, had called into being a deeper trouble than he knew. Harringay, knowing that, turned quickly to one of the other men who had landed from the *Mangkassar*.

"Who is that Englishman?" he demanded in a tone that made the other stare at him curiously, as he answered, tersely

"Sir Myles Barfield!"

"And the girl?"

"Girl!" The man laughed. "That is Lady Barfield. They are on their honeymoon."

"Indeed!"

Harringay had guessed as much; but gave no sign. His eyes went to the native hurrying under the arched trees of the Jalen Pantai. then back to Barfield and the lady. For a second he hesitated, then he spoke sharply.

"Tell him to go to the ship at once, and take his lady with him."

"Why?"

"There will be trouble. You saw what happened. He struck that Malay, and no man of his race will stand for that... Tell him to go... to take the lady with him quickly."

He moved away, but watched the man to whom he had spoken, deliver his message; and saw the tall Englishman laugh and shake his head.

"Fool!" he muttered to himself. "Fool!"

The pair sauntered along the jetty, stopping now and again to watch the shoals of fish which moved in the crystal-clear water; or to stare at the coral and other sea-growths of the submarine garden where the shoals were moving Harringay watched them, with a troubled look in his blue eyes.

"Lady Barfield!" he murmured musingly. "Lady Barfield... Well, here's Drury Lane come to Ternate!"

He saw the situation as an outsider acquainted with all facts, might have seen it; and knew that it was dramatic The man had treated him contemptuously and it was in his power to retaliate with a Jove's thunder-bolt; but he would not, no! Kathy, though she was always a little on the starchy side— "too wise and good for human nature's daily food," at any rate for such an one as himself— in the old days had been more forbearing than he might have expected, and he owed it to her not to suffer a resurrection, a thousand fold so now, since she was Lady Barfield. Lord! If she knew the truth! It would kill her with shame, or send her to a nunnery to hide herself for ever more. And she was not to blame. That account of his death in the Borneo jungle had been very circumstantial, and she had waited four year's— years that to him were like centuries as he considered them, for the old days seen through his arrack-clouded brain were very remote. And no one would ever know! Things would go on as they were, and Kathy would be Lady Barfield to the end, when, full of

years and honor, they laid her in the family mausoleum! He laughed a little grimly.

"Dead men tell no tales," he muttered, "not even to their wives."

He looked again at the pair. They were now at the far end of the Jetty, and on the point of turning. Probably they would go up the Jalen Pantai to see the sights and—

A shout broke on his thoughts. He turned swiftly in the direction from which it came, for it rang with alarm and warning. Then he saw. The Malay whom Sir Myles Barfield had swept aside had returned, and was running along the jetty. He had a native kris in his hand— a kris shaped like a quivering flame; and there was a white foam about his mouth whilst his eyes were those of a mad dog. There was, more wild shouting, a running for boltholes and any place that would ofter shelter: and then one in his flight crossed the Malays path. The kris flickered in the sunshine and the unfortunate man went down, his neck half cloven, whilst the kris now flickered red.

"Amok! Amok!"

The cry rang along the Jetty. On the deck of the Mangkassar a Dutch officer took quick aim with a pistol, but missed; and the Malay ran on.

The Jetty had emptied so fast that now between the madman and the far end of it there remained but four people, a native, Sir Myles Barfield and his lady, and Harringway. The native, as the man with the kris drew nearer, took the quickest way for safety and flung himself into the sea. From the *Mangkassar*'s deck men were shouting hoarse warnings to the Englishman and his bride. Others had already started in pursuit of the murderer, whose objective was now quite definitely realised by them; for, instead of keeping to his original line in the centre of the jetty the man had veered to the side where were the Englishman and his lady. That he meant to make his kill there was as plain as print, and unless the Englishman was armed nothing it seemed could save him and that white lady with the violet eyes.

Harringay saw that he himself was safe— outside the killer's line. But even as he realised that he knew that it was up to him to act since no one else could do. And he acted, chuckling grimly as be began to run.

"Here's where I pay— what's due!" He raced across the jetty to intercept the Malay, giving a wild shout to divert the other's attention from the pair who now were halted not a dozen yards away, the woman behind the man and both between the raging devil of a Malay and the deep sea. It was touch and go. The man ran faster than he did, and if he passed before their lines crossed, Harringay knew that he could not overtake him in time to avert the tragedy.

"God—" he whispered, pantingly. "God—"

It was a prayer of sorts, and, perhaps, it was heard. Anyway, he was level with the Malay when their lines met. The native saw him, guessed his purpose,

no doubt, and swung his kris in a sideward stroke. The terrible blade caught Harringay in the neck, but did not stop his rush. With his very last effort of will he thrust with both hands, and the madman close to the edge of the jetty shot off it into the water, followed by the man who had thwarted his purpose. Both came up in the sea that was dyed red with the Englishman's life blood, and the Malay swimming like a fish, carrying his kris in his teeth, made for the wooden ladder. But in the island justice may be swift. It is every man's right and duty to slay such a killer, and the officer who had fired from the *Mangkassar*'s deck, and who had been among the pursuers, took the obligation on himself. Before the Malay reached the ladder he fired twice: and a pair of brown hands shot up in the sunlight; and the brown body sank like a stone in the clear water.

Lady Barfield, when the danger was over, fainted, and her husband carrying her in his arms towards the *Mangkassar*, paused for a moment as they dragged Harringay from the water.

"How—" he began.

"Dead as a stone Mynheer. The Malay got him in the jugular."

"Who was he?"

"Heavens knows! The Islands are full of such flotsam."

"Flotsam! He had courage! But for him—"

"Yes, Mynheer! You'll owe him a proper funeral."

"I know what's due, of course. He shall have it."

And sure enough that very day Harringay was honored in death as he had not been in life: and from the Shades no doubt laughed ironically with the Fates who so mix up the lives of men.

———————

22: A Dog's Life

Fred M. White

1859-1935

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TO BEGIN WITH, Mr. John Maggs, of somewhere in Bethnal Green, derived his inspiration from the 'gossip' column of his favorite evening paper. More than once he had derived considerable unearned increment from the same source. Paragraphs anent the rich and powerful and their treasures of gold and silver— especially gold stored away in remote country houses with owners blissfully unaware of the Maggs tribe on the lookout for such costly trifles. For that was precisely the sort of man John Maggs was. By day a worker in a garage, by night a lover of nocturnal rides on a motor bicycle but always with an eye to ultimate income.

He liked that bit in the evening Press about Sir Walter Rumbelow of Brayside, near Margate, and the account of his wonderful collection of gold coins. Not as numismatic specimens, but as sterling which he knew how to melt down and dispose of at its full market value. Portable, too, Maggs reflected.

