# PAST MASTERS 225

Marcus Clarke
Temple Bailey
Don Marquis
H. de Vere Stacpoole
Emile C. Tepperman
Katharine Tynan
Guy de Maupassant
Georges Surdez

*and more*

# PAST MASTERS 225

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

24 June 2025

**Contents**



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## 1: The Man of Sentiment

***Marcus Clarke***

1846-1881

*Illustrated Adelaide Post* (South Australia,) 29 Dec 1870

*English-born Australian novelist, journalist, poet, editor, librarian, and playwright; best known for his novel* For the Term of His Natural Life *(1874)*

"WHERE ARE YOU GOING to spend Christmas?" asked Bowker, as we parted.

"The usual place, I suppose, the Port Phillip or Scott's. I've no 'cheerful fire-side,' like you domesticated persons."

"A fire-side would be anything but cheerful in this weather," says Bowker, wiping his brow; " but that's not what I meant to say. I've got a capital notion. My old friend Diggs has asked me to come to a party given in Christmas honor of his new house, and to bring a friend. You be the friend."

"But—"

"But there's lots of fellows you know. Jones and his wife, Brown and his sisters, old Potifar, Glumper, and—"

"I don't like Glumper," I interrupted; "Cynical beast, always sneering at the best emotions of our nature, and pretending to be bored by anything like honest festivity, I won't go—"

"Oh yes, you will though," says Bowker; and being somewhat weak-minded withal, I did. It was a delightful party. Not in the least like the merry-making of the English home I had left, with its holly, snow and yule logs, and hot brandy punch. Diggs gave us nothing but open windows, trickling fountains, fruit, flowers, and the lightest of light wines.

To be sure an enormous plum pudding, bursting with plums and sobbing tears of rich grease, was placed on the table, and each ate a small piece, but that was merely out of deference to the day, and not because we liked it. The roast beef was served in the same manner, and everybody said, "How funny it seems to be keeping Christmas with the thermometer at 80 deg.!" and as everybody had heard, if not made, the same remark last year, and many previous years, everybody agreed, without hesitation that it was very funny.

Now came the first drop in my cup of bitterness.

Glumper, the cynic, had stolen to my side.

"What rot it is to say that," he whispered. "Everybody's said it before."

" Perhaps so."

"And nobody with any common sense thinks it funny at all. Why should it be funny?"

"Glumper, you are a cynic."

"It Rubbish! I'm not good-natured enough— but I talk common sense."

"Christmas isn't the time for it," I said mildly.

"It ought to be. Why shouldn't it? Why should we eat preposterous puddings on a hot wind day? Why should we drag our miserable wives and wretched families along dusty roads to enjoy themselves? Why should we dress in black, and wear white bell-topper hats, calculated only to produce brain fever? Why can't we dine on fruits and French dishes, wear light and suitable clothing, bind a puggaree round our wideawakes, and drink the light wines of the country?"

"I don't like the light wines of the country," said I.

"Don't you," said a smiling gentleman opposite to me, who had listened with benevolent contempt to Glumper's harangue. "I drink nothing else, except colonial beer. I consider it only right to patronise native industries."

"I thought you got your beer for nothing," said Glumper harshly.

"Only a cask now and then," returned the other. "—— is a friend of mine, but to return to our sheep, as that funny fellow Patolin says, I cannot agree with you about Christmas. I think that these little meetings, reunions, if I may call them so, are extremely delightful. Our friends about us, our host, and—and—"

"—and our dinner," says Glumper; "Don't forget the dinner, Snigsby."

"And the dinner to be sure," said Snigsby, gracefully turning aside the shaft; "that is our excuse for displaying sentiment."

"Um," says Glumper, and then his eye catching that of Bowker they both smiled. Disgusted at my neighbor's ill nature, and annoyed at observing how readily Bowker suffered himself to be led away, I addressed myself entirely to Mr. Snigsby.

"I am delighted,"said I, "to find a man who has a touch or sentiment which formed the charm of society—"

"In the days of our grandmothers," said Glumper.

"In the bustle and hurry of this work-a-day world, one is apt to lose tenderness of heart," said Mr. Snigsby, smoothing his sleek hair. "Do you not find it so?"

"I do get out of sorts at times," I replied; "but still I never look at the world with the sneering malignity of Mr. Glumper."

Mr. Snigsby smiled, a smile like that of Mr. Flintwich's friend, "whose moustache went up under his nose, and whose nose came down over his moustache "

"Poor Glumper!" he said in a low tone; "He is much to be pitied: Nature cursed him with an uncontrollabletemper,— a constitutional infirmity, which he has carefully cultivated— and his sordid soul has no sympathy for sentiment. It is not his fault. Let us be thankful that we are not like him."

"The expression of the Pharisee," said I.

"True," rejoined Snigsby; "and yet I said it in no Pharisaical spirit."

"I am sure of that," said I; "who could be Pharisaical at Christmas?"

"Glumper!" said Snigsby.

I love a man who talks in epigrams. Snigsby did not exactly talk in epigrams, but he had a knack of saying the most common-place things with an air of originality. It took me some time to discover this peculiarity, and it was not until I heard him give two French jokes, which I had read before dinner in a *Bruyere* which lay on the drawing-room table (Diggs's bookseller was a man of taste) that I realised his exquisite mediocrity. I detest your "original thinkers," they frighten me.

In the hands of my new-found acquaintance I was quite safe. Each successive platitude that dropped from his lips was more pleasingly put than the one which had preceded it, and lapped in the soothing melody of his sentiment, I floated on a sea of unruffled commonplace. Here at last was the companion of whom I had dreamed. Here was a man well read in literature and the arts, a pleasant talker, a graceful compiler of other men's good things, troubled with no original ideas, burdened with no "fixed principles," simply, a happy, social, good fellow, brimming over with love and tenderness, and honesty, and sentiment.

"I'm an old fashioned fellow," says Diggs, "and I like to enjoy myself in an old-fashioned way. I believe that it is not the custom to drink toasts—"

"Very good thing too," says Glumper, at my elbow, "more wine than you want. Shouting and bawling—"

"Alas! for the good old hospitalities," said Snigsby, "when the loving cup passed round. Now all is selfishness and greed.

"But I mean to drink a toast on this occasion. Here's Hearths and Homes!"

" Why wouldn't he say Windows and Wives," muttered Glumper, "much more appropriate to the climate and quite as alliterative. What do we want with hearths, I should like to know?"

"The good old phrase," said Snigsby, "how pleasantly it sounds, Hearths and Homes!"

He grew so enthusiastic about it, that honest old Diggs called upon him to speak, which he did in quite a touching manner.

He had come to this colony, many years ago, he said, like most of us here (hear, hear), to seek his fortune. He was not one of those people who affected to despise the colony (here he cast a glance at Glumper), because they had lived elsewhere. He had been— in a far off time— to Margate. He had eaten shrimps at Hungerford, even now the taste of shrimps reminded him of his boyhood. Yet those memories were merely pleasing, they did gall his kibe, as Shakspcare says. He had climbed the Rigki, and had gone by diligence from Dan to Beer— he meant from Paris to, to, te Versailles. Yet he did not contrast Emerald-hill with the Splugen Pass, nor make invidious comparisons between Mabille and the Fitzroy Gardens (hear hear). He confessed that he loved the colony. He came into it poor, a struggling— what should we say Poet? Artist? Author? all or

either? No, he would say Man. A struggling Man, and he would leave it, if not rich, at least independent. He liked the colony. It had helped him. He wished to help it. He had done so to the best of his power. He did not take to himself undue credit for being an Englishman, but still he was one, and therefore must ever revere and love Great Britain and Ireland, but he disliked to hear men who had made their way in the colony, men who had come to the colony without, he might say, a copper, men who owed all they possessed in life to kindness of colonial friends, running down the colony, and abusing the colony, and saying the colony was what his American friends would call "small potatoes." (Hear hear.) He would respond to the toast most heartily. He had a hearth and home, won by his own exertions, by his own hard work. He liked work. It did him good, and earned him money. Round that hearth and that home (another sarcasm for Glumper) he had always endeavored to pile flowers of fancy, thought and sentiment. What was life without sentiment? What was life without the kindly love of our fellow creatures? What was life without self denial? Without pity for the weak? Help for the timid? Charity for the poor? Without, in fact, all those delicacies of feeling, that were presumed to belong especially to this festive season? He would say no more. Perhaps he had unwittingly said too much (another dig at Glumper, who was staring out of the window). But this he would say, that he most heartily endorsed the sentiments of his admirable and generous host and begged us all to drink Hearths and Homes with the same honest fervor that he drank it.

And we did drink it. Cheering and knocking wine glasses on the table and grasping each other's hands, and smiling into each other's faces. That is to say, all except Glumper, who looked at Bowker, and sniffed with a malignancy that Diogenes might have emulated.

When the feast was over and we had all grasped hands again, and smiled again, and taken our last *doch an dorrhas* (whatever that is, and if that is the way to spell it), I found myself in the street with Bowker, homeward bound, " Well, and didn't you enjoy yourself ?" said Bowker.

"I did," I replied. "A most delightful evening. Paradise tempered by Glumper."

"Poor Glumper! He is credited with much hardness of heart that he does not possess."

"He is a Beast!" I said with honest indignation. " A malignant and selfish Beast. To call him a Cynic were to cast an unworthy reflection on a very worthy race of philosophers. If it had not been for the counteracting influence of that good fellow Snigsby, I don't think I could have sat out the evening."

"You admire him V

"Admire him! A man who wears his heart upon his sleeve for daws to peck at! Of course I admire him! I admire his generous sentiment, his refined feeling, his noble unselfishness."

"Um," said Bowker.

"Um!" I retaliated. "What is um? What do you mean by um, I should like to know. Do you mean to say that he is not generous, refined, and unselfish?"

"Look here," says Bowker, "you think yourself a man of the world. You think yourself a judge of human nature. You think yourself a better hearted man than Glumper, do you? Come in here. I live here— two rooms, and breakfast consisting of one egg and straw-colored tea for 30s. a week— but that's nothing to do with it, and I will refute you."

"You'll what!" I asked.

"Refute you. Convince you. In fact, tell you a story."

"But it's nearly two in the morning!"

"Never mind. Sit down. Here's tobacco. There's brandy. Here's soda-water. Don't sit in that chair, it's broken. That's right. Never mind me; I'll take the sofa."

"But my dear Bowker," I feebly protested.

"I'm not your dear Bowker. At least, not yet. I don't want to be your dear Bowker until you've heard my story."

"Well," said I in despair at his disconnected persistency. "Go on."

We lit our cigars, or rather I lit mine— Bowker piped— and he commenced.

"Christmas day, six years ago, I landed in this colony," said he. "On that day I made the acquaintance of Snigsby and Glumper."

"On that day! Why, I thought you went up the country, and knew neither of them until a few months ago."

"You thought wrong you see— pardon the grammar, it should be wrongly of course, but it's all the same, that is to say it isn't; but, however, on Christmas day, six years ago, I made the acquaintance of Glumper and Snigsby. We sailed from Gravesend on a very dirty day— dirty is the correct term, as I suppose you are aware; and the weather did not get any cleaner until we get down the Channel. Fairly through the Bay of Biscay, I came upon deck, and made by degrees the acquaintance—"

"—Of Glumper and Snigsby?"

"—Of the other passengers. They were nothing extraordinary, and I did not take much interest in any of them, except one person, that is to say, of course, three persons. A widow with two children."

"Insinuating Bowker!"

"Shut up! She was not particularly handsome ; she was not at all rich ; she was not remarkably fascinating, but she was eminently good. I mean she was kind, and gentle, and self-denying, and—"

"—And everything that Glumper isn't!"

"And I took an immense fancy to her. She was quite alone. No maid or nurse, and the children were a sad trouble to her. Master Jacky was perpetually risking his neck, and Miss Emily was always falling down the cuddy stairs. However she was so amiable and good that we all felt for her, and all helped her. I plead guilty to having allowed Jacky to smoke my pipes, and having expended all my spare cash with the steward in molasses for Emmy."

"Do you call that helping her?"

"If you interrupt again I cut off the sodawater. I began to walk with Mrs. Bain about the deck, to talk with Mrs. Bain, to read with Mrs. Bain, and in short I—"

"Fell in love with Mrs. Bain."

"An interruption, but a just conclusion. I did. Head over ears in love with her. She was older than I. She had two children. I didn't know anything about her family. Bain might have been a black man for all I knew— at least of course he couldn't have been that, because, well— of course, or Galton on Hereditary Genius is an ass. But that doesn't matter. I fell in love with her."

"And proposed to her."

"Wait a bit. She was not in a condition to be proposed to. She was engaged to be married, she was coming out to be married, and she did nothing all the way out but talk about her affianced. He was the most wonderful man that had ever lived. He wrote poetry, and painted in water-colors, and had been up the Rhine, and had failed in business, and was strongly suspected of being consumptive. In fact, was all that the heart of the most romantic of women could desire. She adored him."

"Not encouraging for you."

"I listened in agony to her enumerations of this unknown creature's merits, and in vain tried to lead her from the subject. She would talk of nothing else. She enumerated to me his physical excellences. His raven locks, his flashing eyes,— I saw them in a miniature, and they were as green as unboiled gooseberries— his noble brow and his romantic beard. She went on to tell me of his mental attributes. If ever Heaven had sent an angel upon earth, this being that Mrs. Bain was to marry was the man, that is to say, angel, at least you know what l mean. He had a Soul, he was all Soul in fact, so she said. He was the kindest, most unselfish, truest, most faithful, most highminded and. honorable creature that the world had yet seen."

"Come get on."

"She would kiss his confounded green-eyed picture under the cuddy awning at night, and when the tropical stars shone down upon us, she would turn up her face to Heaven and murmur, 'O Timothy ! how would your poetic soul have enjoyed this sight.' "

"She must have been rather a fool," I interrupted.

"Did you ever know a woman worth a dump who wasn't!" cried Bowker. "It is the privilege of the sex to be foolish. It is their charm, sir, it's their strength, sir. But that's nothing to do with the story."

"Of course not. You were madly in love!"

"Well, well, we got to Melbourne,and anchored in the bay. Mrs. Bain was all in a flutter of excitement you may be sure, and Jacky and Emmy were pranked up in their best attire to receive their future step-father. She had expected, I think, to see a pilot-boat come alongside bearing the orignal of the miniature, but it didn't come. He was to meet her on board the ship, so she said, and take her home. So we waited and waited, but no such boat appeared. She leaned over the side and scanned the faces of all the shore boats' passengers with pitiful eagerness, but the original of the miniature was not there. At every fresh boat that put off, she borrowed a glass from one or other of us, with renewed hope, but to no purpose. There had been some little fun amongst us in the morning, for the widow's love affair had got abroad, you may be sure; and when the glasses were tendered, it was with some little jest concerning the 'him' that had been so much talked of. But by and by as the morning wore away, we began to look in each other's faces and wonder what had become of the Mrs. Bain's expected husband. For me, I confess that I hoped he had been lost in the bush, or murdered by the natives, or dropped into a hole at the diggings, that is, I thought I hoped so, but a glace at the poor wistful face of the widow put all such thoughts out of my head."

"Give me the brandy, T-Tom."

"At last the morning broadened to noon, and our fellow travellers began to go ashore, some of them. All with a kind word for Mrs. Bain, and a cake or a kiss for Emmy and Jack. She began to wonder now, to form dreadful suspicions, her Timothy had been murdered she was sure of it. Why did he ever come to this dreadful place! Why did he ever leave England ? Why did he ever leave that little country village where she had first met him, and where he was so respected and liked ? Not a thought for herself you observe, all this time, but all for him."

''Confound it, get on Bowker!"