So in due course, Maggs took a long week-end holiday together with his motor cycle. He located the cliffs of Bray from a guidebook, and found that Brayside was a large modern house on high ground overlooking the sea; indeed, the front of it was within three hundred yards of the cliff which at that point was as many feet above the tideway with two paths running along the basaltic bastion on which the house was perched. A score of yards below the wall, fencing Brayside from the cliff, was a sort of footpath which was a right of way and unfenced, and this path met with Mr. Maggs' decided approval. Firstly, because it was public and, in the next place, because a climb up the precipitous slope afforded an easy access to the grounds of Brayside House.

Of a second public path down below and not more than a score of feet from high water mark, Maggs knew nothing. It was no sort of concern, anyway. Nor was he particularly keen on the upper path save for the fact that it was a distinct convenience. He was not accustomed to cliffs and that alarming steep slope ending three hundred feet below in the sea made him giddy and gave him an unpleasant sensation in the pit of his stomach.

It looked to him that if a bloke happened to slip off the upper path he would be certain to drop to the bottom like a stone and dash his brains out on the rocks fringing the water. Had he known of the lower path not far above high water mark he might have been easier in his mind. Here and there, due to the passing of time or erosion, were long slides of slippery shale, and Maggs— not devoid of imagination— could picture a cove setting that grey avalanche in motion and after that— Blimey!

As a matter of fact the danger was not as bad as it looked. Maggs might have seen that had it not been for a thick fringe of larch trees far down the giddy slope. These half hid the sea and by so doing, heightened the suggestion of a sheer precipice. The more Maggs studied the situation the less he liked it.

But if he was to enter the grounds of Brayside House and come away again in comparative safety, there was no way save by the cliff path. That must form his entry and his egress unless he was prepared to take serious risks. And he was not prepared to take any risks that could be avoided.

Therefore, the attack must be made from the upper cliff path and once having made up his mind to this, Maggs proceeded to commit to memory the exact lie of the land. More than that, he contrived to enter the area of operations by the simple process of swarming up the few feet of cliff above the public path and climbing into the domain sacred to Sir Walter Rumbelow. Lying perdu in a thicket of heather and gorse, for— save the lawns and garden— the owner had left the terrain in its wild beauty, the marauder had a full view of the house. Facing him, and not more than a hundred yards away, was the library where he knew those precious coins reposed in their locked cases.

A big room with three long windows. Maggs knew this because he had learnt so much from a gossip in the village public house. Moreover, the gossip aforesaid was a jobbing carpenter who did work for Sir Walter from time to time. An old man, he had in his youth actually seen Brayside House built. Maggs regarded this Joe Gittens as a distinct manifestation of providence. He was as good as a guide and a plan of the house combined.

Let it not be assumed that Maggs was taking undue risks in discussing Brayside House and its owner with Gittens. When the inevitable happened— and Maggs was sanguine on that head— it was inevitable also that Gittens would open his heart on the subject to the stranger who asked so many questions anent the place and was so liberal on the score of alcoholic refreshment.

But that Maggs was prepared for and had fully discounted in advance. In reality Gittens had never seen the real Maggs or Watkins, as he preferred to call himself. As Watkins he presented a man with a thick thatch of silver grey plus Victorian side whiskers and a chin beard, the long upper lip being bare. Add a pair of brass-rimmed spectacles and the disguise was complete.

Nor did Magg's precautions end there. If the raid proved a success, it was necessary to provide some rapid means of transport to a haven of safety before Sir Walter's servants discovered their employer's loss in the morning. The motor cycle was ready and snugly hidden not far off, for Maggs had not been so unwise as to come into the village riding his trusty steed. A disused barn and a bale of rotten hay afforded the necessary cover.

Add to these strategic advantages the fact that Sir Walter Rumbelow was away from home for some days, and it will be seen that Maggs had little or nothing to fear— save one thing.

There was no moon and the weather for the time of year was mild, but there was a little more fog hanging about than the burglar liked. There was fog at night and far into the morning, that blanket of fog which is one of the characteristics of the south coast in late autumn, especially when there was no wind as at the moment. And this fact worried Maggs because he would be compelled to follow the cliff path round the headland after securing the swag because it was imperative to avoid the village and the motor cycle lay in ambush in an opposite direction.

The thought of that, to him perilous walk in utter darkness oppressed him like a nightmare. He knew that he could easily strike the cliff path after the raid, but if that cursed fog held, he might take a step too far and finish his career at the foot of the cliff and end as 'found drowned.' Still an occasional gleam from his flashlight might avert tragedy. But the fog held and on the third night, just before closing time, Maggs bade farewell to his village gossip.

"Just time for one more," he said heartily. "Make the most of it for I leave to-morrow. Back to work, old sport, more's the pity. Well, so long. Take care of yourself."

So, with every preparation made and his modest baggage on his back, Maggs set out on his errand. Up to a certain point the road along the cliff was easy—a wall on one side and a thick hedge on the other. Even in the fog no danger was to be feared so far. But, once beyond a wicket gate, the trouble began. So many yards would have to be traversed ere it was necessary to start climbing upwards at a right angle, until the boundary wall of Sir Walter's domain was reached. And these steps with his heart in his mouth Maggs counted. Just a hundred and seventeen of these he registered, then turned left and began to swarm up the heather clad slope until, with a sigh of relief he bumped into the boundary wall. He dropped over on the far side on to what seemed like turf under his feet. So far, so good.

He crept on and on in the dead silence of the place until the house itself loomed up before him ghostly in the fog. Maggs was feeling easier now for he possessed a fine geographical sense and, moreover, he had visualised the landscape inch by inch by daylight. It was as if he had the whole world to himself. And, in the midst of it, a haunted house, forsaken and deserted. Not a single glimmer of light to be seen anywhere. Probably the whole domestic staff had taken French leave and gone off to the weekly dance in the parish hall.

Not that Maggs was banking on this probability. He scouted round to the back of the house and thence to the garage, the door of which was open and no

sign of the chauffeur in the blank window of his quarters overhead. No doubt Sir Walter had taken the car with him on his temporary departure from his home.

Then the house was deserted. What blinkin' luck. Given one uninterrupted hour, or less, and Maggs would be away round the cliff path in search of the hidden motor-cycle awaiting him. And, if his luck held good, he would be home and asleep before those servants had discovered the robbery.

Then back again to the front of the house. He stood on the ledge of the centre library window, working back the catch with a thin-bladed knife. It was as easy as kiss me 'and. The thick velvet curtains cautiously parted, Maggs was inside. There was a warm, comfortable smell of leather and underfoot a carpet so thick and soft that it was possible to move without the slightest sound. A quick flash round with a pocket lamp and Maggs caught his breath.