"You can guess the end, I suppose. At last when it was late in the afternoon, and Jacky was sulking with a tar-stained pinafore, and Emmy crying in chorus with her mother, a boat with two men in it came alongside. Mrs. Bain jumped up, her face radiant with joy, and rushed to the side. 'There he is!' she cried; 'Oh, I see him !' I felt as if I had got my death blow, and went away a little so as not to see the meeting. In a a few moments a gentleman came on deck. It was Glumper!"

"The scoundrel!" I burst out, "I thought so!"

"I waited for lier to rush into his arms, but she did not. She stood staring at him as though she had never seen him before, and then her knees began to

tremble, and her voice to shake, and, catching little Emmy to her bosom, she faltered out, 'Oh, sir, what is it? What is the matter?'

" 'I have a painful duty to perform, Madam,' said Glumper; 'a duty which—tidings which—' and then she dropped.

"We took her down to her cabin,—the boat with the other man in it keeping off the ship the while— and Glumper communicated his tidings. The 'angel' had married somebody else!"

As Glumper departed I saw the face of the other man, a green-eyed, cadaverous, mean and cowardly face if ever I saw one.

"But who was he?"

"Snigsby!"

"Impossible!"

"Perfectly true. Your man of sentiment, of refinement and generosity, your hater of cynicism, and prater about truth and honesty— was the coward who had deceived the poor woman who loved him, and then begged his friend to break the news to her."

"Bowker!"

"I like an ass plumped down upon my knees in the little cabin then and there, and with Jacky clinging to one arm and Emmy to the other, begged the widow to marry me. Of course she wouldn't. She loved that scoundrel too fondly. We made a sort of agreement that she should think over it, and before she went to Sydney to an old school-fellow of hers who lived there, she sent me a letter, in which she said that, bad as Mr. Snigsby's conduct had been, she could not forget that he had loved her once, and that perhaps he had been led away, and that his nature was a noble one, and that she wished me well and, that— I'll take some of that brandy, too, old fellow."

There was pause for a while, and then I said, "Is this all true then."

He went to a little ricketty bureau, whereon stood a battered despatch box, and, after an instant's search found an envelope.

"The letter's in that," said he, "You can read it if you like."

I am a sentimental donkey, I believe, but I am glad to say that I did not read the letter.

"Perhaps things are not so bad as they appear," I said.

"Perhaps not. Such matters are common amongst men of sentiment. Snigsby only copied Sterne. He might have gone further, and imitated John Howard, the 'philanthropist,' who let his son die in the gutter. I only wanted to show you that rough diamonds often are the finest gems. Glumper has a heart ten times as big as Snigsby's."

"Heart! The scoundrel! he has no heart! I wonder you speak to him, Bowker? I shan't any more."

"Nonsense," said Bowker, who had seemingly recovered all his buoyant manner. "What is the use of being idiotic. Come to-morrow to Prahran Town Hall. He lectures on the 'Loves of the Angels.' I'm going."

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## 2: The Horla

***Guy de Maupassant***

1850-1893

Transl. Jonathan Sturges, 1890 (1864-1911)

There are two earlier, much shorter versions of this theme by the author: "*Lettre d'un fou*", in *Gil Blas*, 17 Feb 1885; and "*Le Horla*", again in *Gil Blas*, 26 Oct 1886. This is the third and longest version, now presented in diary form, from 1887.

**MAY 8**. What a lovely day! I have spent the whole morning lying on the lawn in front of my house, under the great plane tree that shades the whole of it. I like this part of the country and I like to live here, for I am attached to it by old associations, by those deep and delicate roots which attach a man to the soil on which his ancestors were born and died, which attach him to the ideas and usages of the place as well as to the food, to local expressions, to the peculiar twang of the peasants, to the smell of the soil, of the villages and of the atmosphere itself.

I love the house in which I grew up. Prom my windows I can see the Seine, which flows alongside my garden, on the other side of the high road, almost through my grounds—the great and wide Seine, which goes to Rouen and Havre, and is covered with boats passing to and fro.

On the left, down yonder, lies the large town of Rouen, with its blue roofs, under its pointed Gothic towers. These are innumerable, slender or broad, dominated by the spire of the cathedral, and full of bells which sound through the blue air on fine mornings, sending their sweet and distant iron clang even as far as my home; that song of the metal, which the breeze wafts in my direction, now stronger and now weaker, according as the wind is stronger or lighter.

What a delicious morning it was!

About 11 o'clock, a long line of boats drawn by a steam tug as big as a fly, scarcely puffing as it emitted its thick smoke, passed my gate.

After two English schooners, whose red flag fluttered in the breeze, there came a magnificent Brazilian threemaster, perfectly white, and wonderfully clean and shining. I saluted it, I hardly knew why, except that the sight of the vessel gave me great pleasure.

**May 12**. I have had a slight feverish attack for the last few days, and I feel ill, or rather I feel low-spirited.

Whence come those mysterious influences which change our happiness into discouragement, and our selfconfidence into diffidence ? One might almost say that the air, the invisible air, is full of unknowable Powers whose mysterious presence we have to endure. I wake up in the best spirits, with an inclination to

sing. Why ? I go down to the edge of the water, and suddenly, after walking a short distance, I return home wretched, as if some misfortune were awaiting me there. Why? Is it a cold shiver which, passing over my skin, has upset my nerves and given me low spirits? Is it the form of the clouds, the color of the sky, or the changeable color of the surrounding objects, that has troubled my thoughts as they passed before my eyes? Who can tell? Everything that surrounds us, everything that we see, without looking at it, everything that we touch, without knowing it, everything that we handle, without feeling it, all that we meet, without clearly distinguishing it, has a rapid, surprizing and inexplicable effect upon us and upon our senses, and, through them, upon our ideas and upon our heart itself.

How profound that mystery of the Invisible is! We can not fathom it with our miserable senses, with our eyes which are unable to perceive what is either too small or too great, too near to ns or too far from us— neither the inhabitants of a star nor of a drop of water; nor with our ears that deceive us, for they transmit to us the vibrations of the air in sonorous notes. They are fairies who work the miracle of changing these vibrations into sound, and by that metamorphosis give birth to music, which makes the silent motion of nature musical... with our sense of smell which is less keen than that of a dog, ... with our sense of taste which can scarcely distinguish the age of a wine!

Oh! If we only had other organs which would work other miracles in our favor, what a number of fresh things we might discover around us!

**May 16**. I am ill, decidedly! I was so well last month! I am feverish, horribly feverish, or rather I am in a state of feverish enervation, which makes my mind suffer as much as my body. I have, continually, that horrible sensation of some impending danger, that apprehension of some coming misfortune, or of approaching death; that presentiment which is, no doubt, an attack of some illness which is still unknown, which germinates in the flesh and in the blood.

**May 17**. I have just come from consulting my physician, for I could no longer get any sleep. He said my pulse was rapid, my eyes dilated, my nerves highly strung, but there were no alarming symptoms. I must take a course of shower baths and of bromide of potassium.

**May 25**. No change! My condition is really very peculiar. As the evening comes on, an incomprehensible feeling of disquietude seizes me, just as if night concealed some threatening disaster. I dine hurriedly, and then try to read, but I do not understand the words, and can scarcely distinguish the letters. Then I walk up and down my drawing room, oppressed by a feeling of confused and irresistible fear, the fear of sleep and fear of my bed.

About 10 o'clock I go up to my room. As soon as I enter it I doublelock and bolt the door; I am afraid— of what? Up to the present time I have been afraid of nothing. I open my cupboards, and look under my bed; I listen—to what? How strange it is that a simple feeling of discomfort, impeded or heightened circulation, perhaps the irritation of a nerve filament, a slight congestion, a small disturbance in the imperfect delicate functioning of our living machinery, may turn the most light-hearted of men into a melancholy one, and make a coward of the bravest! Then, I go to bed, and wait for sleep as a man might wait for the executioner. I wait for its coming with dread, and my heart beats and my legs tremble, while my whole body shivers beneath the warmth of the bedclothes, until all at once I fall asleep, as though one should plunge into a pool of stagnant water in order to drown. I do not feel it coming on as I did formerly, this perfidious sleep which is close to me and watching me, which is going to seize me by the head, to close my eyes and annihilate me.

I sleep—a long time—two or three hours perhaps—then a dream—no— a nightmare lays hold on me. I feel that I am in bed and asleep ... I feel it and I know it—and I feel also that somebody is coming close to me, is looking at me, touching me, is getting on to my bed, is kneeling on my chest, is taking my neck between his hands and squeezing it—squeezing it with all his might in order to strangle me.

I struggle, bound by that terrible sense of powerlessness which paralyzes us in our dreams; I try to cry out—but I can not; I want to move— I can not do so; I try, with the most violent efforts and breathing hard, to turn over and throw off this being who is crushing and suffocating me— I can not!

And then, suddenly, I wake up, trembling and bathed in perspiration; I light a candle and find that I am alone, and after that crisis, which occurs every night, I at length fall asleep and slumber tranquilly till morning.

**June 2**. My condition has grown worse. What is the matter with me ? The bromide does me no good, and the shower baths have no effect. Sometimes, in order to tire myself thoroughly, though I am fatigued enough already, I go for a walk in the forest of Roumare. I used to think at first that the fresh light and soft air, impregnated with the odor of herbs and leaves, would instil new blood into my veins and impart fresh energy to my heart. I turned into a broad hunting road, and then turned toward La Bouille, through a narrow path, between two rows of exceedingly tall trees which placed a thick green, almost black, roof between the sky and me.

A sudden shiver ran through me, not a cold shiver, but a strange shiver of agony, and I hastened my steps, uneasy at being alone in the forest, afraid, stupidly and without reason, of the profound solitude. Suddenly it seemed to

me as if I were being followed, that somebody was walking at my heels, close, quite close to me, near enough to touch me.

I turned round suddenly, but I was alone. I saw nothing behind me except the straight, broad path, empty and bordered by high trees, horribly empty; before mo it also extended until it was lost in the distance, and looked just the same, terrible.

I closed my eyes. Why? And then I began to turn round on one heel very quickly, just like a top. I nearly fell down, and opened my eyes; the trees were dancing round me and the earth heaved; I was obliged to sit down. Then, ah! I no longer remembered how I had come! What a strange idea! What a strange, strange idea! I did not the least know. I started off to the right, and got back into the avenue which had led me into the middle of the forest.

**June 3**. I have had a terrible night. I shall go away for a few weeks, for no doubt a journey will set me up again.

**July 2**. I have come back, quite cured, and have had a most delightful trip into the bargain. I have been to Mont Saint-Michel, which I had not seen before.

What a sight, when one arrives as I did, at Avranches toward the end of the day! The town stands on a hill, and I was taken into the public garden at the extremity of the town. I uttered a cry of astonishment. An extraordinarily large bay lay extended before me, as far as my eyes could reach, between two hills which were lost to sight in the mist; and in the middle of this immense yellow bay, under a clear, golden sky, a peculiar hill rose up, somber and pointed, in the midst of the sand. The sun had just disappeared, and under the still flaming sky appeared the outline of that fantastic rock which bears on its summit a fantastic monument.

At daybreak I went out to it. The tide was low, as it had been the night before, and I saw that wonderful abbey rise up before me as I approached it. After several hours' walking, I reached the enormous mass of rocks which supports the little town, dominated by the great church. Having climbed the steep and narrow street, I entered the most wonderful Gothic building that has ever been built to God on earth, as large as a town, full of low rooms which seem buried beneath vaulted roofs, and lofty galleries supported by delicate columns.

I entered this gigantic granite gem, which is as light as a bit of lace, covered with towers, with slender belfries with spiral staircases, which raise their strange heads that bristle with chimeras, with devils, with fantastic animals, with monstrous flowers, to the blue sky by day, and to the black sky by night, and are connected by finely carved arches.

When I had reached the summit I said to the monk who accompanied me: “Father, how happy you must be here!” And he replied: “It is very windy here, Monsieur;” and so we began to talk while watching the rising tide, which ran over the sand and covered it as with a steel cuirass.

And then the monk told me stories, all the old stories belonging to the place—legends, nothing but legends.

One of them struck me forcibly. The country people, those belonging to the Mount, declare that at night one can hear voices talking on the sands, and then that one hears two goats bleating, one with a strong, the other with a weak voice. Incredulous people declare that it is nothing but the cry of the sea birds, which occasionally resembles bleatings, and occasionally human lamentations; but belated fishermen swear that they have met an old shepherd wandering between tides on the sands around the little town. His head is completely concealed by his cloak and he is followed by a billy goat with a man’s face, and a nanny goat with a woman’s face, both having long, white hair and talking incessantly and quarreling in an unknown tongue. Then suddenly they cease and begin to bleat with all their might.

“Do you believe it?” I asked the monk. ‘ ‘ I scarcely know, ’ ’ he replied, and I continued: “If there are other beings besides ourselves on this earth, how comes it that we have not known it long since, or why have you not seen them? How is it that I have not seen them?” He replied: “Do we see the hundred-thousandth part of what exists? Look here: there is the wind, which is the strongest force in nature, which knocks down men, and blows down buildings, uproots trees, raises the sea into mountains of water, destroys cliffs and casts great ships on the rocks; the wind which kills, which whistles, which sighs, which roars. Have you ever seen it, and can you see it? It exists for all that, however.”

I was silent before this simple reasoning. That man was a philosopher, or perhaps a fool; I could not say which exactly, so I held my tongue. What he had said had often been in my own thoughts.

**July 3**. I have slept badly; certainly there is some feverish influence here, for my coachman is suffering in the same way as I am. When I went back home yesterday, I noticed his singular paleness, and I asked him: “What is the matter with you, Jean?” “The matter is that I never get any rest, and my nights devour my days. Since your departure, Monsieur, there has been a spell over me.”

However, the other servants are all well, but I am very much afraid of having another attack myself, July 4. I am decidedly ill again; for my old nightmares have returned. Last night I felt somebody leaning on me and sucking my life from between my lips. Yes, he was sucking it out of my throat, like a leech. Then he got up, satiated, and I woke up, so exhausted, crushed and weak that I could not move. If this continues for a few days, I shall certainly go away again.

**July 5**. Have I lost my reason?

What happened last night is so strange that my head wanders when I think of it.

I had looked my door, as I do now every evening, and then, being thirsty, I drank half a glass of water, and accidentally noticed that the water bottle was full up to the cut-glass stopper.

Then I went to bed and fell into one of my terrible sleeps, from which I was aroused in about two hours by a still more frightful shock.

Picture to yourself a sleeping man who is being murdered and who wakes up with a knife in his lung, and whose breath rattles, who is covered with blood, and who can no longer breathe and is about to die, and does not understand—there you have it.

Having recovered my senses, I was thirsty again, so I lit a candle and went to the table on which stood my water bottle. I lifted it up and tilted it over my glass, but nothing came out. It was empty! It was completely empty! At first I could not understand it at all, and then suddenly I was seized by such a terrible feeling that I had to sit down, or rather I fell into a chair. Then I sprang up suddenly to look about me; then I sat down again, overcome by astonishment and fear, in front of the transparent glass bottle. I looked at it with fixed eyes, trying to conjecture, and my hands trembled. Somebody had drunk the water, but who? I? I without any doubt. It could surely only be I. In that case I was a somnambulist; I lived, without knowing it, that mysterious double life which makes us doubt whether there are not two beings in us, or whether a strange, unknowable and invisible being does not at such moments, when our soul is in a state of torpor, animate our captive body, which obeys this other being, as it obeys us, and more than it obeys ourselves.

Oh! Who will understand my horrible agony? Who will understand the emotion of a man who is sound in mind, wide-awake, full of common sense, who looks in horror through the glass of a water bottle for a little water that disappeared while he was asleep? I remained thus until it was daylight, without venturing to go to bed again.

**July 6**. I am going mad. Again all the contents of my water bottle have been drunk during the night— or rather, I have drunk it!

But is it I? Is it I? Who could it be? Who? Oh, God! Am I going mad? Who will save me?

**July 10**. I have just been through some surprizing ordeals. Decidedly I am mad! And yet—

On July 6, before going to bed, I put some wine, milk, water, bread and strawberries on my table. Somebody drank—I drank—all the water and a little of the milk, but neither the wine, bread, nor the strawberries were touched.

On the seventh of July I renewed the same experiment, with the same results, and on July 8, I left out the water and the milk, and nothing was touched.

Lastly, on July 9, I put only water and milk on my table, taking care to wrap up the bottles in white muslin and to tie down the stoppers. Then I rubbed my lips, my beard and my hands with pencil lead, and went to bed.

Irresistible sleep seized me, which was soon followed by a terrible awakening. I had not moved, and there was no mark of lead on the sheets. I rushed to the table. The muslin round the bottles remained intact; I undid the string, trembling with fear. All the water had been drank, and so had the milk! Ah, Great God!...

I must start for Paris immediately.

**July 12**. Paris. I must have lost my head during the last few days. I must be the plaything of my enervated imagination, unless I am really a somnambulist—or have I been under the power of one of those hitherto unexplained influences which are called suggestions? In any case, my mental state bordered on madness, and twenty-four hours of Paris sufficed to restore my equilibrium.

Yesterday, after doing some business and paying some visits which instilled fresh and invigorating air into my soul, I wound upt the evening at the ThSatre-Frangais. A play by Alexandre Dumas the younger was being acted, and his active and powerful imagination completed my cure. Certainly solitude is dangerous for active minds. We require around us men who can think and talk. When we are alone for a long time, we people space with phantoms.

I returned along the boulevards to my hotel in excellent spirits. Amid the jostling of the crowd I thought, not without irony, of my terrors and surmises of the previous week, because I had believed—yes, I had believed— that an invisible being lived beneath my roof. How weak our brains are, and how quickly they are terrified and led into error by a small incomprehensible fact!

Instead of saying simply: “I do not understand because I do not know the cause,” we immediately imagine terrible mysteries and supernatural powers.

**July 14**. Fete of the Republic. I walked through the streets, amused as a child at the firecrackers and flags. Still it is very foolish to be merry on a fixed date, by government decree. The populace is an imbecile flock of sheep, now stupidly patient, and now in ferocious revolt. Say to it: "Amuse yourself,” and it amuses itself. Say to it: "Go and fight with your neighbor,” and it goes and fights. Say to

it: "Vote for the emperor," and it votes for the emperor, and then say to it: "Vote for the republic," and it votes for the republic.

Those who direct it are also stupid; only, instead of obeying men, they obey principles which can only be stupid, sterile, and false, for the very reason that they are principles, that is to say, ideas which are considered as certain and unchangeable, in this world where one is certain of nothing, since light is an illusion and noise is an illusion.

**July 16**. I saw some things yesterday that troubled me very much.

I was dining at the house of my cousin, Madame Sable, whose husband is colonel of the 76th Chasseurs at Limoges. There were two young women there, one of whom had married a medical man, Dr. Parent, who devotes much attention to nervous diseases and to the remarkable manifestations taking place at this moment under the influence of hypnotism and

He related to us at some length the wonderful results obtained by English scientists and by the doctors of the Nancy school; and the facts which he adduced appeared to me so strange that I declared I was altogether incredulous.

"We are," he averred, "on the point) of discovering one of the most important secrets of nature; I mean to say, one of its most important secrets on this earth, for there are certainly others of a different kind of importance up in the stars, yonder. Ever since man has thought, ever since he has been able to express and write down his thoughts, he has felt himself close to a mystery which is impenetrable to his gross and imperfect senses, and he endeavors to supplement through his intellect the inefficiency of his senses. As long as that intellect remained in its elemen-tary stage, these apparitions of invisible spirits assumed forms that were commonplace, though terrifying. Thence sprang the popular belief in the supernatural, the legends of wandering spirits, of fairies, of gnomes, ghosts, I might even say the legend of God; for our conceptions of the Workman-Creator, from whatever religion they may have come down to us, are certainly the most mediocre, the most stupid and the most incredible inventions that ever sprang from the terrified brain of any human beings. Nothing is truer than what Voltaire says: 'God made man in His own image, but man has certainly paid Him back in his own coin. '

"However, for rather more than a century men seem to have had a presentiment of something new. Mesmer and some others have put us on an unexpected track, and, especially within the last two or three years, we have arrived at really surprizing results."

My cousin, who is also very incredulous, smiled, and Dr. Parent said to her: "Would you like me to try and send you to sleep, Madame?"

"Yes, certainly."

She sat down in an easy chair, and he began to look at her fixedly, so as to fascinate her. I suddenly felt myself growing uncomfortable, my heart beating rapidly and a choking sensation in my throat. I saw Madame Sable's eyes becoming heavy, her mouth twitching and her bosom heaving, and at the end of ten minutes she was asleep.

"Go behind her," the doctor said to me, and I took a seat behind her. He put. a visiting card into her hands, and said to her: "This is a looking glass; what do you see in it?" And she replied: "I see my cousin." "What is he doing?" "He is twisting his mustache." "And now?" "He is taking a photograph out of his pocket." "Whose photograph is it?" "His own."

That was true, and the photograph had been given me that same evening at the hotel.

"What is his attitude in this portrait?" "He is standing up with his hat in his hand. "

She saw, therefore, on that card, on that piece of white pasteboard, as if she had seen it in a mirror.

The young women were frightened, and exclaimed: "That is enough! Quite, quite enough!"

But the doctor said to Madame Sable authoritatively: "You will rise at 8 o'clock tomorrow morning; then you will go and call on your cousin at his hotel and ask him to lend you five thousand francs which your husband demands of you, and which he will ask for when lie sets out on his coming journey."

Then he woke her up.

On returning to my hotel, I thought over this curious seance, and I was assailed by doubts, not as to my cousin's absolute and undoubted good faith, for I had known her as well as if she were my own sister ever since she was a child, but as to a possible trick on the doctor's part. Had he not, perhaps, kept a glass hidden in his hand, which he showed to the young woman in her sleep, at the same time as he did the card? Professional conjurors do things that are just as singular.

So I went home and to bed, and this morning, at about half-past 8, I was awakened by my valet, who said to me: "Madame Sable has asked to see you immediately, Monsieur." I dressed hastily and went to her.

She sat down in some agitation, with her eyes on the floor, and without raising her veil she said to me: "My dear cousin, I am going to ask a great favor of you." "What is it, cousin?" "I do not like to tell you, and yet I must. I am in absolute need of five thousand francs." "What, you?" "Yes, I, or rather my husband, who has asked me to procure them for him."

I was so thunderstruck that I stammered out my answers. I asked myself whether she had not really been making fun of me with Dr. Parent, if it was not merely a very well-acted farce which had been rehearsed beforehand. On

looking at her attentively, however, all my doubts disappeared. She was trembling with grief, so painful was this step to her, and I was convinced that her throat was full of sobs.

I knew that she was very rich and I continued: “What! Has not your husband five thousand francs at his disposal? Come, think. Are you sure that he commissioned you to ask me for them?”

She hesitated for a few seconds, as if she were making a great effort to search her memory, and then she replied: “Yes—yes, I am quite sure of it.” “He has written to you?"

She hesitated again and reflected, and I guessed the torture of her thoughts. She did not know. She only knew that she was to borrow five thousand francs of me for her husband. So she told a lie. “Yes, he has written to me.” “When, pray? You did not mention it to me yesterday.” “I received his letter this morning.” “Can you show it me?” “No; no—it contained private matters—things too personal to ourselves. I burned it.” “So your husband runs into debt?”

She hesitated again, and then murmured: “I do not know.” Thereupon I said bluntly: “ I have not five thousand francs at my disposal at this moment, my dear cousin.”

She uttered a kind of cry as if she were in pain and said: “Oh! oh! I beseech you, I beseech you to get them for me!”

She got excited and clasped her hands as if she were praying to me. I heard her voice change its tone; she wept and stammered, harassed and dominated by the irresistible order that she had received.

“Oh! oh! I beg you to! If you only knew what I am suffering! I want them today.”

I had pity on her: “You shall have them by and by, I swear to you.” “Oh! thank you! thank you! How kind you are."

I continued: “Do you remember what took place at your house last night?” “Yes.” “Do you remember that Dr. Parent sent you to sleep?” “Yes.” “Oh! Very well, then; he ordered you to come to me this morning to borrow five thousand francs, and at this moment you are obeying that suggestion.”

She considered for a few moments, and then replied: “But as it is my husband who wants them—”

For a whole hour I tried to convince her, but could not succeed, and when she had gone I went to the doctor. He was just going out, and he listened to me with a smile, and said: “Do you believe now?” “Yes, I can not help it.” “Let us go to your cousin’s.”

She was already half asleep on a reclining chair, overcome with fatigue. The doctor felt her pulse, looked at her for some time with one hand raised toward her eyes, which she closed by degrees under the irresistible power of this magnetic influence, and when she was asleep, he said:

"Your husband does not require the five thousand francs any longer. You must, therefore, forget that you asked your cousin to lend them to you, and, if he speaks to you about it, you will not understand him."

Then he woke her up, and I took out a pocketbook and said: "Here is what you asked me for this morning, my dear cousin." But she was so surprized that I did not venture to persist; nevertheless, I tried to recall the circumstance to her, but she denied it vigorously, thought I was making fun of her, and, in the end, very nearly lost her temper.

I have just come back, and I have not been able to eat any lunch, for this experiment has altogether upset me.

**July 19**. Many people to whom I told the adventure laughed at me. I no longer know what to think. The wise man says: "It may be!"

**July 21**. I dined at Bougival, and then I spent the evening at a boatmen's ball. Decidedly everything depends on place and surroundings. It would be the height of folly to believe in the supernatural on the lie de la Grenouilliere—but on the top of Mont Saint-Michel?— and in India? We are terribly influenced by our surroundings. I shall return home next week.

**July 30**. I came back to my own house yesterday. Everything is going on well.

**August 2**. Nothing new; it is splendid weather, and I spend my days in watching the Seine flowing past.

**August 4**. Quarrels among my servants. They declare that the glasses are broken in the cupboards at night. The footman accuses the cook, who accuses the seamstress, who accuses the other two. Who is the culprit ? It is a clever person who can tell.

**August 6**. This time I am not mad. I have seen— I have seen! I can doubt no longer— I have seen it!

I was walking at 2 o'clock among my rose trees, in the full sunlight, in the walk bordered by autumn roses which are beginning to fall. As I stopped to look at a Geant de Bataille, which had three splendid blossoms, I distinctly saw the stalk of one of the roses near me bend, as if an invisible hand had bent it, and then break, as if that hand had picked it. Then the flower raised itself, following the curve which a hand would have described in carrying it toward a mouth, and it remained suspended in the transparent air, all alone and motionless, a terrible red spot, three yards from my eyes. In desperation I rushed at it to take it. I

found nothing; it had disappeared. Then I was seized with furious rage against myself, for a reasonable and serious man should not have such hallucinations.

But was it an hallucination? I turned round to look for the stalk, and I found it at once, on the bush, freshly broken, between two other roses which remained on the branch. I returned home then, my mind greatly disturbed; for I am certain now, as certain as I am of the alternation of day and night, that there exists close to me an invisible being that lives on milk and water, that can touch objects, take them and change their places; that is, consequently, endowed with a material nature, although it is imperceptible to our senses, and that lives as I do, under my roof-

**August 7**. I slept tranquilly. He drank the water out of my decanter, but did not disturb my sleep.

I wonder if I am mad. As I was walking just now in the sun by the river side, doubts as to my sanity arose in me; not vague doubts such as I have had hitherto, but definite, absolute doubts. I have seen mad people, and I have known some who have been quite intelligent, lucid, even clear-sighted in every concern of life, except on one point. They spoke clearly, readily, profoundly on everything, when suddenly their mind struck upon the shoals of their madness and broke to pieces there, and scattered and floundered in that furious and terrible sea, full of rolling waves, fogs and squalls, which is called madness.

I certainly should think that I was mad, absolutely mad, if I were not conscious, did not perfectly know my condition, did not fathom it by analyzing it with the most complete lucidity. I should, in fact, be only a rational man who was laboring under an hallucination. Some unknown disturbance must have arisen in my brain, one of those disturbances which physiologists of the present day try to note and to verify; and that disturbance must have caused a deep gap in my mind and in the sequence and logic of my ideas. Similar phenomena occur in dreams which lead us among the most unlikely fantasmagoria, without causing us any surprize, because our verifying apparatus and our organ of control are asleep, while our imaginative faculty is awake and active. Is it not possible that one of the imperceptible notes of the cerebral keyboard has been paralyzed in me? Some men lose the recollection of proper names, of verbs, or of numbers, or merely of dates, in consequence of an acoident. The localization of all the variations of thought has been established nowadays; why, then, should it be surprizing if my faculty of controlling the unreality of certain hallucinations were dormant in me for the time being?

I thought of all this as I walked by the side of the water. The sun shone brightly on the river and made earth delightful, while it filled me with a love for life, for the swallows, whose agility always delights my eye, for the plants by the river side, the rustle of whose leaves is a pleasure to my ears.

By degrees, however, an inexplicable feeling of discomfort seized me. It seemed as if some unknown force were numbing and stopping me, were preventing me from going farther, and were calling me back. I felt that painful wish 1 to return which oppresses you when you have left c beloved invalid at home, and when you are seized with a presentiment that he is worse.

I, therefore, returned in spite of myself, feeling certain that I should find some bad news awaiting me, a letter or a telegram. There was nothing, however, and I was more surprized and uneasy than if I had had another fantastic vision.

**August 8**. I spent a terrible evening yesterday. He does not show himself any more, but I feel that he is near me, watching me, looking at me, penetrating me, dominating me, and more redoubtable when he hides himself thus than if he were to manifest his constant and invisible presence by supernatural phenomena. However, I slept.

**August 9**. Nothing, but I am afraid.

**August 10**. Nothing; what will happen tomorrow?

**August 11**. Still nothing; I can not stop at home with this fear hanging over me and these thoughts in my mind; I shall go away.

**August 12**. Ten o'clock at night. All day long I have been trying to get away, and have not been able. I wish to accomplish this simple and easy act of freedom—to go out—to get into my carriage in order to go to Rouen—and I have not been able to doit. What is the reason?

**August 13**. "When we are attacked by certain maladies, all the springs of our physical being appear to be broken, all our energies destroyed, all our muscles relaxed; our bones, too, have become as soft as flesh, and our blood as liquid as water. I am experiencing these sensations in my moral being in a strange and distressing manner. I have no longer any strength, any courage, any self-control, not even any power to set my own will in motion. I have no power left to will anything; but someone does it for me and I obey.

**August 14**. I am lost! Somebody possesses my soul and dominates it. Somebody orders all my acts, all my movements, all my thoughts. I am no longer anything in myself, nothing except an enslaved and terrified spectator of all the things I do. I wish to go out; I can not. He does not wish to, and, so I remain, trembling and distracted, in the armchair in which he keeps me sitting. I merely

wish to get up and rouse myself; I can not. I am riveted to my chair, and my chair adheres to the ground in such a manner that no power could move it.

Then, suddenly, I must, I must-go to the bottom of my garden to pick some strawberries and eat them, and I go there. I pick the strawberries and eat them. Oh, my God! My God! Is there a God ? If there be one, deliver me! Save me! Pardon! Pity! Mercy! Save me! Oh, what suffering! What torture! What horror!