Yes, there the boodle was— glittering and winking in the glow, thousands of coins, a large proportion of them gold. It was compact stuff that could be easily stowed away in a big inside pocket, and every ounce of it saleable at its face value— at least two thousand pounds as mere metal; the find of a lifetime.

Maggs wasted no further time. Ere long most of those thin scraps of precious metal were transferred to his capacious pocket, and no sign of life within a hundred miles.

And then suddenly there came a sort of glow through the thick curtains and what sounded like the hum of a car. After that voices in the hall and a flash of illumination, as if somebody had switched on the lights outside the library.

"Dashed funny thing, Monty, old chap," one voice said. "But where the deuce is everybody? Withers, Withers, WITHERS."

The cry echoed through the house, but the mysterious Withers had no reply. Withers was non est.

"Nice game," the voice went on. "Dear old Nunky away and the servants off on some beano. Dashed if they haven't taken the faithful hound with 'em. You hang on here for a sec. Monty, whilst I go and have a look round."

"Righto, old fruit," the invisible Monty rejoined.

Maggs felt his way silently in the direction of the window. By sheer good luck he found his way there without disturbing any article of furniture en route. Who were these intruders, he asked himself, blowing in so unexpectedly. Relations of the old bloke, of course. And hadn't one of them said something about a dog? Maggs had seen no dog, he didn't want to see a dog— no right-minded burglar ever does. Noisy yapping brutes.

Maggs was outside the window now, intent on making his way without delay to the spot where the motor-cycle awaited him. Once astride of that, he had little to fear. There was just a chance that those toffs might enter the library and if they did.....

Maggs didn't want to think of it. All he wanted, like the Arabs in the poem, was to fold his tent and silently steal away.

Outside the fog still dripped and clung. But Maggs knew his way. He had only to follow his nose and reach the boundary wall, then drop over into the heather, make a bee line for the cliff path, and thence to the cycle and safety. He hated the idea of that cliff path in the fog and inky darkness, but, once clear, an occasional pinpoint of flame from the pocket torch would suffice to guide him to safety and the high road to home, sweet home.

He pushed on resolutely until the wall was close at hand. And then he was conscious of a sort of asthmatic wheezing a few inches behind him and something moist and damp and cold pressing against his left leg. Snakes in the heather, perhaps; Maggs had heard of such things— vipers that bit and sometimes killed people. It was only by sheer will that Maggs refrained from a shout.

But he must see what the perishin' thing was. Even if he ran a risk, he must know. He turned down the nozzle of his torch so that the pencil of light showed only on the ground, and then he saw something that brought his heart into his mouth.

There, within two inches of his leg, was an enormous bulldog showing a magnificent set of teeth in a ferocious grin.

"Erump, tump, tump," quoth the bulldog, in the rich, fruity baritone of his clan. "Erump, burp, parp."

With one wild yell Maggs flung himself over the wall and raced down the heathery slope in search of safety. All he wanted in that hectic moment was to place as much air and space as possible between himself and the animal, which he sub-consciously recognised as the 'faithful hound' alluded to in the fragmentary conversation he had heard in the library a few minutes ago.

In his headlong panic he raced across the cliffs without realising that he had crossed the path and plugged down the precipitous slope at the foot of which lay the sea. And, in so doing, he alighted on a wide bed of loose shale such as he had noticed when spying out the lie of the land. His feet slid from under him and, sprawling on the flat of his back, he set the shale in motion, and down he went as if he were slithering to perdition on the face of an avalanche. In vain he turned and twisted and clutched in an endeavor to obtain some sort of a grip, but the more he struggled the faster the loose erosion rumbled downwards towards the waves breaking on the rocks at the foot of the cliff. The crash and grind of the sea sounded in his ears like the crack of doom. In vain to cry out, in vain to scream for help with the fog blanketing his voice and black darkness before his eyes. A few seconds and there was an end of John Maggs!

Somewhere overhead the bulldog was wailing like a lost soul. But not so loudly as Maggs some 200 feet below.

Those few seconds of long-drawn out agony seemed like years to the unhappy marauder. Down, down he went with a crash and rumble of sliding shale until, in a state of mental paralysis, he shot clean over square bluff into space and, for a few moments, remembered no more. Then the crushing impact.

But not the crash he dreaded. Some hard substance struck him in the small of the back and knocked all the wind out of him. Something that seemed to sway and toss and yet hold him in a close grip. Not so far from the water either, because Maggs could hear the swish and suck of the tide unpleasantly close. Then, as his scattered senses began to reassemble, he recognised dimly the thing that had happened.

His fall had been broken and his body supported by the latteral branch of some trees perched on the cliff side. It was a wide, flat branch that smelt like fir of some kind. If he could only reach the bottom of it! But at the slightest movement the branch swayed ominously and the paralysing fear came back again. Another slip and the adventure would be definitely finished.

It was so dark, too, and the fog as thick as ever. Maggs could hear it dripping around him like the flopping of so many frogs. Not a breath of wind moving, silence everywhere.

It was 'ard, crool 'ard, Maggs told himself, with tears of self-pity in his eyes; but better, perhaps, than being a mangled corpse on the rocks below. All the same, he was just as much a prisoner now as if he had been chained by the leg or behind stone walls. Here he was with his pockets bulging with gold and that blinkin' motor cycle, and safety, only half a mile away.

Perhaps he might get away with it yet. If only he could see something of the lie of the land! But in his headlong flight from that perishin' dog he had dropped his torch. There was nothing for it but to wait till daylight and then see if it were possible to scramble up the cliff and make a dash for the cycle before the world began to wake to another morn. A slim chance, but not impossible. And hours of this yet.

Gradually Maggs dozed off. He had sunk deeper into his cradled bower, and no longer feared a fall. The doze faded into a dream and the dream into a sound sleep—

WHEN MAGGS finally awoke it was morning, early morning with a smudge of smoky light overhead and a lifting of the atmosphere, but no breath of wind yet and no fading of the blanket of fog. So thick was it still that Maggs could not see two yards beyond his nose. He could hear the ominous growl of the sea below and the cry of the gulls— beyond that, nothing.

If only that perishin' fog would lift!

Came at length sounds of life behind the thick curtain of blinding mist. Voices! A faint puff of wind. Another. Overhead a pallid sphere like a new

cheese. The sun at last! Then the fog rolled back fold upon fold as a moving curtain might do and the palpitating Maggs could see at last.

"Luv a duck," he blubbered, "luv a duck. If I'd only knowed. Crool luck. An' me orl the time—"

He was lying on the lateral branch of a weather-scarred and stunted cedar-tree barely fifteen feet in height and overhanging the lower path, which was not far above high water mark.

Absolute safety in his grasp. Almost. But not quite.