**August 15**. This is certainly the way in which my poor cousin was possessed and controlled when she came to borrow five thousand francs of me. She was under the power of a strange will which had entered into her, like another soul, like another parasitic and dominating soul. Is the world coming to an end?

But who is he, this invisible being that rules me? This unknowable being, this rover of a supernatural race?

Invisible beings exist, then! How is it, then, that since the beginning of the world they have never manifested themselves precisely as they do to me? I have never read of anything that resembles what goes on in my house. Oh, if I could only leave it, if I could only gd away, escape, and never return! I should be saved, but I can not.

**August 16**. I managed to escape today for two hours, like a prisoner who finds the door of his dungeon accidentally open. I suddenly felt that I was free and that he was far away, and so I gave orders to harness the horses as quickly as possible, and I drove to Rouen. Oh, how delightful to be able to say to a man who obeys you: “Go to Rouen!”

I made him pull up before the library, and I begged them to lend me Dr. Hermann Herestauss’ treatise on the unknown inhabitants of the ancient and modem world.

Then, as I was getting into my carriage, I intended to say: “To the railway station!” but instead of this I shouted—I did not say, but I shouted—in such a loud voice that all the passers-by turned round: “Home!” and I fell back on the cushion of my carriage, overcome by mental agony. He had found me again and regained possession of me.

**August 17**. Oh, what a night! What a night! And yet it seems to me that I ought to rejoice. I read until 1 o’clock in the morning! Herestauss, doctor of philosophy and theogony, wrote the history of the manifestation of all those invisible beings which hover around man, or of which he dreams. He describes their origin, their domain, their power; but none of them resembles the one that haunts me. One might say that man, ever since he began to think, has had a foreboding fear of a new being, stronger than himself, his successor in this world, and that, feeling his presence, and not being able to foresee the nature of

that master, he has, in his terror, created the whole race of occult beings, of vague phantoms born of fear.

Having, therefore, read until 1 o'clock in the morning, I went and sat down at the open window, in order to cool my forehead and my thoughts, in the calm night air. It was very pleasant and warm. How I should have enjoyed such a night formerly!

There was no moon, but the stars darted out their rays in the dark heavens. Who inhabits those worlds? What forms, what living beings, what animals are there yonder? What do the thinkers in those distant worlds know more than we do? What can they do more than we can ? What do they see which we do not know? Will not one of them, some day or other, traversing space, appear on our earth to conquer it, just as the Norsemen formerly crossed the sea in order to subjugate natives more feeble than themselves?

We are so weak, so defenseless, so ignorant, so small, we who live on this particle of mud which revolves in a drop of water.

I fell asleep, dreaming thus in the cool night air, and when I had slept for about three-quarters of an hour, I opened my eyes without moving, awakened by I know not what confused and strange sensation. At first I saw nothing, and then suddenly it appeared to me as if a page of a book which had remained open on my table turned over of its own accord. Not a breath of air had come in at my window, and I was surprized, and waited. In about four minutes, I saw—yes, I saw with my own eyes!—another page lift itself up and fall down on the others, as if a finger had turned it over. My armchair was empty—at least it appeared empty—but I knew that he was there, sitting in my place, and that he was reading. With a furious bound, the bound of an enraged wild beast that springs at its tamer, I crossed my room to seize him, to strangle him, to kill him! But before I could reach it, the chair fell over as if somebody had run away from me—my table rocked, my lamp fell and went out, and my window closed as if some thief had been surprized and had fled out into the night, shutting it behind him.

So he had run away; he had been afraid; he, afraid of me!

But—but—tomorrow—or later— some day or other—I should be able to hold him in my clutches and crush him against the ground! Do not dogs occasionally bite and strangle their masters?

**August 18**. I have been thinking the whole day long. Oh, yes, I will obey him, follow his impulses, fulfil all his wishes, show myself humble, submissive, a coward. He is the stronger; but the hour will come—

**August 19**. I know—I know—I know all! I have just.read the following in the Revue du Monde Scientiftque: "A curious piece of news comes to us from Rio de

Janeiro. Madness, an epidemic of madness, which may be compared to that contagious madness which attacked the people of Europe in the Middle Ages, is at this moment raging in the Province of Sao Paulo. The terrified inhabitants are leaving their houses, saying that they are pursued, possessed, dominated like human cattle by invisible, though tangible beings, a species of vampire, which feed on their life while they are asleep, and who, besides, drink water and milk without appearing to touch any other nourishment.

"Professor Don Pedro Henriques, accompanied by several medical savants, has gone to the province of Sao Paulo, in order to study the origin and the manifestations of this surprizing madness on the spot, and to propose such measures to the emperor as may appear to be most fitted to restore the mad population to reason."

Ah! Ah! I remember now that fine Brazilian three-master which passed in front of my windows as it was going up the Seine, on the 8th day of last May! I thought it looked so pretty, so white and bright! That being was on board of her, coming from there, where its race originated. And it saw me! It saw my house, which was also white, and it sprang from the ship on to the land. Oh, merciful heaven!

Now I know, I can divine. The reign of man is over, and he has come. He who was feared by primitive man; whom disquieted priests exorcised; whom sorcerers evoked on dark nights, without having seen him appear, to whom the imagination of the transient masters of the world lent all the monstrous or graceful forms of gnomes, spirits, jinns, fairies and familiar spirits. After the coarse conceptions of primitive fear, more clearsighted men foresaw it more clearly. Mesmer divined it, and ten years ago physicians accurately discovered the nature of his power, even before he exercised it himself. They played with this new weapon of the Lord, the sway of a mysterious will over the human soul, which had become a slave. They called it magnetism, hypnotism, suggestion— what do I know? I have seen them amusing themselves like rash children with this horrible power. Wo to us! Wo to man! He has come, the—the— what does he call himself?—the—I fancy that he is shouting out his name to me and I do not hear him— the—yes—he is shouting it out—I am listening—I can not—lie repeats it —the—Horla—I hear—the Horla— it is he—the Horla—he has come!

Ah! the vulture has eaten the pigeon; the wolf has eaten the lamb; the lion has devoured the sharphomed buffalo; man has killed the lion with an arrow', with a sword, with gunpowder; but the Horla will make of man what we have made of the horse and of the ox; his chattel, his slave and his food, by the mere power of his will. Wo to us!

But, nevertheless, the animal sometimes revolts and kills the man who has subjugated it. I should also like —I shall be able to—but I must know him, touch him, see him! Scientists say that animals' eyes, being different from ours, do not

distinguish objects as ours do. And my eye can not distinguish this newcomer who is oppressing me.

Why? Oh, now I remember the words of the monk at Mont SaintMichel: “Can we see the hundred-thousandth part of what exists? See here: there is the wind, the strongest force in nature, which knocks down man, and bowls down buildings, uproots trees, raises the sea into mountains of water, destroys cliffs and casts great ships on the breakers; the wind which kills, which whistles, which sighs, which roars—have you ever seen it, and can you see it? It exists for all that, however!”

And I went on thinking; my eyes are so weak, so imperfect, that they do not even distinguish hard bodies, if they are as transparent as glass. If a glass without tinfoil behind it were to bar my way, I should run into it, just as a bird which has flown into a room breaks its head against the windowpanes. A thousand things, moreover, deceive man and lead him astray. Why should it then be surprizing that he can not perceive an unknown body through which the light passes?

A new being! Why not? It was assuredly bound to come. Why should we be the last ? We do not distinguish it any more than all the others created before us. The reason is, that its nature is more perfect, its body finer and more finished than ours, that ours is so weak, so awkwardly constructed, encumbered with organs that are always tired, always on the strain like machinery that is too complicated, which lives like a plant and like a beast, nourishing itself with difficulty on air, herbs and flesh, an animal machine which is a prey to maladies, to malformations, to decay; broken-winded, badly regulated, simple and eccentric, at once a coarse and a delicate piece of workmanship, the sketch of a being that might become intelligent and grand.

We are only a few, so few in this world, from the oyster up to man. Why should there not be one more, once that period is passed which separates the successive apparitions from all the different species?

Why not one more? Why not, also, other trees with immense, splendid flowers, perfuming whole regions ? Why not other elements besides fire, air, earth and water? There are four, only four, those nursing fathers of various beings. What a pity! Why are there not forty, four hundred, four thousand? How poor everything is, how mean and wretched, grudgingly produced, roughly constructed, clumsily made! Ah, the elephant and the hippopotamus, what grace! And the camel, what elegance!

But the butterfly, you will say, a flying flower! I dream of one that should be as large as a hundred worlds, with wings whose shape, beauty, colors and motion I can not even express. But I see it—it flutters from star to star, refreshing them and perfuming them with the light and harmonious breath of its flight! And the people up there look at it in an ecstasy of delight as it passes!

What is the matter with me? It is he, the Horla, who haunts me, and who makes me think of these foolish things! He is within me, he is becoming my soul; I shall kill him!

**August 20**. I shall kill him. I have seen him! Yesterday I sat down at my table and pretended to write very assiduously. I knew quite well that he would come prowling round me, quite close to me, so close that I might perhaps be able to touch him, to seize him. And then—then I should have the strength of desperation; I should have my hands, my knees, my chest, my forehead, my teeth to strangle him, to crush him, to bite him, to tear him to pieces. And I watched for him with all my overexcited senses.

I had lighted my two lamps and the eight wax candles on my mantelpiece, as if with this light I could discover him.

My bedstead, my old oaken post bedstead, stood opposite me; on my right was the fireplace; on my left, the door, which was carefully closed, after I had left it open for some time in order to attract him; behind me was a very high wardrobe with a looking glass in it, before which I stood to shave and dress every day, and in which I was in the habit of glancing at myself from head to foot every time I passed it.

I pretended to be writing in order to deceive him, for he also was watching me, and suddenly I felt—I was certain that he was reading over my shoulder, that he was there, touching my ear.

I got up, my hands extended, and turned round so quickly that I almost fell. It was as bright as at midday, but I did not see my reflection in the mirror! It was empty, clear, profound, full of light! But my figure was not reflected in it—and I, I was opposite it! I saw the large, clear glass from top to bottom, and I looked at it with unsteady eyes; and I did not dare to advance; I did not venture to make a movement, feeling that he was there, but that he would escape me again, he whose imperceptible body had absorbed my reflection.

How frightened I was! And then, suddenly, I began to see myself in a mist in the depths of the looking glass, in a mist as it were a sheet of water; and it seemed to me as if this water were flowing clearer every moment. It was like the end of an eclipse. Whatever it was that hid me did not appear to possess any clearly defined outlines, but a sort of opaque transparency which gradually grew clearer. At last I was able to distinguish myself completely, as I do every day when I look at myself.

I had seen it! And the horror of it remained with me, and makes me shudder even now.

**August 21**. How could I kill it, as I could not get hold of it? Poison? But it would see me mix it with the water; and then, would our poisons have any

effect on its impalpable body? No—no—no doubt about the matter- Then—then?-

**August 22**. I sent for a blacksmith from Rouen, and ordered iron shutters for my room, such as some private hotels in Paris have on the ground floor, for fear of burglars, and he is going to make me an iron door as welt I have made myself out a coward, but I do not care about that

**September 10**. Rouen, Hotel Continental. It is done—it is done —but is he dead? My mind is thoroughly upset by what I have seen.

Well then, yesterday, the locksmith having put on the iron shutters and door, I left everything open until midnight, although it was getting cold.

Suddenly I felt that he was there, and joy, mad joy, took possession of me. I got up softly, and walked up and down for some time, so that he might not suspect anything; then I took off my boots and put on my dippers carelessly; then I fastened the iron shutters, and, going back to the door, quickly double-locked it with a padlock, putting the key in my pocket.

Suddenly I noticed that he was moving restlessly round me, that in his turn he was frightened and was ordering me to let him out. I nearly yielded; I did not, however, but, putting my back to the door, I half opened it, just enough to allow me to go out backward, and as I am very tall my head touched the easing. I was sure that he had not been able to escape, and I shut him up quite alone, quite alone. What happiness! I had him fast. Then I ran downstairs; in the drawing room, which was under my bedroom, I took the two lamps and poured all the oil on the carpet, the furniture, everywhere; then I set fire to it and made my escape, after having carefully double-locked the door.

I went and hid myself at the bottom of the garden, in a clump of laurel bushes. How long it seemed! Everything was dark, silent, motionless, not a breath of air and not a star, but heavy banks of clouds which one could not see, but which weighed —oh, so heavily!—on my soul.

I looked at my house and waited. How long it was! I already began to think that the fire had gone out of its own accord, or that he had extinguished it, when one of the lower windows gave way under the violence of the flames, and a long, soft, caressing sheet of red flame mounted up the white wall, and enveloped it as far as the roof. The light fell on the trees, the branches and the leaves, and a shiver of fear pervaded them also. The birds awoke, a dog began to howl, and it seemed to me as if the day were breaking. Almost immediately two other windows flew into fragments, and I saw that the whole of the lower part of my house was nothing but a terrible furnace. But a cry, a horrible, shrill, heartrending cry, a woman's ray, sounded through the night, and two garret

windows were opened. I had forgotten the servants! I saw their terror-stricken faces, and their arms waving frantically.

Then, overwhelmed with horror, I set off to run to the village, shouting: “Help! help! fire! fire!” I met some people who were already coming to the scene, and I returned with them.

By this time the house was nothing but a horrible and magnificent funeral pile, a monstrous funeral pile, which lit up the whole country, a funeral pile where men were burning, and where He was burning also—He, He, my prisoner, that new being, the new master, the Horla!

Suddenly the whole roof fell in between the walls, and a volcano of flames darted up to the sky. Through all the windows which opened on that furnace, I saw the flames darting, and I thought that he was there, in that kiln, dead.

Dead? Perhaps! His body? Was not his transparent body indestructible by such means as would kill ours?

If he were not dead? Perhaps time alone has power over that invisible and redoubtable being. Why this transparent, unrecognizable body, this body belonging to a spirit, if it also has to fear ills, infirmities and premature destruction?

Premature destruction? All human terror springs from that! After man, the Horla. After him who can die every day, at any hour, at any moment, by any accident, came the one who would die only at his own proper hour, day, and minute, because he had touched the limits of his existence!

No—no—without any doubt—he is not dead! Then—then—I suppose I must kill myself!...

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## 3: Hocussing of Kookaburra

***Edward Dyson (as by "Ward Edson")***

1865-1931

*Punch* (Melbourne) 9 Nov 1905

"IF KOOKABURRA WINS I'm completely done for, Joey, and there's the beginning, end, and middle of the whole business."

"How done for?"

"Done for to such an extent that I won't have one copper to polish on another and won't know which way to turn."

"Not know which way to turn!"

"No, my dear, because all roads will lead to gaol."

"What have you been doing, then?"

"Where s the use of my telling you that? It should be sufficient for you to know that if that infernal horse comes in first he might as well have me dragging at his heels, for I shall be a done man."

"And our marriage?"

"I'm afraid, dear, they are not likely to permit the interesting ceremony to take place in gaol.

"I wonder if you quite know what you are saying to me, Jack?"

"I ought to. I am as sober as a judge, and I know the situation, by heart. It's damning facts that have been dinning in my ears for weeks past."

"And you let me go on in my happiness believing that I was to be done with that hateful old life, thinking that I was soon to have husband, home—picturing myself at peace with the world, with loving, little hands playing at my lips. Oh, Jack, Jack!"

"You blame me for not making you unhappy earlier?"

"Why have you gone into this miserable gambling?"

"I did not go in deliberately, as one goes in for a swim, I drifted in little by little, till I found myself in this infernal whirlpool. Joey, if Kookaburra wins, everything goes. You must help me."

"I help you! Heaven knows I would do anything, anything for you, Jack, but what could I do to prevent Kookaburra winning ?"