For on the path, looking up at him and showing that splendid range of teeth, was the cause of all the mischief.

"Erump, tump, tump," said the bulldog. "Wrupp."

Along the path came a large man in thigh gaiters and rough shooting jacket— evidently a gamekeeping sort of person. He looked at the dog and followed the direction of his upturned, blunt nose. And saw Maggs on his perch.

"Seemin'ly," he said, "Seemin'ly you be the bloke what we 'uns be lookin' for. Come down."

"That's torn it," Maggs almost wept.

———————

23: A Straightforward Case

Thomas Cobb

1854-1932

Sunday Times (Perth) 3 May 1931

MR. DICKENSON had never had such a shock in his life.

After an anxious night his peace of mind had been restored, at eight o'clock in the morning, by the announcement that a man-child had been born to him. Not being on the telephone he walked to the recently-erected public box in the next street— a quiet cul-de sac— with the intention of communicating the good news to his mother-in- law, but on approaching same he came to a sudden halt

Through the glass door he could see a man's head, the owner of which appeared to be sitting on the floor asleep. On advancing and opening the door however. Mr. Dickenson discoverer that the man was dead. He was sitting in a pool of blood and, as soon as the newly-made father had recovered sufficient self-possession he leaned forward across the dreadful occupant of the box, seized the suspended directory, found the number of the local police station, and described his appalling discovery.

In a very short time, Detective-Inspector Poore was on the spot, with Sergeant West and a constable wheeling an ambulance. The corpse was removed to the mortuary, and Mr Dickenson was at liberty to telephone to his wife's mother.

The dead man was apparently about forty, well dressed, with a watch still on his wrist, and money in his purse so that the object of the crime could not have been robbery. Also a letter was found in his pocket, addressed to

Hugh Westfield, Esq.,
23, King Alfred's-road,
Haverstock Hill, N.W.3.

Death, which must have taken place several hours earlier, was obviously due to the bullet wound in the left breast, and the first thing to be done was to drive across London to King Alfred's-road. The door of No. 23 was opened directly Inspector Poore entered the front garden, by an anxious looking, dark-haired woman of two or three and thirty.

"Oh!" she cried, on the threshold, "I know you have brought bad news of my husband!"

She had not seen him since he kissed her "good-bye" on leaving for his Office shortly after nine the previous morning, and now entering the hall, it was the Inspector's painful duty to break the news that she would never see him again alive.

A few minutes later, she was sitting in the dining-room, explaining between heart-broken sobs, that she had expected Hugh home as usual between half-past six and seven on Monday evening; that she had waited and waited, staying up the live-long night, hoping in vain, and at last making up her mind to telephone to Scotland Yard when she saw the stranger at her gate

Mr. Westfield, as Inspector Poore gathered, was a solicitor, with office in Maxwell Buildings, Southampton Row.

"Do you know," asked the detective "of anything likely to take him to the neighborhood of Blackheath, where his body was found?" As she shook her head while tears ran down her cheeks Poore continued, "or can you suggest anyone who may have had a grudge against Mr. Westfield?"

"No one," she answered. "No one in the world— with the exception of his partner."

Pressed for further information, she explained that Mr. Hammond had bought the partnership nearly two years ago— the beginning of incessant trouble and disagreement. There was only one point upon which, the two men did not differ, the desirability of a dissolution at the earliest possible moment. The difficulty was that Mr Hammond declined to withdraw until his capital was refunded.

With obvious reluctance, Mrs. Westfield told Inspector, Poore that Hugh had never succeeded in recovering the ground which had been lost during his absence in France. It he had not been in difficulties, he would never have entered into the partnership. The money which Mr. Hammond had paid for his share had soon gone, and Hugh would have done anything in his power to raise fifteen hundred pounds to get rid of him.

"But," Mrs. Westfield insisted, "though it is true that no two men could have been on much worse terms, of course I am not insinuating for a moment that Mr. Hammond had a hand in Hugh's death. That would be too absurd."

In Poore's opinion, however, there was at least room for further investigation. Meanwhile he was compelled to ask Mrs. Westfield to accompany him to Blackheath to identify the body. Never, in all his considerable experience, had be seen a woman more thoroughly overcome by grief, especially when she inspected the various little odds and ends from her husband's pockets— his cigarette case, his pocket-book, his watch, his bunch of keys.

"As far as you can tell," suggested the Inspector, "there is nothing missing— none of his keys, for instance?"

"I don't know exactly how many there were," she answered. "But I can't see his fountain pen— It was mounted with gold, and had his initials engraved. I gave it to him last year on our wedding-day."

An hour later that Tuesday morning, Detective-Inspector Poore was entering the well-appointed offices on the first floor of Maxwell Buildings, and a few

moments afterwards, he was taken to the room of the junior partner, a fair-haired, dapper-looking, smartly-dressed man of about thirty-five. After listening to the detective's statement, he was silent for what seemed a long time.

"It seems scarcely credible," he said at last. "As a matter of fact, I was just thinking of ringing up King Alfred's-road to ask whether anything was amiss. Wakefield is never later than a quarter to ten."

"When did you see him last, Mr. Hammond?"

"At a few minutes past six yesterday afternoon. The clerks always take care to get away at the tick of the clock. I looked into his room after I had put on my hat."

"Then you left him alone in this office?"

"He often stayed pottering about after everyone had gone," said Hammond.

"Can you suggest any reason for his going to Blackheath?"

"I can swear that he had no business to take him in that direction. I know nothing whatever of his private affairs."

"What," asked the Inspector, "was Mr. Westfield doing when you looked into his room?"

"Sitting at his. table, smoking a cigarette and looking over a lease."

"Was there anything in the document to suggest where he might be likely to go on leaving here?" said Poore. "Perhaps you'll allow me to see it," he added, whereupon Hammond left the room and after a brief absence, returned with a. folded blue paper in his hand— the lease of a house in Bellini-avenue, Camden Town, which would expire next Midsummer Day, the lessor being John Roone, of Camden-road, the lessee Daniel Casey— "gentleman."

"Our client," Hammond explained, as he stood looking over the Inspector's shoulder, "is Roone. As it's a pre-war lease, the house would fetch double the rent to-day. Last month Casey died intestate, and letters of administration have been applied for by his cousin, a man named Rickman, a shady customer, a bookie, in fact. He lives in a street off Tottenham Court-road. Roone offers to forego six months' rent and the dilapidations, in return for immediate possession. A fairly liberal offer—"

"Which Rickman refuses!" exclaimed Inspector Poore in a significant tone.

"Do you know the man?" demanded Hammond.

"I knew Dan Casey, anyhow," said the detective. "A rascally old fence with a patriarchal beard and a sanctimonious voice. You may recollect," continued Poore, "the burglary at Lord Ambury's place in Dovercourt Gardens six months or so ago. I was a sergeant at the Yard at the time. A man named Hogbin got five years, and Casey was charged with receiving, but as usual the artful old devil managed to keep on the safe side. I went through his house in Bellini-avenue, and though it's true that I drew blank, I could swear he had something stowed away in it— perhaps, even the Ambury pearls— worth a king's ransom. Do you

know," asked the Inspector, "whether Mr. Westfield had any idea who Casey really was?"

"The fact is," answered Hammond, "that Boone had some sort of suspicion, and gave us a hint."

"It's pretty clear," said Poore, "why Hickman refused your client's offer. He knew too much about Casey to give up possession till he had gone over the house with a fine toothcomb."

"But, surely," suggested Hammond, "it's scarcely conceivable that Casey, if he ever handled the pearls, would have kept them by him all these months."

"Quite conceivable," Inspector Poore insisted. "The old man knew we were keeping a sharp look-out. He never ran risks. After all, Mr. Hammond, it wasn't so much the question whether the necklace was in the house, but whether Hickman thought it might be. Now what I should like to know it this: Did Mr. Westfield share his suspicion?"

"Rather a far-fetched theory, Inspector!"

"I understand," the detective persisted, "that Mr. Westfield was extremely anxious to put his hand on fifteen hundred pounds—"

"Oh, well," Hammond interrupted, "as Mrs. Westfield has been talking, I may as well say that I was grossly misled, but, anyhow, it's a bit too thick to hint that Westfield was capable, of sticking to property which he knew to be stolen."

"You overlook the fact," said Poore, "that the reward for the recovery of the pearls is still open— two thousand pounds! Lady Ambury would be too thankful to get them back to ask inconvenient questions. My object is to follow Mr. Westfield's footsteps from the time he left here yesterday. The Question is: Which way did he go? I think," the Inspector added, "it's good enough to have a word with Mr. Roone."

Oh reaching Camden-road, however, he heard that Mr. Roone had gone out to luncheon, and, in fact, Poore bad to hang about till four o'clock before there was an opportunity to question him. He was naturally deeply distressed, especially as he had seen Mr. Westfield shortly after half-past six the previous day, when he had called on his way home from the office.

"He was acting for me," Mr. Roone explained, "in connection with one of my properties in Bellini-avenue. A question of delapidations. He wanted to look over the house and had called on his way home to ask whether I had a key."

"Had you?" demanded the Inspector.

"As it happened, I had. After Casey's sudden death, I went to have a word with his housekeeper. She had two keys of the front, door and made no bones about giving me one. I thought it plight be useful."

"And you gave it to Mr. Westfield yesterday evening," suggested Poore.

"He stood where you're standing now," said Mr. Roone, "and put it on his own bunch— poor fellow!"

The Inspector now lost no time in going to No. 9 Bellini-avenue, a secluded row of semi-detached houses with small front gardens. The winter afternoon was already beginning to grow dusky, but a glance at the front door, by the aid of his electric torch, at once convinced him that the lock was beyond his ability to manipulate with the few pieces of wire in his pocket. Going round by the side of the house, he had no difficulty in pushing back the catch and getting in through the scullery window, when the first thing was to test the electric light, which he found had not, been disconnected.

Detective-Inspector Poore's purpose was not to seek the Ambury pearls on the present occasion, but rather to find evidence of Hugh Westfield's presence on the previous evening. He might, for instance, have dropped his fountain pen in the house. So that the detective set himself to follow the course which a suppositions treasure hunter might have taken. In the first place, he explored the basement, then mounting to the top landing, worked his way slowly down again, peering into every nook and corner.

On reaching the ground floor, he opened the sitting-room door and switching on the light came at once to the conclusion. that Mr. Rickman would not get much for the furniture. Everything looked shabby, the crimson curtains, the cretonne-covered chairs, the faded, threadbare carpet.

As he advanced farther into the room he suddenly halted, gazing down at a dark patch on the floor between the fender and the table. Stooping, he passed his hand over the stain. It was still damp— blood, he could swear, blood recently spilt!

Standing upright again, but with his eyes on the tell-tale spot, Detective-Inspector Poore thought that he was now in a position to carry Hugh Westfield's movements further.

To begin with he had been intensely eager to obtain possession of fifteen hundred pounds in order to get rid of Hammond, his uncongenial partner. He had probably taken the trouble to establish the truth of Mr. Roone's innuendoes concerning Dan Casey and learning of the old fence's alleged connection with the Ambury robbery, had come to the conclusion that there was at least a possibility that the pearls were secreted in the house at Bellini avenue, j

This conclusion may have been strengthened by Rickman's refusal to accept Mr. Roone's offer, and Westfield, in desperate need of money, had determined to make a personal search. On leaving Maxwell Buildings on Monday, shortly after six, he had gone to Camden-road and asked for the key. With this in his pocket, he had made his way to Bellini-avenue, switched on the j light, and gone from room to room.

Now in the sitting-room, where the Inspector was at present standing, was an old-fashioned mahogany bookcase, the lower part of which consisted of four

drawers. The front of the highest let down, disclosing a kind of writing-desk— just the place for a secret receptacle.

Assuming that Rickman had refused to give up possession of the house in the hope of finding the pearls hidden away in it, he would naturally visit it from time to time— what if he had come at about seven o'clock yesterday evening, what if he had seen the light in the sitting-room, stealthily opened the door and discovered Westfield in the act of investigating the bookcase?

In this event, he might jump to the conclusion that he had been forestalled, that the intruder had already succeeded in finding what he had failed to discover. It was probable that he had never come into personal contact with Mr. Roone's solicitor until that moment, their communications having taken place through the post.

Rickman might have demanded that Westfield should turn out his pockets, a struggle might have followed, though it seemed unlikely that Dan Casey's cousin would have been armed with a gun. The fact remained that blood had certainly been spilt in that room, and it was obvious that more must be learnt of Mr. Rickman at the earliest opportunity.

The Inspector looked at his watch and saw that there was every reason to expect to find Hammond still at his office. Having let himself out by the front door, he took a taxi to Maxwell Buildings, and was conducted at once to the junior partner's room.

It was impossible not to be struck by the man's appearance. On hearing the news of Westfield's death the same morning, he had shown admirable self-command, and little emotion, but now his face had grown haggard, he had lost his jauntiness.

"Anything fresh?" he exclaimed. "Upon my soul, Inspector, I haven't been able to get Westfield out of my mind for an instant since you were here. It seems impossible that he can be dead. I can't grasp it."

"I thought," said Poore, "that I should like a word with Rickman if you will give me his address— a street off Tottenham Court-road, you said."