"Old Petard owns Kookaburra."

"Well, What of that?"

"You remember Petard? He is the old Johnny that tried to dance attendance upon you before I cut in— used to throw you expensive bouquets from the stalls."

"Oh, yes, I remember that very well."

"In fact, I had to kick him, you know, before he was convinced of the hopelessness of his suit."

"I wish you wouldn't talk like that. The question is, how am I to help?"

"Couldn't you re-awaken Ben Petard's fatherly regard?"

"Jack !"

"Oh, I know, I know. I'm not going to suggest melodramatic things, but perhaps if you restored him to the old footing (I don't mean the footing I did) it might be possible to find a way out of the difficulty."

"You're mistaken about old Petard. You think him a fool. He's very far from it. He admired me, came often to see me act, and made me presents. That may be idiotic, but he's a shrewd, hard man, and if I attempted any double-dealing with him in connection with Kookaburra he'd see through me in a twinkling."

"Well, Joey, I've told you the position. Do you think I should have told you now if I had not been desperate? I love you, old girl, upon my life and soul I do, but I see love, liberty, everything slipping from me. I reckoned on dropping the game if this came out all right, taking a billet, and letting the dad see I meant to go straight. I am sure he'd take me back to his heart if I let him see I had done with the old racket, and I could have done it with you beside me, Jo; but just now I am worse in than ever before. I must fight out, fairly or foully, or I must go down for good."

"If I could only, do something, Jack. I would do it if it cost me my life, because, after all. al! I hope for is centred in you. I'm a wretched actress, a humbug, a fraud. I feel it. I am only suffered because of my prettiness, and good limbs. I never cared for the life; I have hated it, dear, ever since you came and made honourable love, and talked of the little home, and— and— my God, Jack, I would rather die the mother of a crowing babe in a humble cottage than the greatest actress on earth."

Jack caught her in his arms and kissed her cheek. It was wet with tears.

"We'll not give it up without a fight, Jo," he said.

"Only show me how, and I'll fight while I can stand," whispered the girl.

## ii

BEN PETARD was a well-known sport, a trusted owner, and a man who knew the game thoroughly. Possibly it was because he knew so much of the people who follow racing professionally, from the gilded owner to the leering imp scouring the stables, that he trusted so few. Ben had a great opinion of his powers of penetration. Those he mistrusted he mistrusted thoroughly; those he trusted he trusted implicitly.

He trusted Chipper Lee. Chipper had ridden half-a-dozen of his horses to the front in big events, and had proved himself square, clean and honest, with twelve years of faithful service. He was too heavy now for more than an

occasional mount, but he was the guide and guardian of the stables, and Ben Petard slept easily, knowing that Chipper Lee was in charge of the favourite.

Chipper was a nickname bestowed upon Lee because he was the least chipper, or cheerful, of mortal men. Only twenty-six, he bore himself like a centenarian, with the sins of four generations upon his head. This Cerberus of the stables was as grave as a judge and as dignified as a bishop, and that made his attitude towards Bess Plummer, the new girl at Roseholme, the more remarkable.

True, Bess was very fresh and shapely and had a pretty face and pearly teeth, and a flashing eye, and a saucy and bewitching manner. All the other lads were mashed on Bess; that was quite to be expected, but that the sedate and reserved Chipper should have yielded to her enchantments was matter for amazed debate with all who knew him. Really, Bess had made a direct and deliberate assault upon young Mr. Lee, and after some surprise and a little display of weak resistance, Chipper had succumbed to the extent of becoming Bess' devoted slave.

"But why do you like me better than the others?" he said to Bess one night, under the roses at Roseholme. "That's easy," answered the girl; "I like you best because you are the best."

"But I ain't what you'd call good-lookin', am I?"

Bess took his face between her two hands and kissed it. "You are, Bill," she said; "I think you're just handsome."

"Well, I'd never a believed it," said Chipper meditatively, feeling his face with a new interest. Chipper Lee's old friends, those who thought they knew him, would have been even more greatly surprised had they known how ardent a lover he was. Bess Plummer had awakened within him a passion that made a new man of him, a man he himself almost failed to recognise. Bess's beauty dazzled him, the thought that she cared for him lit up the world with a strange joy and beauty.

Their first lovers' quarrel assumed in his mind the dimensions of a catastrophe.

"It only shows you don't trust me," said Bess, positively, in the accustomed nest under the Chinese roses that whitened the hedge between Roseholme, the residence of the trainer Peter Garner, and the stables, where Kookaburra was guarded like the jewel of a Sultan's harem.

"What d'yer want to go fer?" answered Chipper pitifully.

"I want to go with you."

"But I'll be back in ten minutes 'r so."

"I want to go with you and to go into the stables, and to see the beautiful horse, and pat him."

"You know, none o' the people from the house is allowed in."

"That's why I want to go."

"I couldn't do it, Bess. The boss 'ud fire me this blessed minute if he knew I'd done it, 'n where'd we be fer gettin' married if I got the shoot?"

"And do you think I'd marry a lad what hasn't got confidence in me? No, thank you, Mr. Lee."

"Oh, come, I say, Bess, have a bit o' common."

"You think I'm a fool, you think I don't understand. Those stables are kept bolted and barred to keep out rogues and scoundrels; you won't let me go in and see you feed the horse because people like me are not admitted. It shows the opinion you have of me. You— you can't love me, or you'd n-n-never think so badly of me." Bess was actually crying.

Lee looked at the girl in wonder; he tried to comfort her. She only pushed him off.

"Go to your stables," she said. "I am going back to the house. I'll leave to-morrow. I'll not stay where I'm treated like a— a—"

"Bess, don't, Please, Bess, don't cry. You can come with me. No one will see us. I'll chance it if you'll make it up. Forgive us Bess."

So it happened that Bess stole into the big stable with Lee, and patted the beautiful black horse, Kookaburra, in his stall, smoothing his delicate skin, plunging her hands into his food, going into little raptures over his handsome head and his lean, satiny legs.

But poor Chipper's risk was taken in vain. Bess quarrelled with her mistress that very night, and was ordered to leave her house first thing in the morning, but in her great indignation she packed her box at once, and left, catching the half-past eleven train to Melbourne, and Chipper knew nothing of it till morning, and then his mind was largely occupied with another disaster.

## iii

KOOKABURRA had gone back in the betting with an actual slump, and Bobtail was now first favourite, and yet nothing positive was known. However, rumours that Kookaburra had collapsed were persistent. There were a dozen stories, some said he had been kicked, others that he had been injured in training, others that he had taken ill, others that he had been dosed ; but they all meant the same thing, that Kookaburra's chances of winning the big event were down to zero.

The great day came. Kookaburra's position in the betting had improved again. It was said that he had made a splendid recovery, and would have to be reckoned with. Jack Crane and Joey Gillespie, the smart, little burlesque actress, stood on the lawn white-faced, silent, anxious, and watched the horses coming out.

As Kookaburra cantered slowly down the track Jack's left hand gripped Joey's right.

"He looks fit to run for a kingdom," faltered Jack. "God help us!" murmured Joey.

They stood thus watching the race. Kookaburra ran well till the field was rushing into the straight, and then he fell away to nothing, and cantered in last, his head low, his skin foam-specked.

There was no doubt of it, Kookaburra had been " got at."

Jack had not released Joey's hand. "Our troubles are over, old girl," he said.

"And this is the last of it. Jack. You will keep your promise?"

"Yes, Jo. I'll try and make up to you for what you have done."

That night there was a tremendous crowd at the Imperial Theatre to witness the popular Gaiety burlesque, "The Little Widow," and when Miss Joey Gillespie, who had recently been absent through illness, tripped on in her costume of canary silk, and commenced the slight song and grotesque dance that had been one of the hits of the piece, a young man in the front seats of the gallery arose in his place, and uttered a cry that attracted eyes from all parts of the theatre. When leaving the theatre after the performance, and when just about to be handed into the hansom by Jack Crane, Joey Gillespie was fired at by a man, who instantly broke through the crowd and fled.

The young actress lay in a huddled heap at her lover's feet. She was taken to the hospital, and the wound was found to be so serious that her deposition was taken. Miss Gillespie had nothing to tell that was of the slightest use to the detectives. She could not imagine who had fired at her, she had no enemies. It was concluded that some unknown, love-sick admirer had fired the shot, but whoever it was, he escaped Scot free.

To Jack, Joey whispered a different tale, however.

"It was Chipper Lee," she said. "I saw him in the theatre. He recognised me. He knows it was I who put the drug in Kookaburra's food."

This opinion is borne out by the mysterious disappearance of Chipper Lee. Jack Crane is now an exemplary husband and father, and Joey, his wife, is regarded as a model wife and mother by her starchy but good-hearted old father-in-law, and so far her sin has not found her out.

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## 4: Bound South

***Captain Dingle***

1879-1947

*Adventure*, 1 Jun 1928

IT WAS raining, which was bad enough. A cold rain, too. There was a clammy fog on the river, and the streets near the wharves were cheerless and dank, like a Russian hell where all is cold. Rats venturing from the ships to seek bits of food around the dirty shops scuttled back to the ships for comfort. The street lamps only half glowed, like rheumy eyes. Here and there a shaded window hinted at warmth within. If human beings trod the pavements, it was hurriedly, even furtively, and as briefly as possible.

Joe Lennard shuffled along one side of the street where the warehouse was, peering every way jerkily. Far enough behind him on the opposite side of the road Officer Burton, plain clothes man, kept pace with Joe, keeping to the shadows.

Presently Joe stopped. So did Burton. Joe slithered into a doorway near the wharf end of the street, and Burton reached the spot in one swift rush. In the same instant four men turned the comer as if they had a very definite object in view. There was a huddle, blows, choked curses; and then Joe Lennard and Detective Burton were bundled up like pieces of freight, pitched into a cart that sprang into , being at a whistle, and were rolled decisively down to a grubby steamer with steam at her stack.

"You can tell Captain Irons to go ahead. Dunno who or what we've caught, but they can shovel coal!" the chief engineer told a sailor on the dirty, littered deck.

Soon the engine room telegraph rang, the steamer backed into the river and headed seaward. The *Lurcher* was bound south.

She was nicely on her way before poor, dope fuddled Joe Lennard or sizzling, vengeful Officer Burton knew it.

Joe did not know Burton, who was a new importation for the running to earth of a pestilent ring of drug moguls. That was a clever ring. It had fooled all the local cops, dicks and stools. Poor old Joe Lennard, one time near welterweight champion of another, cleaner ring, was known to be hanging on the fringes; but, doped as he almost always was, he was shrewd enough to keep out of danger until the new man appeared. Burton, secure in his newness, came nearer to following Joe to a killing than any officer had. Then the *Lurcher*, needing firemen for a hurried night sailing, upset the trap.

JOE AND Burton found themselves feeding voracious red furnaces with shovels that weighed a ton each. Side by side, choked with dust, scorched with

fierce heat, with a savage engineer cursing them and a draught of cold air from the ventilators hitting them like ice douches, they slowly came to full consciousness after a period of daze. One other sweating wretch hurled coal with them; yet another grabbled coal from the bunker to the stokehold floor.

Burton straightened his back, shook his head, and flung down his shovel. His legs were unsteady; the steamer rolled and throbbed. His head ached like a Volstead New Year morning. The assistant engineer was on his way back along the alley to the engine room when Burton's shovel clanged on the footplates, and Burton was already on the iron ladder leading to the fiddley hatch when the engineer turned to stop him.

There was a rush and a scuffle. Joe Lennard dropped his shovel to tackle the engineer. Burton clambered on upward, leaving a fine fight behind him. He was not interested in anything else just then but to tell the world, as represented by the skipper of this steamer, what it meant to kidnap an officer of the law. He blinked until his eyes mastered the clammy blackness of the drizzling night. Vague lights bleared out there in the murk, diminishing. Near at hand, more like a green ghostly luminance than a light, the starboard sidelight glimmered against the wet drift.

Then he made out the bridge and the ladder. The cold air revived him. He shook himself, took a deep breath and mounted the ladder. Two men stood in the weather bridge wing, talking in low tones. Burton appeared before them like a thunderbolt.

"Somebody pulled a boner when he pulled me on this boat," he snarled. "Who was it? I want to kiss him!"

"Who's this, Mister?" the skipper turned to the second mate.

"I'll tell you who I am!" retorted Burton. Even in the gloom they could see the badge shining on his vest as he opened his coat and crowded close to them. "You've kidnaped a police officer; that's what I am. Now start back to shore—"

The skipper and second mate of the *Lurcher* laughed at him. Burton got hot. The blood rushed to his bruised head. He made a grab for the nearest man, and they both jumped on him with sure, practised hands and feet. Something fell on his aching head, and he dropped. Then the officer blew his whistle. A seaman appeared.

"Get another hand and take this back to the second engineer," the captain said.

"It's one o' the guys we shanghaied, ain't it, sir?" the seaman muttered. "Had a gun, he did. Th' chief took it off him."

They carried Burton away, back to the fierce labor of the stokehold. The captain of the *Lurcher* kept the badge to add to other trophies. It went into a drawer along with the pocket kit of a doctor who had at one time postponed

aiding a fatally injured man in order to study the art of raising steam in the *Lurcher*'s boilers.

WHEN Burton came to full consciousness for the second time, he was wise enough to tackle his job and so gain comparative respite. Joe Lennard was sweating in silence, too. Neither spoke to the other. The third fireman pricked and sliced, raked and flung coal, with the grim precision of long use; and the two greenhorns cannily followed his example. Joe's head was freshly battered; he sported a purple shiner; his lips were cruelly cut so that he grinned incessantly. His eyes burned and he breathed wheezily, but he carried on. And when the engineer appeared again, eager to find fault, the gages showed full head of steam, the fires were going splendidly.

"That's your game, my cherub," he grinned at Joe. "Do your stuff. A live fireman's better than a dead pug any day."

And as he ducked again into the alleyway:

"Joe Lennard! You a near champ, hey? Shovel coal, my son, that's you."

"You that Joe Lennard, the old welter?" Burton panted after awhile.

He glanced keenly at Joe's unlovely face. He knew Joe only by name.

"Hell! Do I look like it?" growled Joe. He went on shoveling. And in due time the watches were changed. The beaten men crawled forward to the quarters, guided to bath and bunk by the silent third man. The steamer had cleared the coast, and was ploughing , along to the southward at a steady speed that kept the seas foaming around her. The rain and the mist had cleared. It was a fine night. Before going below for the balance of the night the captain and the chief engineer met for a brief exchange.

"The Second tells me one o' those two birds we gathered in told him he was Joe Lennard, the old pug. A useful lad himself, the Second is. He'll have no more trouble," the chief said.

The captain laughed.

"The other lad came bustin' on to the bridge and flashed a trick badge. Said he was a detective. You'll have no more trouble with him. It was a real badge, though. Stole it, likely."

"Aye, shouldn't wonder, sir. I took a gun from him when he came aboard. A tough lookin' bird. Gunman, sure enough," the chief decided as he left for his slumbers.

A GOLDEN day was lighting up the blue ocean when next the green firemen had to go below. Sheer fellowship of misery drew them together. They found the deck unsteady, and there was something queer about the way their breakfast acted when they emerged from the forecastle into the keen air. They

let their watch mate go ahead, and then they went over to the rail with one accord.

"I was going to brace that captain again," groaned Burton.

"I meant to tell that engineer my name again, " Joe moaned, "but—I—won't!"

Burton possessed a native shrewdness which saved him from the mistake of bearding the captain again. He saw the insecurity of his position. The ship was no fine liner. The crew were a desperate lot of hoboes apparently as much out of place here as he was. He saw a man talk back at the mate, and that man was carried forward, all reddened, and did not appear again for two days. He saw poor, shaky, livid Joe Lennard tell the engineer a few blistering home truths, and Joe, fighting like a terrier but grinning with agony, sobbing for wind, would have been battered to a pulp but for Burton's shovel. The cocky engineer dared not face the edge of that fearful tool in hands as sure and eager as Burton's.