Hammond's hand trembled as he turned over some of the papers on his writing-table, till he found the folded blue lease which the Inspector had glanced through on his earlier visit. On the reverse side, a few words were pencilled.

"The address is 5 Bedington-street," said Hammond, whereupon Poore promptly made his way downstairs again, and re-entered the taxi which he had kept.

Number 5, Bedington-street, was a tobacconist's shop, with a private door in addition, with three bells, under two of which were small brass plates. In the window was exhibited a choice selection of reading matter, as well as packets of cigarettes, and behind the counter stood Mr. Farwell, the tobacconist, a huge

man who wore a brown knitted, long-sleeved waistcoat, with-out a coat. He had a wooden leg, and was smoking an enormous briar root pipe.

"Is Mr. Rickman at home?" asked the Inspector.

"Come to that," answered Farwell, "he hasn't set a toot outside all day. He came down this morning for a packet of cigarettes, and queer enough he looked."

Poore was on the alert at once.

"Queer— how was that?" he suggested.

"You see, he'd had a smash-up out Enfield way, he said it was."

"He owns a car, then!"

"One he picked up for a song six months ago," said Farwell.

The Inspector was not accustomed to wear his heart on his sleeve, but nevertheless it was difficult to hide his excitement.

"And you say he had a smash-up last night," he exclaimed.

"Yes, and a heavy man like him can't stand a toss as well as one of your build. I'm not what you call a dwarf, and he can give me a couple of stone easy. His hand got cut pretty bad."

"Did he show it to you?"

'Why, no, not to say show it. He said it had bled something awful, and when he came down this morning it was smothered in bandages all up the arm— the left, the one he had broken when the racecourse gang set about him at the Lewes spring meeting last year. If you ask me, he's never been the same man since— nervy, if you know what I mean. Bless you, he never stirs out without a gun in his pocket."

That was exactly what Inspector Poore wanted. He had never had a more straightforward case. It had unfolded itself almost automatically Any suspicion of Mr. Hammond which had at first occurred td him, was put entirely on one side.

"Where does Rickman keep his car?" he asked.

"Number three, Stone's Mews, first turning on the right towards Tottenham Court-road," said Farwell.

It proved to be a coach-house which had been turned into a small garage. The doors were open and a short, pale-faced man was leaning against the wall, reading an evening paper by the aid of a gas jet.

"Is that Mr. Hickman's car?" asked the Inspector, nodding towards the only one that was to be seen.

"What business' is that of yours?" was the surly answer.

"I am Detective-Inspector Poore—"

"Crikey, I beg pardon, governor," said the pale-faced man, as Poore stepped towards the car, a two-seater, with a dickey behind.

Although it badly needed a coat of paint, it showed no sign of having been in a collision. Leaning over it, the detective flashed his torch over the interior, noticing now that the cover of the cushion next to the drivers' seat had been cut away, as also had a portion of the carpet which had lined the floor.

"What have you been doing here?" demanded Poore.

"I ain't done nothing," was the reply. "It was like that when Mr. Rickman brought it in."

"What time was that?"

"Getting on for twelve last night, sir."

"When was it taken out?"

"Maybe about half-past nine. You see, there'd been an accident out Enfield way. Mr. Rickman got his hand cut-bleeding all over the shop, he said it had been, and, come to that, there were one or two stains when I scrubbed it out this morning."

Putting the torch back into his over-coat pocket. Inspector Poore stood gazing thoughtfully at the car.

His theory had been corroborated by the discovery that Rickman was in the habit of carrying a gun. It seemed possible that he had not intended deliberately to commit murder. Finding himself getting the worst of the struggle at Bellini-avenue, he might have meant to terrify his adversary, but being unused to firearms, had rather by accident than design, shot him through the heart.

However that may have been, Rick-man had the dead body on his hands. If it we're found on the premises, his own life would pay the forfeit. Having waited till the streets were deserted, though there was never much traffic along Bellini-avenue, he had brought his car to the garden gate, and, not without risk, being a big man of robust physique, succeeded in conveying the body unobserved across the pavement.

Then no doubt he had driven swiftly to the other side of London and his wits quickened by danger, hit upon the rather ingenious device of bestowing the corpse in one of the new telephone boxes. That in the cul-de-sac must have seemed to be put there for his purpose. Anyone seeing the car drawn up before it, would naturally assume that he was sending a message, and to shift the body into the box would have been the work of only a few moments.

Still there were the blood stains in his car, and in his panic he must have ripped the cover from the cushion and the carpet from the floor, subsequently binding up his hand, which was probably uninjured.

Inspector Poore had little doubt about his facts, but as he stood confronting the pale-faced man, he was calculating whether he had enough evidence to obtain a conviction.

"What's your name?" he suddenly inquired.

"William Clark, sir."

"Well, Clark, if you're not careful, you may find yourself in trouble."

"How's that?" demanded Clark. "What have I done this time?"

Now the Inspector drew his bow at a venture:

"I daresay," he said, "you know there's such a thins as stealing by finding."

"Who said I was going to steal it?" cried Clark, whereupon Inspector Poore breathed more freely. "Haven't I been I hanging about to give it back pretty well all day? How could I if Mr. Rickman didn't turn up?"

"Well, suppose you go and fetch it."

With a sulky expression, Clark went slowly up the step-ladder, and after disappearing from view for a few minutes, returned with a gold-mounted fountain pen which he handed to the Inspector.

"lt was just under the edge of the carpet, where he'd cut it away," said Clark. "I've only been waiting for him to come round—"

But Detective-Inspector Poore did not stay for more. He had got all he wanted to make certain of a conviction against Hickman, and considerable kudos for himself.

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24: The Test

Stella M. During

1858-1933

Sunday Times (Perth) 26 July 1931

Almost entirely forgotten Victorian author of romantic and historical novels

"YOU know, of course, that I was afflicted with a Socialist son."

The old eyes looking up filled with sudden angry fire. The old hands, wrinkled, veined, ivory white, folded on top of an ebony stick, trembled perceptibly. She hoped he had known but she was not sure. He shook his head.

"No, I was not aware of it," he said. And, then a little touch of fun curling his mouth corners, "Is it an affliction— nowadays?"

"I don't know about 'nowadays.' The world has swept on and left me behind. But he was an affliction— to me. If Charles had been killed in the war, the Boer war, of course, as he easily might have been, and James had come into the title Heaven knows what he would have done. Providence spared me that but it has not spared me everything. Avril is touched with the same brush— and you ought to know it."

"Dear lady, does it matter?" The young man looking down, the young man who desired above everything on earth to be allowed to marry Avril, spoke with gentle deprecation. "I don't care what sort of a brush Avril is touched with. To me she is perfect and always will be. Besides, aren't we all Socialist, more or less, nowadays."

"No," said the old Countess and again "No!" and her stick thumped emphatically on the floor. "Socialism is a microbe, a disease, a madness of the blood, and it leads to perdition! It led James, my son, into marriage with an uneducated farm lassie who could barely write her own name. Fortunately she did not hamper him long, she died early, her new glories killed her— at least I hope they did. I would have forgiven him if he hadn't married her. But he did."

"Surely," said her hearer softly, "It was the right thing to do. And this farm lassie, who couldn't write her own name, was Avril's mother?"

"She was Avril's mother!" And that such a mother was an outrage was plain. "And that isn't all Avril takes after her. She favors her mother's side of the family more than mine!" Having made up her mind to tell, the old lady meant to tell everything.

Her hearer smiled a little. It explained much about Avril that had puzzled him, a certain straightness of vision, an absence of pretence and coquetry, a sturdy determination to be truthful herself, and to insist on truthfulness in others; all qualities, in Gerald Arlington's opinion, that added to her charm. He

knew, now, where she got them. They were a heritage from industrious and God-fearing peasant ancestors.

"Have you any more terrible revelations for me?" he asked and his eyes were quizzical.

"Yes," said the old Countess grimly. "There is one other thing you ought to know. Her father laid it upon her as his dying wish that she should spend part of every year with her mother's people. She obeys it rigidly. Neither ridicule nor remonstrance is of any avail. She goes to her own people every summer and works among the others on the farm. She is there now."

"Where?" demanded Gerald.

"At Rockfell, in Cumberland. And I haven't finished even yet. There is a cousin, a ranting, raving hot-Gospeller of some sort, who is regarded in his own village as a prophet and a seer. I am not sure that Avril herself does not so regard him. She is an odd girl. Gerald, with a touch of the visionary about her. She is all for the things of the spirit. And she looks for them in a Cumberland farm house."

"She is more likely to find them there than in a London drawing room," said Gerald, gravely. Anxiety sprang into the old Countess' eyes.

"Has it made a difference?" she asked, almost in a whisper. "Would I have done better not to tell you?"

His firm brown hand came down over the old one, bony and chill, on his arm.

"I think the best answer to that is that I am going to Rockfell, in Cumberland."

"When?" breathed the Countess.

"Now," said the young man, and stooped and kissed her.

She leant back in her chair as he left her, and her faded eyes, that could still flash with something of their old fire, filled with the difficult and painful tears of age. It was so near her heart, this marriage, this altogether suitable marriage. She had been so afraid that the knowledge of Avril's deplorable parentage, on one side at least, would be sufficient to cool the ardour of even such a lover as Gerald Arlington.

And he had taken it cheerfully, almost lightly. It seemed to mean nothing to him. Oh, surely, after that, the idealism of an unworldly girl would not be allowed to rob an old woman of her heart's desire.

HE REACHED Rockfell on the afternoon of the next day. It was a typical northern village, a huddle of small houses, solidly built of blocks of grey stone and roofed with slate, grouped about a grey stone church with a squat tower and some of the finest brasses in England. Valley Farm, he was told, was two miles down the estuary, here a broad and shiny expanse of treacherous-looking

sand, where the gulls, like a row of pearls on a string, stood each side of the gently lapping water whose channel lay a blue ribbon, in the middle of the golden-brown flats. It was a warm, peaceful, lovely scene, but he sensed the fact that it was not always peaceful, that a south-west gale would send the angry waves flooding up the valley and shift the moving sands into dangerous unfamiliarity. Lovely as it was, it had for Gerald a suggestion of menace in its beauty. He was glad to turn his back on it and make his way to Valley Farm.

He found it easily, a solid and re-spectable group of grey buildings nestled into a fold of the hills, shelter-ed from the north wind by a grim and mighty fell and surrounded by gardens sweet with fruit and flowers. Greer meadows, stretching either side of a little purling river, were being shorn of their hay, and every soul on the place was helping to toss and turn the heavy and aromatic swathes save one old man, toothless and rheumatic, who sat sunning himself at the kitchen door.

"Wantin' Avril, are ye?" he quavered, in answer to Gerald's inquiry, "Ye'll find her i' t' field, wi' t' rest."

It was a pretty picture that met his eyes as he reached the gate of the hay-field. The last load had been carried to the swiftly rising stack, the horses two magnificent fleabltten greys, had been unyoked and a big, handsome bearded man was leading them to the water. On the back of one of them rode Avril, in pink print gown and sun bonnet, entirely a part of her surroundings and to all appearance ut-terly content. Neither she nor her escort noticed the stranger, watching them with an oddly sinking heart. They seemed to have eyes only for one another. As the horses with long breaths of satisfaction "distended leathern sides with water," the man leant, his elbow on the nearest's powerful flank, and looked up at the girl with the delicate face and the deep eves, seated on its broad back.

"Come out from the tents of Shem," he adjured, continuing evidently an argument of some length. "What part or lot have yo' wi' the ungodly. Leave your garish London. Why should yo' consort wi' harlots, painted and half naked as I have seen them there, dancing the hours o' the night away in a vain search for the happiness that will always elude them for they seek it where it is not to be found. Here is happiness. Avril, here among your mother's people, living a life that is simple and natural, winning your bread by the labor of your hands, car-ing for and loving the simple, noble beasts who give yo' love, earnest, ardent, satisfying love, in return. This is the life the Almighty planned for the children of men, a life lived under His open, broadflung sky, and if sometimes, it is stormy—what matter? Dull, yo' think? Yo' would miss the pageant of life in a great city? Can any pageant equal the pageant of the year, as the days pass, one after the other, each different in beauty? Cast in your lot with us, your mother's people, and be happy. God knows I would give my life to make and keep you so. Marry

me. Avril, and stay where you belong, where your heart is, if only yo' will let yourself be convinced of it. Come out from amongst those who are strangers to all that is best in yo'. Come to us, simple, God-fearing people, to whom yo' belong."

"Avril," said a voice deep and low and musical.

A child puts its finger on a soap bubble and all its tender irridescent beauty is gone. So was that moment for Reuben Holroyd. Avril bent down from her lofty perch and held out both her hands.

"Gerald, oh, Gerald!" she said, and in her eyes were tears of passionate appeal.

"Satan himself sent him," muttered Reuben, staring at a grey world from which warmth and beauty had departed. "Three more, minutes— and I would have prevailed."

After which everything was different, dreadfully, damnably different. Avril's frocks were of silk, not cotton, and on her pretty nose and perfect lips was that touch of powder and color to which Gerald was accustomed but which, for Reuben, placed her definitely in the legion of the lost. And she and Gerald were together morning, noon, and night. She seemed to cling to him as though he and he alone could save her from vague but imminent peril. Through the glorious days and starlit nights, Reuben yearned in prayer for her, prayer doomed to futility in that no faith gave life to it. It was a bitter sense of its futility that at last made him appeal not to God but to Gerald.