"Our play is to carry on, Joe, and saw wood until we get to land," Burton advised afterward. "I know a trick then."

"If I c'd get hold of a snootful of snow—" whimpered Joe.

"You'll be able to lick him without dope, if you hold yer hosses and shovel coal," Burton said wisely. "Nothing like firing boilers for bringing back the old kick. Had some wallop once, didn't you, Joe?"

"Look at what that stiff handed me! Wallop!" grunted Joe.

But Burton had his way. He knew he could bring the captain to account in good time. The time was not yet. And he was interested in Joe Lennard now as he had not been before. He had only been hunting him as a cog in the wheel of drug sharks, never identifying him with grand old Joe Lennard of the ring. Now he could see a chance to combine business with sport and do a bit of getting even at the same time. He'd have Joe right to his hand when time was ripe, too. Duty must not suffer through any such trifle as a mere shanghaiing. Neither could it be set aside for friendship.

Misery made them shipmates, and Joe, knowing nothing of Burton's man hunting proclivities, accepted him for the stout sidekick he was. Together they hoped for the dawn of their own day. Clean salt air and hard work would do much for Joe, once the drug was out of his system.

But he was to suffer much before that cleansing was complete. Joe had sunk pretty low. For days the fierce travail of the stokehold came near to killing him. He suffered so that Burton went to the captain for stimulant to stave off collapse.

"Stimulant? Get for'ard, my lad, and tell your dopey prize-fighter to sweat it out," the captain said.

Burton began to talk with savage emphasis. A mate joined in. Burton threatened. Skipper and mate together took him, turned him, and hurled him

down the bridge ladder like a sack of com. He had been a good man in his profession; few were better man handlers than Burton; but it takes a super landsman to tackle successfully two hard bitten lusty seamen on a teetering deck with a ladder at his back.

BURTON took a lame back and a sprained wrist to his cheerless bunk. When he could no longer bear Joe's sufferings he went out on deck where men were washing clothes. He picked out the most likely pair, and went straight to his mark.

He told them who he was, and promised them reward if they would help him force the captain to land him and his pal, who was a sick man. The men grinned at him, and winked, then grinned at each other.

"That's a noo lay, ain't it. Bill?" chuckled one.

"I'd say so," the other returned. "I've heard a few in my time. Didn't one lad say he was a parson, Jem?"

"Prize-fighter!" said Jem.

Burton went back to Joe in disgust. And half an hour before it was time for them to go down to the fires again he took him on deck and walked him up and down. Joe cursed him fitfully. Burton told him it was all in preparation for the day of reckoning. The men Burton had spoken to told others, and a gang gathered, laughing and joking pointedly. A strapping fireman from the other watch off duty lounged across the deck and stood in their way.

"Which o' you's the champeen fighter?" he bawled.

His voice was thick with years of coal dust; his shoulders and arms were trademarked with the shovel and slice.

"Mind your business; the lad's sick," growled Burton, and shoved forward.

The fireman shoved back and grabbed Joe's arm.

"Let's see you! Gee! What a face fer a champeen! Put yer hands up, and I'll dot the other eye fer you. C'mon."

He slapped Joe's face, and Burton was hurled aside as Joe struck back, hard and straight, squashing the fireman's nose into a red smear. But that was all. The big fellow was a scrapper, hard and fit. He had sea legs too. Joe hooked and uppercut him twice; then one of the fireman's looping swings sank into Joe's stomach and Joe went down. Burton stepped in to keep the fireman back until Joe could stagger to his feet, and four men rushed him. Stokehold boots trampled his toes, and sea toughened arms beat at him.

Burton fell back against the bulwarks of the well deck and was beaten to his knees. He dimly saw Joe get up, totter forward and go down again, sobbing. They helped each other below to their four hours of labor in eloquent silence. It was a hard place into which they had fallen, and a tough crowd with which to live.

DAY AFTER day of firing furnaces hardened unaccustomed muscles. Food plain and plenty, regular sleep and clean air worked magic. Their legs acquired sea sense, and Joe's eyes grew brighter. His skin too lost some of its pallor. Burton regained his self-confidence as his legs grew steadier. After his experience with the captain and mate at the bridge ladder, he carefully avoided officers.

The men almost left them alone, except for wordy attacks. One fat sailorman, encouraged by the last unequal conflict, stuck his elbow humorously into Burton's ribs with terrific force as they waited at the galley door. But Burton's legs were behaving. The fat sailorman was still sitting on the deck, gasping from a swift and sure demonstration of police man-handling practise, when Burton entered the firemen's forecastle with his mess kids. There was a marked falling off in unpleasant attentions afterward.

Then on a morning all blue and gold and fragrance the steamer swung to anchor in a palm fringed harbor. Red roofs, white houses, brown skinned people. A drowsy hum and a feeling of "never mind" reached out and enveloped the grubby iron ship, even to her wretched stokehold. Burton glanced at Joe, and a faint grimace flitted across his face. He tried to make out the flag that flew from a rambling building among tall palms. Joe seemed indifferent to it all. If anything, he showed increased interest in his job and the steamer.

"Going to hop it here, Joe?" Burton whispered.

Joe looked at him pityingly.

"Hop it?" he echoed. "Brother, you don't know me! I was in on a juicy melon to be cut that night we got sandbagged. I'm goin' right back in this boat to collect!"

"I thought the job was murdering you," Burton grinned.

"Murder me? Say, it's like pattin' the light bag to me! I nigh died fer want of a shot o' dope; but I got over that. Watch me on the way home. I got some debts to pay off." Joe looked hard into Burton's face. "Gee! If you want to beat it, buddy, count on me to give you a boost. I'm yer sidekick."

"I'm staying with you," returned Burton, laughing queerly and turning away. He tried hard to make out that national flag.

Burton meant to get ashore and resume his natural status, then take Joe into custody; afterward he would settle accounts with the captain of the *Lurcher*. Just for a moment he wanted to tell Joe the truth, thus giving him a chance to make himself scarce. Training stopped that impulse. He was bound to take Joe Lennard back. He had started out for that.

The steamer went alongside the wharf to unload. It was a miscellaneous cargo she had; but there was a full cargo to be loaded. The day was about done when she tied up; ship's work ceased. Burton was over the side and well uptown

while his watch mates were still washing up. Nobody missed him, except Joe, and Joe guessed that his pal had skipped after all. That was all right. Joe could be dumb as an oyster, if necessary.

BURTON brushed off his clothes as he threaded the sleepy streets. He had worn his shoes and trousers on the passage down, for they were all he had. He had no hat. His coat and vest were an over smart match for the rest of him. They at least were not grimed with coal dust and oil, nor scorched with fierce flame, but merely crumpled by being slept on in a bedless bunk. He had a few silver coins in his pocket, and first of all bought a hat for twenty-five cents. Then he wandered along, looking for the police station, or its equivalent, or a consular office.

None of the crew had known in what country this port was. They knew the port by name; further they never bothered to inquire. The language Burton heard around him sounded like some sort of Spanish, but he was as vague as most of his kind in matters of geography. Following the flutter of the flag he had first seen, he came to a place which held all the information he needed.

"No extradition," he muttered, emerging. "No use in lugging Joe ashore, then. Might as well stick it out and go back with him."

But he went to find the consul to tell him all about it. The man looked at him as if he had seen many a queer specimen in his time and had learned patience. But he frankly disbelieved Burton's story. Where was his badge? His credentials? Well, the consul would make a note of it, and see the captain of the *Lurcher* in the morning. Would he lend Burton money to cable to the home office? He would not. Perhaps tomorrow.

Burton sent a cable that took every cent he had. It was only one word, his name. Burton, no more. But he hoped the chief would notice the office of origin, and get the idea that his man Burton was at least alive, down there in Coralita. The rest must be guessed at. He tried to open a chat with a native policeman who smiled gleamingly and seemed friendly. But they were not talking each other's language. Burton grew irritable, the policeman ceased smiling, and Burton went aboard the ship in an angry state of mind. He looked for Joe. Joe had gone.

JOE'S absence started another train of unpleasant thought which soon wiped out the petty irritation caused by the futile conversation. Joe gone. Gone where? Burton went on deck and stood at the rail for half an hour trying to make up his mind. The town was quiet. Infrequently voices rang out, usually voices in harsher language than the natives used. Musical notes filtered through the trees from behind the town; fireflies flitted in all the dark spaces. From an

anchored sailing ship thrummed a banjo; a negro voice sang to it, and the air was balmy and sweet.

Where had Joe Lennard gone? If he had flown the coop, after what he had said. Burton had been nicely fooled. And all the time he had thought himself so smart, leaving Joe in ignorance of his watchmate's identity. If Joe really had fooled him, and made himself scarce, it was hopeless to look for him, for nobody could ever know where a shrewd crook like Joe would hide. If he had only gone ashore for a ramble, it was not hard to guess that he'd gravitate to the haunts of his kind. But then there was no need to hunt after him. After all, the sane thing was to wait.

Burton waited. He would have relished a cigar. A returning fireman, rendered jovial and generous by liquor, handed out a bundle of reeking black cigarets with an obscene compliment. Burton sucked in the strong smoke gratefully. He was tranquil and assured again by the time Joe Lennard stepped nimbly up the gangway.

"Have a good time, Joe?" he greeted.

Joe grinned, hurrying forward to their quarters. Burton was at his heels and saw Joe peer keenly around the dim forecastle before taking a little package from his pocket and hiding it under his moldy straw mattress which was a relic of a previous voyage and occupant. Burton's bunk had no bed.

"Have a good time, Joe?" Burton repeated.

"Say, buddy, if I was lookin' for it I'd be able to get fried and floosied and elected alderman on the three dollars I got," Joe stated with quiet emphasis. "I never struck no place like this fer stuff. Quiet too. Every guy who has dough is uptown. Captain, and officers too. But I ain't playin' that game no more, buddy."

"What was that you slipped under the bed, Joe? Dope?"

Joe shot a keen glance at Burton, but there was no shame or furtiveness in his glance, only a mild surprise.

"Sure," he nodded.

Burton laid his hand on the bunk rail.

"You don't want to start all over again, Joe. Not that," he said seriously. "Let me have it." Joe grinned, and gently but firmly removed Burton's hand.

"Leave it be. Don't you worry about me," he said. "I'm all cleaned of it. But I want that for a purpose. Maybe you'll know, maybe not. Anyhow, it ain't fer me, old socks. Give you my hand on it, and I never threw a fight."

Somehow the strong grip of Joe's broken and gnarled hand sent a wave of discomfort surging through Burton. It was impossible to feel that grip and doubt the man's sincerity. It was impossible to carry on as he had gone; it was too much like the well known snake in the grass. Yet he could not frame the words that must break Joe's confidence in him. They were natural foes, made comrades by misfortune. And there was something theatrical in a man arresting

a chum when all had been known for so long. Instead of blurting out his true status. Burton could only repeat his request for the package of drugs.

"Don't say no more, buddy," Joe returned sharply. "I told you I was through with the stuff, and I mean through. The bunch I run with 'ud never have roped me into their dirty game if they hadn't slipped me dope that night Koffman busted my ribs. I was crazy with pain. But there's no dope in me now. I'm goin' back at 'em. They can't use me for a stinkin' graft like that. They tried to make me peddle dope to high school kids. Gals! You know where the gals gets to afterwards. Quick, too.

"I might 'a' fell for it. They was takin' me in on a juicy cutup, to get me feelin' good, that night we got socked on the callybash. And you was takin' chances down that lane that night, 'bo. I feel better than I ever felt shot full o' snow; but, oh, boy, how different!"

"Just the same, Joe, I hate to see it on you."

"Forget it!" Joe whacked Burton on the back. "We been buddies, ain't we? And we're goin' to pay off some scores on

the way back, ain't we? Come and cut in on the fun when we get there."

"I'll have to, Joe," said Burton, honestly.

Joe only laughed as they turned into their steamy bunks. In five minutes he was asleep. Burton lay wakeful for hours.

WHEN the *Lurcher* sailed for home, she shipped half a dozen desperate looking beachcombers to replace her own crowd who had fallen for the fleshpots spurned by Joe. The captain and chief engineer too had been having a good time ashore, it was not much of a cargo that the steamer had secured; barely a half freight of coffee in bags; yet sailing day was a roaring affair, with some flashy grandees from the town giving the officers a vinous send-off such as might have speeded personages of note. And when the steamer got to sea and encountered a moderate head surge that set her to rolling and pitching crazily, things speedily began to happen.

Burton and Joe were closer now than ever; they were more or less old hands. Their two watchmates were new, and much newer than they had been when shanghaied. The cocky young engineer who popped in and out of the stokehold, yelling for steam, would have been jocose toward them; but Joe had a score to settle with him, and the payment was swift in coming. The two beachcombers were in a sad pickle, coming aboard drunk and half stupid. They were utterly helpless and useless. The engineer cursed them; and failing in that way to make one of them give him an excuse for beating him up, started to beat the fellow up anyway. Then Joe stepped in with eagerness.

"Leave him alone, buddy."

He shoved the engineer back.

"What th— Oh, it's the champ again!"

"You leave the man be; that's enough for you," Joe warned.

The reply was hard and straight; but it missed Joe. Joe was different. The engineer's fist went over Joe's shoulder, and Joe's counter took the fellow close up under the ribs and hurled him backward over a heap of ashes into the door of the coal bunker.

The surprised and furious engineer forgot all about steam and crawled over the ashes to beat Joe to pulp. Joe met him with a grin, playing with him on the reeling iron floor. Joe had been good in his day. Now he jabbed and hooked and slapped with the open hand until he had his man dizzy and blind with rage. It was simply paying a score, to Joe's way of thinking.

Burton stood back by the ladder, enjoying the fight, but most of all the artistry of Joe's work. When the engineer's face was swollen like a pudding, and Joe still grinned, the job seemed about done. But the engineer thought otherwise. He stumbled back a pace, suddenly stooped for Joe's shovel and swung it.

Joe's grin vanished. He frowned, stepped in like a slither of light and struck under the shovel two trip hammer jolts to the chin. There was a click, the man pitched to the floor, out to the world and beyond.

"Hold him up," Joe said briskly.

Burton lifted the man to a sitting position.

"Jaw's unshipped," Joe told him, and with a matter of fact, deliberate punch, he knocked the jaw back into place again.

Then Joe took the bucket of oatmeal drinking water and sloshed it over the engineer's head and face. The man looked as if he had just been boiled in porridge. And when he came to, he glared fearfully at Joe. But Joe's debt was paid. He had no further animosity. He was back at his firing when the engineer stood shakily on his feet. The matter was closed; but it took the engineer almost as long to realize that as it did for his face to return to normal.

BEFORE the ship was a week at sea petty scrapping among the crew developed into something more serious. The skipper and engineer had been having too good a time all that week. They were drinking. And the officers and assistant engineers had their share, too. The ship was kept going by habit more than by anything else. The fires were fed, and the wheel was relieved by firemen and seamen who could think of no other routine as long as the galley produced the regular whack of food three times daily. The new hands, once they got over their seasickness, took a place among the forecastle crowd.

Joe and Burton had debts to collect among the old hands; but daily fights among the men themselves left them without adequate openings to single out their old enemies. Joe's pet enemy, the big fireman of the four to eight watch,

suddenly got himself knifed, just when Joe had washed and trimmed his nails all ready to go out and slap his face. The knifing was not serious, but it put a new aspect on the forecastle fights. The new hands were dirty fighters—knifers.