"I'm asking you," he began, his words coming slowly and with difficulty. "I'm asking yo', in God's name, to go. Yo're standin' between Avril and her best good. But fur yo' coming just when yo' did, she'd have seen it, an' taken t' right road. For the sake of Avril's best good, for the sake of her happiness, I'm asking yo' to go."

Gerald put his bands in the pockets of his plus fours and studied the man, bearded black-browed, powerful before him. He had no need to fear comparison. Broad-shouldered, narrow loined, lean and muscular, physically he was his equal and more. In breeding, in intellect, in education his advantages over the rough countryman were so great he was almost ashamed of them. His eyes filled with genuine sympathy, a sympathy that scorched the other man.

"You're a good chap. Holroyd," he said. "I believe you are absolutely sincere in what you say; that you really think I am standing not only in the way of Avril's good but of her happiness. But I'm not. I'm standing between her and the most ghastly mistake a girl can make, the mistake of stepping out of an environment, a world, I mean, to which she is fitted, into another to which she is not. I love her as much, perhaps more, than you do. And I'm going to prevent it."

"Then you won't— go?"

For a moment Arlington hesitated, loath to wound.

"When I go," he said at last, and firmly, "Avril goes with me."

Reuben stood where he left him. His sombre eyes on the ground, his hands clenched, his breath coming hard as though be had been running.

"I'm a good Christian man." he muttered at last. "I wish harm to nob'dy. But if I wasn't a good Christian man—"

A sudden mist as of blood turned all the gentle world red before his eyes. He folded his great arms across his chest, holding down by main force the ravening beast within.

And after all. Gerald went home alone. A telegram came the very next day summoning him back to London if he would see his father again alive. It came at the worst possible time, late on Saturday afternoon, and Saturday evening, and all Sunday, Rockfell was cut off from the world. No train or bus left the village; no motor existed there. No horse Reuben possessed could do the fifty miles round the head of the estuary in time to catch the midnight mail from Langby Bridge on its further side. Thirty-six— nearly forty maddening hours must pass before Gerald could leave Rockfell unless—

"Reuben," whispered Arvil lifting eyes dark with appeal, for the misery in Gerald's set, white face melted her heart within her. "Reuben, he could catch the night mail at Langby Bridge if you would take him across the sands."

Reuben turned and looked at her, his eyes on fire. He was the one man in Rockfell who could be relied upon, pole in hand, to convey in safety men and horses across the eight miles of gleaming danger that lay between Rockfell and Langby Bridge. And he was asked to take Gerald!

"Take him across t' sands!" he echoed almost in a whisper. "I'll see him damned first."

Avril shrank as though he had struck her. Never in all her life before had she heard Reuben swear. She went back to Gerald. He must wait till Monday and she must help and comfort him.

They were sitting in the big kitchen, silent, for words were useless and worse, when a shadow darkened the doorway— Reuben.

"I've tho'ght better of it," he said grimly. "I'll tak' yo' over t' sands— if yo'll go."

It was a dour and dangerous journey, rapid enough to begin with, slow cautious, testing with the pole for firm footing, twist this way, turning that later on, and, save for curt directions on Reuben's part, never a word spoken. The worst was over, the river crossed when he came to a sudden halt

"I hev to ask yo', once again, will yo' leave Avril to her best good— and to me?" he said steadily.

Gerald stared at him. The fellow's pretensions were intolerable.

"Who are you— to decide what is and what is not for Avril's good?" he demanded and with hauteur.

"That has nowt to do wi' it. Will yo' leave her?"

"No." said Gerald with decision.

There was a moment's tense silence The westering sun threw monstrously long shadows on the wet golden-brown of the flats and the shadows were quite still. Out towards the sunset a mile or so away was a hissing line of creamy water. Reuben stared at it with sombre eyes.

"Then yo' can gan t' ways alone, for I'll go no furder wi' yo'," he said at last. "Do yo' know what it means to tak' a line?"

"Yes"

"Then tak' a line from yon sandspit to th' headland beyond. When yo' get to th' point o' th' sandspit you're safe!" and he turned and left him.

Gerald laughed a little, the curt hard laugh of intense anger, as he watched the retreating figure. His position was not without peril, and he knew it, but he felt no fear. The end of the sand-spit looked near enough to be hit with a stone though it might well be two miles away. Still it was absurd to think he perhaps would not reach it.

He walked with due caution, testing each step before he trusted his weight to it and looking out for stones— for where a stone will lie a man may tread. At first all went well. He kept the headland well behind the point of the sandspit and the going was good. Then suddenly his foot sank to the ankle. Instinctively, inevitably, he advanced the other foot— and it sank to the knee. He did the only possible thing, lifted his arms and threw himself backwards. His head hit a half-buried stone as he fell.

ON A RAISED BANK, pink with sea thrift. Avril eat and gazed across the shining flats, awaiting Reuben's re-turn. Long ago the two men who loved her had disappeared into the distance, tiny black dots in a shimmer of reflected light. It would be an hour, perhaps two, before she could hope to see Reuben returning, but it was something to sit and wait for him.

And suddenly, an hour, perhaps two, before he was due, she saw him close in shore, standing rigid and motionless, staring out across the bay. Instinctively aware of tragedy. Avril sprang down from her perch and ran towards him. Her light feet on the wet sand made little sound. She was close upon him when she heard him speak.

"What am I?" he asked, and his voice was toneless and low. "Th' Lord tested me— an' I failed Him. What am I— now!"

Avril seized his arm.

"Reuben," she whispered, "what have you done?"

For a moment he stared as though not understanding. Then words came steady and unmistakable.

"I've left him— out there— alone."

"Reuben! And the tide's coming in!"

"I know," said Reuben, dully.

But Avril did not hear. Already she was running down to where, on the river, a boat swung gently at her moorings. Reuben stood aghast. Avril in a heavy boat, alone, at the mercy of the tide race!

Was he to have two lives on his conscience. Before she had her hand on the rope he was at her side,

They found Gerald unconscious where he had fallen. The first fury of the incoming tide had spent itself and the water lapped softly round him.

Another ten minutes would have seen the end....

Reuben preaches no more in the little grey stone chapel under the frowning fell.

"I am a sinner." he tells those who remonstrate. "Wor' than you know. The lord tested me— an' I failed Him:"

But little Lady Arlington, who still spends part of every year with her mother's people, and whose mission in life is to comfort, will not have it so.

"No, Reuben," she tells him softly "You saved him. I could have done nothing by myself. But for you he would have been drowned."

End