There was a howl. Men ran to the captain. The captain was in a merry mood and told the men to kick the tar out of the knifer. With the advice, he ordered an issue of liquor, and that worked a complete change forward. In an hour the big fireman and his assailant were sitting side by side in a bunk, singing ribald songs. Wheel and stokehold reliefs were late; and only because Joe's watch stayed below after their spell was up did the steamer keep going at all.

"I never was on a boat before, Joe, but this one seems to be handled pretty incidental to me," Burton remarked, when at last they went forward and found the forecastles full of liquored men, drunk beyond the fighting and singing stages.

"Like a lot o' pigs in a crate," grunted Joe, hauling a snoring man out of his bunk and dumping him on the grimy floor.

Two days later the ship was running along the land in a misty rain. The skipper gave attention to verifying his position, then went back to his comfortable session with the chief, who had not been into the engine room since leaving; port. If the mates worried, they hid it well. They seemed well content. But there was a new feeling about the crew on the evening of the landfall.

Joe and Burton had been left alone, much to their satisfaction; but it was only because they made it plain that they had nothing in common with the rest. When their watchmate had first told the others of Joe's whipping the engineer, Joe and Burton might have ruled the forecastle. They chose to decline all honors. It was no man and master fight that Joe fought; it was a simple man to man squaring of accounts.

So now they lay in their bunks after dark, watching men move about the fore hatch through mist and rain, like ghosts. At first they watched with idle curiosity; later with keener interest. The hatches were being silently removed. Then the steamer's speed noticeably slackened, and the voice of the bridge officer could be heard yelling down the engine room tube for more revolutions.

"Let's take a look," said Burton.

All his professional instincts were sharpened. He smelled dirty business. Joe sensed trouble; that was enough to bring Joe out. They crept on deck and stood in the dark comer by the forecastle head ladder. Voices were loud and angry now on the bridge. The skipper appeared and yelled. Then an engineer bounced up from the stokehold to yell profanely about keeping steam when there was nobody shoveling coal. Hot words passed, then engineer and mate clattered down the ladders from the bridge and came lurching forward.

"This is going to be good!" chuckled Burton.

THE MATE was aware of the activity around the hatch. He flashed a light, cursing. Curses answered him. Then men rushed him and the engineer. The engineer took sudden fright and shouted nervous orders to delinquent firemen to return to their duty. He was taken by the same crowd that rushed the mate. Steel flashed. The mate went down with a grunt. The engineer backed away, striking out manfully with his fists, shouting murder.

"That's what it is!" snapped Joe. "Murder! Come on, buddy."

Burton and Joe Lennard found themselves standing side by side over the mate's body, fighting off crowding men who cursed them for lickspittles. Any other two men might have found the fight hopeless, for sticks and knives were plentiful. But Joe could hit and dodge; Burton had tackled mobs before. They gained breathing space, in which the engineer took courage again. His shouts brought other mates, other engineers. The skipper himself came running forward.

Then the fight became a battle. Somebody hit Burton on the head from behind before the reinforcements realized that he and Joe were not of the mutineers. Burton hit back on general principles, flooring the skipper, and went on with his battling. Burton fought on the side of authority because all his training was to that end. Joe fought against the crew, not so much because he loved the officers, as because he still had scores to pay with some of the crew. That and inherent dislike for knifing put powder into his punch and lightning into his eye.

The fight took on a desperate phase for a moment when two other seamen came running forward from the boat deck. But now the captain had his pistol working and fired two shots close overhead. Gradually the gang backed up and was shut in the forecastle.

"Who stood by the ship?" rasped the skipper. "Let's see you."

His torch flashed in the faces of Joe and Burton. He laughed nervously.

"Damned if it isn't the champion and the fly cop! All right, lads; I'll see you don't lose by it."

The mates took Joe and Burton aft, and they relashed and covered a boat which had been all ready to lower. Discovery of the ready boat had sent the captain scurrying forward again, to inspect the fore hatch fastenings. Then the engineers armed themselves, went to the forecastle and invited out men to get the boilers going again. Joe and Burton were allowed to go to their bunks; and then Joe peered hard into his mate's face. "What did he mean, fly cop?" he asked. Burton laughed.

"That's what I told him when I tried to make him land us, Joe. But he was the fly one. If I'd been a dick I'd have got hunk with him down there in Coralita. Forget it."

THE NEXT day the captain appeared sober, and the ship was run strictly on seagoing schedule. She was running in for home, and there was no trace remaining of slipshod rule or mutiny. When she made her number there was no police flag flying. When she took her pilot, and later came to Quarantine, no word was said of mutiny and bloodshed.

Furtive men wondered. It was not like a shipmaster to quell a mutiny and make no complaint. It puzzled Burton, with his law trained mind. Joe said nothing. That puzzled Burton, too. He believed that Joe was well content to see no police flag flown, though he had been no mutineer.

Then the steamer slid into her slip. Burton was first at the gangway, and half a dozen burly fellows greeted him in a manner which made Joe's eyes snap. But Joe seemed to be very little worried, though he made his feelings clear:

"So you are a fly cop, eh? Well, you got to take me in, I suppose. I'm here."

The captain, engineer and officers were staring at the plain clothes men whom Burton was inviting aboard. That party looked like unexpected trouble.

"I'm not taking you, Joe," Burton said, "except as a witness against these guys for kidnaping me."

Then Joe grinned. He took from his pocket the little package he had hidden under his bed down south. Burton's face clouded. Joe opened the package and poured into one palm a dozen coffee beans. One bean he squeezed, keeping his back turned on everybody but Burton.

"Never mind about a piffling kidnaping case, buddy," he said hoarsely. The crushed bean had revealed a white powder. "There's a hundred bags of coffee in the forehold, and every one of 'em's half phoney, like these. Dope! Hurry and get the skipper! I was under the window when he took the shipment."

"Go get 'em, boys!" snapped Burton to the burly lads. "So that's why those guys tried to stop the ship and take a boat. Hatches off too. And that's why no police flag flew. But how the chief came to send the boys down to meet me is a mystery."

Joe chuckled. He was watching the captain and chief engineer trying to appear virtuous under arrest.

"Not much mystery about it, buddy. I cabled for 'em," said Joe.

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## 5: Bongo

***Sinclair Lewis***

1885-1951

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THE drums went *trrrrrrr*. The bugles shouted. Into the central ring staggered the star of Platt Bros. & DeSalz' Mammoth Combined Circuses— a small brown bear decorously costumed In a pill-box cap and a large red bow. It was Bongo, no less— Bongo the Protean, Terpsichorean, and Histrionic Ursine Marvel of the World— little bear Bongo, walking with a cane and, to the screaming delight of the children, waving a cigar made of the best papier-mache.

Bongo circled the ring, bowing to the audience till his cap was almost shaken off his broad head. He handed his cigar and stick to an obsequious clown-waiter, in evening dress, and sat at a table. With a fork and a huge knife he ate nothing at all, very neatly, and finished the meal by drinking more nothing out of a tilted bottle. He rode a tricycle, he balanced a large starry ball on his nose, he hunted in his keeper's pockets for sugar, and wound up, with the drums again ruffling, the bugles hysteric, and the children yelping, by angling beside a tub, tumbling in, and crawling out with a huge fish, also papier-mache, triumphant in his claws.

He marched off then, and the children settled down to the rather dreary finale of the circus— an almost bankrupt circus, threadbare under a patched tent.

Indeed, with the rivalry of the movies, it was the amiable genius of little bear Bongo alone that was keeping Platt Bros. & DeSalz alive.

Bongo, rejoicing now in lettuce and an exquisite loaf of dry bread, in his cage after the limelighted splendor, had been born in the circus. There was some scandal about his father— he was never spoken of in Bongo family circles— and his mother, like himself, remembered only the show. She had been a cub of but six months when she had been captured by furry natives, led by a spectacled German animal-collector from Hamburg, in the sullen forests of Siberia.

To Bongo, the circus was as much the whole of life as is Hester Street to the child fortunate enough to be born among pushcarts. No life was conceivable other than the long drowsy days in winter quarters, broken only by sessions of learning tricks, with the sure award of half a comb of honey; the motion of the circus train, its lulling sway and the clean smell of cinders; the menagerie tent with the exciting, faintly disturbing odors of the lion and the monkeys; and the glory of acting to hysteric applause.

It is doubtful if in his small bearish mind Bongo had ever heard much about Hamlet, but if he had, he could not have conceived that walking around a stage in black silk tights, carrying a skull, was half so noble as riding a bright red

velocipede, ever so gay and fine, one paw on the bar and the other poking nonchalantly at his pill-box cap. It was a many-colored life, but secure. Providence— acting through his keeper, Mr. J. Henry Trotter— unfailingly lavished bright fresh straw, dry bread and ears of corn, and each year a new scarlet pill-box cap with a fresh elastic to go under Bongo's chin.

It is doubtful, too, if Bongo realized that somewhere in the world were little bears who had no keepers to fetch them peanuts. Indeed, Bongo did not know that there were any other bears. He was four, now; his brothers had died at birth, his mother when he was a year old, and there were no bears besides himself in the mangy menagerie of Platt Bros. & DeSalz.

He was his own Hamlet in a Denmark inhabited entirely by worshiping human subjects— he thought. But this is a moral tale, with a message, and Bongo was to learn sad, long sorrows.

The circus had started out late in May, this year, and played seven towns before it reached Colorado. At midnight the circus train was climbing the edge of a high canyon. It was June by the calendar, but here, nine thousand feet above sea level, a smear of snow hung like torn wool on the mountainside, and a breath of winter crept into the cages on the flat cars, wilting all their tropic exuberance.

The leopards moaned in a gold-and-crimson den, the lone elephant rubbed the sides of his box car with quaking shoulders, and alone in the shivering darkness, little bear Bongo squatted on his heels and pawed unhappily at his nose.

He wore his pill-box cap and his handsome red bow tie— his keeper had been comfortably drunk, last evening, and had forgotten to take them off— but even a cap and a red tie are not protection against acid cold for a bear who has been enervated by sleeping on the richest straw.

The train seemed to be dropping downhill now; it rolled like a ship; the trucks muttered, "Hit it up, hit it up, hit it up." But so accustomed a traveler as Bongo was not nervous; he was more pestered by the cold. He scrabbled straw over himself feebly and rolled into a ball in the corner.

Then it happened. A crash. His car leaping into the air and turning over. Bongo thrown into the air and slammed down. Quaking, he heard men bellowing, the lion thundering, the hyena shrieking, and swiftly the night was torn by flames. His cage was upside down; he stood on the ceiling of it, only a little bruised, and was cloudily aware that there was a way out from this horror— the door of his cage had been wrenched open.

He lumbered out, grotesquely galloping. His hind legs seemed to cross his front ones as he fled. The glare from the burning train showed a way through the sharp fractured stones up the mountainside, and Bongo followed it, mindless with terror.

He passed out of the lather of light. His eyes, unaccustomed to night in the wilderness, could still pick out better than man's a way through the scattered boulders. He felt for a path, padding with sensitive paws; came sharp up against a cliff, turned, got confused, turned and turned again— and at dawn, little bear Bongo was curled in an elbow of rock, shivering and completely lost.

He looked out on a natural upland clearing, bordered with fir, and was uneasy at the stillness, the thin air without one good wholesome trace of camel-smell or peanuts in it. He got up. shaking his coat till the frost flew from the agitated hairs, and feebly circled toward the center of the clearing. He'd had enough of this dismaying business of breadless freedom. He had an indistinct bearish urge to get back to the circus, but he had no notion which way to turn.

He rolled through the clearing, sniffing hungrily, humping up his back, his wide stern swaying. Suddenly he sat down with a "Whumph!" of surprise. He had seen the most astonishing thing of his life— more amazing than the train wreck. Out of the fir thicket came a creature strangely like himself, with an absurd miniature of itself rollicking alongside.

It was a she-bear and her cub, but Bongo did not know. His knowledge of cities and men, of pop and pink popcorn, his civilized taste in starry gilt balls to balance and vintage lettuce to chew, did not include any information about bears.

Only by instinct and memory did he realize that here were beings related to himself, strange lovely creatures whom he wanted to know better.

The she-bear— a foot taller than little bear Bongo and twice as shaggy, a black bear of the Rockies, rival to the grizzly— squatted and growled. The cub squatted and whimpered. Bongo was inspired. He lumbered up. He scooped up a chunk of rotten log. he balanced it on his nose, and, with the dancing step that had never failed to win an audience, he capered affectionately toward his own kind, airily waving a histrionic paw.

The old bear squealed, slapped its cub, and the two of them dashed into the forest, the muscles of their shoulders rolling under thick hides as they fled. Bongo stood gasping, his paw foolishly raised. It was the first time an audience had ever walked out on him. The chunk of wood slid from his nose, and he dropped to all fours, his head moving slowly from side to side in bewilderment.

He was again homesick for the circus train.

He tried to head for it. He realized that in the darkness he had come uphill all the way; that he must climb down. Trotting to the edge of the upland clearing where he had awakened he found a slope and followed it; struck a long rocky decline and scrambled down it, wincing and grunting as the rocks clipped his urbane feet.

It was downward, right enough. But it happened that he was descending the side of the ridge opposite the canyon where the train lay smoldering. He

dropped through rocks and thin shelters of fir into thick spruce, and after two panting hours of stumbling forward, reached a valley where a stream ran among larches, cottonwoods and weedy bogs. He had come to spring again— and incidentally to a land where, save for the wrecking crew now busy on the track across the ridge, ten miles away, there was no human being (with comforting loaves of dry bread in his pocket) within seventy miles.

He lapped and lapped at a cold pug-hole of water, and stood weaving, furious with hunger. He had noticed queer, smooth, long-legged green things that had popped into the water at his approach— animals, presumably, but stranger to him than the yak. One of them had come to the surface— two bulging little eyes and a flat head.

Bongo stared. Bongo the friendly, Bongo the pet, trembled with unuttered savage growling and, faster than it ever had moved before, his thick foreleg scooped at the water, caught up the frog, and he crunched it with swift fangs.

Delicious!

For an hour, the circus train forgotten. Bongo hunted frogs. He began to feel more at home in the valley. His eyes grew wise in hunting. He saw and swiped at a field mouse, missed it, sat stolid by the little highway of the mice, and agreeably snapped up the next one. He investigated an ant hill, and though he did it amateurishly and got well bitten about the nostrils, he licked up a few thousand ants as dessert and felt well pleased with himself.

It was warm down here, in the coaxing spring sunshine and curled in a thicket. Bongo slept till he was recovered from the shock and cold of the night before. He awoke toward dusk and vaguely headed in the direction where he still believed he might And the circus train. But he was confused when the valley began to slope up again, and he paced back and forth on a knoll as in a cage.

Now in the clay farther side of that valley, there were half a dozen caves, and all of them were intermittently occupied by the most settled and respectable families of American black bears. The bear is an individualist, tolerant of his fellows but a lone hunter, and Bongo had drifted into what came as near to being an ursine village as anything could. He did not know it, yet. He was sickeningly lonely, and as the moon came up, with its full unearthly light, he was frightened.

No more than any other city brat did Bongo know the panic moonlight of the country. Daylight he had seen on parades, but at night he had been shut in a cage or in his winter pen. This ghost of light, in which the spruce were dead stone, the grass was phosphorescent, and the clay banks rising above the knoll shone with malignancy, drained from Bongo the last of his Rotarian vigor.

He growled feebly, and turning round and round like a corkscrew, burrowed for himself a nest of leaves. He crouched in it, his piggy little eyes watching with alarm the night, which should have softened downily into darkness, grow pallid

in the bewitched false light as the moon sailed into open sky. He was conscious of spectral wails circling him, nearer and nearer.

They were coyotes, but Bongo knew nothing of coyotes. He was used enough to animals howling in the menagerie, but this was different— a menacing, hunting cry, and it made him huddle into himself as though he were huddling beside the mother he had forgotten.

Between coyote yelps, in the moonsmitten silence, Bongo was aware of movements near him, of cautious shufflings, of a woolly smell that excited him.

He peered. He crawled out of his nest. He padded through the spruce that ringed his knoll— and on a rough clay terrace, in front of the swart mouths of many caves, he saw a dozen black bears, old and young, prowling in the moonlight, the cubs tumbling one another while their parents mumbled at old bones and scratched themselves in a relaxed, shirt-sleeved, after-the-day's-work, neighborhood way. They kept in family groups, not too close to one another, but they made up a rough community of his own people, and Bongo's friendly heart yearned toward them.

So, in the moonlight, on grass prickly with pine needles in an amphitheater below the Shelf of Caves, little bear Bongo coaxed them by putting on the greatest performance of his life, while the older bears stared down at him, and the cubs stopped playing and shrank to frightened stillness.

His pill-box cap and his red tie were awry but brave. He rose to his hind legs, poked at the cap, and began to dance, paddling at them with beseeching front paws and kicking as high as he could. He picked up a twig for cigar and skittishly paraded before them, smoking it.

After the first shock they had crawled down nearer to him, one by one.

Entranced, he worked the harder. He squatted beside a rock which (he hoped they would see it) represented his dining table of the circus, and with languid elegance he drank nothing out of a glass which also was artistically represented by nothing. Then, in a passion of art and friendliness, he stood up on his front paws and, his plump stern wagging with the effort, walked back and forth for them, back and forth, with a perfection that no bear acrobat has ever equaled.

He was shocked and terrified by a blow on his elevated hind legs, and dropped to earth to see an enormous black he-bear, eighteen inches taller than himself, reared over him, growling, while from the close-circled audience came low beary sounds that in humans would have been contemptuous titters. He trembled up. The black giant cuffed him, with one sweeping slap tore the pill-box cap from his head, grunted, and lumbered away to his cave, followed by his tribe, and little bear Bongo stood alone in his deserted circus.

He whined, shaking his head, and half an hour afterward he crept into an untenanted cave— and it was the smallest cave, and damp, and at the humble suburban end of the clay shelf.

Week after week, the older bears growled at him to keep away, and the cubs ran and hid from him, and by night it was damp in his cave. He learned to hunt for himself— not frogs and mice only, but grubs in logs, rabbits, berries and, learning by watching the others from a distance, the hives of wild bees.

He never dared to try his art on them again but he never could give up trying to be social. When he found his first honey, he sidled up to his closest neighbor with some of it smeared on his paw. She was a small bear and scrawny, but even she mauled him— after licking the honey. He tried to play with the cubs and got whopped away by their elders.

He was, in a word, to the smallest common ursine sense, absolutely crazy.

Who ever heard of a bear that wore a red tie and danced in the moonlight? Who ever heard of a bear so idiotic that he thought he could get away with pretending that he liked to share his food? Who ever heard of a bear playing with other people's cubs, unless he had some foul design on them?

Who ever heard of a bear that was brown, anyway?

The most thumping proof of Bongo's mania was that when he was slapped, he didn't slap back. While the rest of Bongo's unheard-of follies might have been mere publicity-seeking and meanness, this social refusal to duel like a sportsbear and a gentlebear showed him to be a dangerous revolutionary as well as a maniac.

By late summer they no longer dreaded Bongo but merely despised him, and in the evening, at their pleasant cavemouths, the cubs would sing after him as he slunk home:

*Bongo is crazy— crazy— crazy!*
*He's loco, duck-foot, lean and lazy!*
*He's drunk on honey; he's wolfish drunk;*
*He can't snare foxes or kill a skunk,*
*Or find the log with the juicy grubs*
*And Shame on You cry the Flaming Cubs,*
*Woof, woof, woof!*

*The stars are fleas in the night's black fur,*
*And when they come out to bother her,*
*And bad coyotes that eat small cubs*
*Come paddlety-paddlety through the shrubs,*
*They'll howl for Bongo and drag him back*
*To his own unbearly and crazy pack,*
*Woof, woof, woof!*

And meantime Bongo had fallen in love! She was a lovely thing, three years and a half old this summer, in the bloom of innocent maidenhood— Miss Silver Ear, with teeth splendid as steel. She was a flirtatious girl, and every day she shocked the solider bears of the village by parading along the clay shelf, wiggling herself in no very nice manner. But to Bongo, his ideals formed by leopards and ladies riding bareback, she was elegance itself. He loped after her, timorously, one day, and tried to rub noses.

Probably it was only with a winning flirtatiousness that she slapped his nose; she had a right to expect to be slapped back, probably bitten, and so to begin a reasonable affair. But when Eongo shrank and whined, she knocked him over. After that, she knocked him over every time she saw him.

Their snickering at Bongo's other eccentricities was nothing compared with their contempt when day after day they saw him slinking after Silver Ear and being clawed.

His spirit was almost broken.

He became afraid even of other animals, even of the mean coyotes, and when he made a kill, these forest hoodlums sneaked closer to him than they would ever have to a self-respecting bear. They scented his fear. They laughed at him— bears only chuckle, but coyotes shriek with laughter.

He killed a rabbit, one morning, down among the cottonwoods on Mormon Run, and as he crouched to eat it, he was conscious of leering wolfish faces edging toward him through the trees— four coyotes, like gunmen surrounding a solid citizen. He looked at them mildly, and crunched the rabbit.

He dropped the hind quarters, and suddenly they were snatched up from his very feet by a flashing wolf. He did not so much as grunt. There was more than enough meat for him.

The coyotes squatted and considered. Here, obviously, was a bear either very sick or loco. And, like four projectiles, they shot at his head.

And out of the forests of Kamchatka came the memory of Bongo's ancestors that had fought the saber-toothed tiger.

He waved at them clumsily, turned quickly, got his back against a tree, and as they soared at him again, he squatted, and batted them down as casually as a sleepy man would bat flies. One of them caught its fangs in Bongo's left front paw and with sudden appalling speed Bongo clasped it to him in that bear hug which is not a hug at all, but a tearing of the enemy's chest with claws like a steel rake. From neck to belly he ripped it, and as the coyote went limp in his arms, he bit into its hot neck, growled furiously, and lumbered at the other three, which fled, yelping.

The lettuce-bred Bongo devoured most of that coyote.

He swaggered back to the Shelf of Caves. Miss Silver Ear was in front of her maidenly home, chewing a bone.

As he came up to her, she reared up with a threatening paw. Bongo straightway smote her on the side of the head, so that she was almost knocked over, then straightened her up with a sock on the other side, snarled at her, and paraded back to his cave, to sleep off his sanguinary jag for seven hours.

He did not know it, but all that time Silver Ear curled before his cave in an ecstasy of love for him.

When he came out, at evening, for a drink— he had a terrible head and a slight shame— she followed him, and the village marveled. For a moment, he might have become a real bear, as good as any other bearly bear on Cave Street, and the elders of the village watched him with approval. But he did not realize it. He grunted affably at Silver Ear instead of lamming her again, as she fondly hoped, and he was lost to the decent opinion of the village forever.

And he kept on courting her by trying to be gentle!

She permitted him about, in the hope that he would again be the honest and considerate young suitor he had for a moment shown himself, and in his delight he tried the more to please her.

He had no memory. whatever of being drunk and slapping her.

He looked for the present which amorous bears bring to their beloved— information about a place to kill. He wandered farther from home than any of the other bears, and on a three-day hike from the village, he came on the cabin of a settler, who had arrived in the valley after Bongo himself.

Bongo smelled Man, and Man meant loaves of dried bread.

He galloped up to the cabin, and was met with a blast from a shotgun which scorched his back. He went away with speed, remembering that there were mean men as well as blessed beings.

He was angry. He wriggled about the place by evening, and discovered a pig in a pen of unbarked logs. Now why bears should* consider pig the greatest of luxuries, we cannot say, but it is a fact, and this discovery Bongo bore to Silver Ear.

He found her with one Lump Jaw, a surly oversized young he-bear whom she had always fancied and Bongo always hated. It was half an hour before Bongo was able to get her aside and tell her of his exquisite find.

She humped away with him. Lump Jaw stopped her, but she came on after Bongo, and his heart was proud... He was going to be a bearly bear. With a bearly mate.

He thought, once or twice, on that flight back to the settler’s precious pig, that he saw Lump Jaw sneaking back of them, but he was not sure.

When it was dusk again, while Silver Ear kept watch outside, Bongo crawled under the bars of the pigpen.

He slid as on grease to the hovel in the corner of the pen where the pig lay dreaming. Bongo snatched up that pig, gave it the lethal hug before it could let out one squeal, and dragged it out, under the fence, to his dear Silver Ear.

They were bending over it together when— thunderclap out of moony sky— Bongo was staggered and deafened by a clout on his ear, and felt down his nose claws of fire. As he cowered and peered up, he saw Lump Jaw, and he crouched, sore and afraid.

Lump Jaw, with no further attention to him, snatched up a leg of the pig in his huge fangs, and dragged it off— and Silver Ear trotted off beside him, happily, with a grunt that was more giggling than a giggle.

It was a week before Bongo slunk back to the Shelf of Caves and to his outcast shame.

He would not have gone at all, but he knew no other home now, and it was coming cold. The streams froze at night; there were few frogs, few mice, only rabbits to be stalked in the brush, and dry untasteful roots to be grubbed from the brittle earth.

He was puzzled by the disappearance family by family of his fellow citizens. He, the gay dog of winter quarters— he still had round his neck a gray rag which might once have been a red tie of much chic— knew nothing about hibernation; knew only that Silver Ear and Lump Jaw and the other grandees were no more to be seen. It made the hunting better, this lack of competition, and made him the lonelier.

On the day of the first snow, he felt incomprehensibly sleepy. He scratched leaves and pine boughs into his cave, in a drowse, made of them a nest in the farthest corner, fell into a great sleep— and awoke four months later, after a four-month-long dream about Silver Ear.

He found a world of streams and vanishing snow patches edged with dirtcovered filigree of ice. It was an early and exuberant spring; otherwise, little bear Bongo would probably never have come out of his cave again.

He was thin as a rat. Trembling with weakness, he set about the dreary business of snapping up frogs, minnows, mice— he who should just now have been starting out in a scarlet-and-golden cage, with banners and the tumult of puffing bands, to greet his Public.

The other bears came out, after him, scrawny, very irritable, and finally there came out, together, Silver Ear and Lump Jaw. They were the most snappish and intolerant of all, and they were followed by four cubs, and Silver Ear flew at him, a mangy demon, when he so much as glanced at her young.

That day even the innocent Bongo, that Jolly Bachelor Uncle among bears, knew that he wasn’t wanted.

He drifted away from the Shelf of Caves. He followed Mormon Run down the valley to warmer layers of air, warmer pools where he could scoop up trout with

a flicker of his paw. He was not very clear about it all, but he was relieved at being free of the thrall of passion for that Troy's Helen among bears, the lovely Silver Ear...

Bears have advantages. Except for two bones, a pile of leaves, and what might have been the crushed and soggy remains of a red pill-box cap, he was leaving behind him no baggage for which he would have to send...

He must have wandered more than a hundred miles, sometimes cold and starving; once, after encountering the cabin of a settler ambitious to keep bees, very drunk with honey and bee-stings.

Ranges and valleys he crossed, and then, one afternoon, little bear Bongo stood on a tremendous cliff looking down on a plain checkered with alfalfa and orchards and sugar beets, with the roofs and white sides of cottages making a bright and enticing town among them. He listened, startled. He heard a familiar "Oom-pah, oom-pah, oom-pah, oom-pah"— a circus band!— and made out the long gray-yellow tent, with a sun-ray on the Babylonian magnificence of the ticket wagon.

With no second's hesitance, Bongo humped down a cliff path that was no path at all. He rolled over rock walls like a porcupine. He skidded down water channels. He bumped his stern on rolling rocks with only the mildest "Woof!" of reproof to the rocks for biting him.

The citizenry of the town of Conquistadore were appalled to see a bear galloping down Main Street. Before anyone could hustle in for a gun and get him, the bear had reached the circus grounds. There were few people outside the tent, for the afternoon show was on; those few scattered, bellowing.

A clever canvasman ran for a pitchfork, but Bongo stayed not to be pitchforked. He dashed through the main entrance of the tent, upsetting the ticket taker, overthrowing the ticket box; through the menagerie tent, where leopards yammered at him; into the main tent and the ring— while five thousand people, as one, rose in horror at this escaped beast of ferocity.

The ringmaster ran toward him, and the ringmaster had a revolver. Before he drew, Bongo rose on his hind legs and advanced mincingly, kicking high, one paw affectedly in air, and dropped to all fours before his sovereign lord.

"Well, I'll be " reflected the ringmaster.

He never got any farther.

The head animal-keeper was there now, with rope, prong, and shotgun.

"Seems like a trained bear. Escaped somewheres," he said profoundly.

He roped Bongo, who followed meekly into the menagerie, while the five thousand settled down with a universal sigh.

In the menagerie tent, the keeper tossed to Bongo a huge starry ball. Bongo balanced it on his nose, and paraded with it— a little clumsy now, but the professional, the real thing, come back to his own.

“You’ll do!” exulted the keeper. “I don’t know where you come from, but never ask the Lord embarrassing questions when he gives you a straight flush or a prescription or a performing bear.”

He handed Bongo a loaf— a delicious, an epicurean loaf of dried bread, and as Bongo gulped it his heart sang and his mind got to work in a slow, bearish fashion on improvements in ball-balancing... Why not on one ear?

The keeper led him to a large cage, a very superior cage— incredibly luxurious to one who had been cursed with greasy caves. He half entered, and stopped, his heart rapid.

In a corner of the cage, alone, staring at him with startled rapture, was a young lady bear, a real, reasonable, brown Siberian bear.

Bongo edged toward her. They rubbed noses and curled up side by Side. He gently swatted her— ever so gently— it would not more than have killed Jack Dempsey. She tapped him back, lovingly, and so he came from the burdens of freedom and the horrors of Nature to the happy civilization of his cage.

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## 6: The Scientific "D."

***Edward Dyson***

(As by Ward Edson)

*Punch* (Melbourne) 8 July 1909

DETECTIVE Serenus A. Nowll was reckoned an ornament to his profession. He was quite the most up-to-date man in the Intelligence Department, and thoroughly investigated every new theory, scheme, and principle for the prevention and detection of crime. Indeed, there were captious critics among his envious rivals who declared that Detective Serenus A. Nowll would be much better employed chasing criminals than pursuing theories.

Of course, this was absurd, and in accordance with the old-time supposition that the chief duty of a thief-taker is to take thieves. Serenus took a loftier view of his profession; he claimed that it was a scientific profession, and aspired to shine as a scientist. In fact the favourite nickname of Serenus A Nowll was The Scientist.

The detective, he said, was not merely a policeman, not merely a keeper of the peace; he was one of the bulwarks of civilisation. Without him, there was danger of the whole structure of society going to pieces. He was society's guarantee against anarchy, and was called upon to deal with, all the subtler manifestations of villainy, all the cunningest foes of order, and to do so effectually must be subtler and more cunning than the smartest enemies of the law.

To perfect himself Serenus A. Nowll studied all those sciences and philosophies that seemed to bear upon his work. He was a profound thinker in psychology, he had given years of his life to the principles of hypnotism, he knew all that the experts could tell him about thought reading and telepathy, and the minor details of a detective's work were all at his finger tips.

When the principle of detection by thumbprints came into prominence, Detective Serenus A. Nowll took the matter up with great enthusiasm.

As years wore on, Detective Nowll gave his time and attention more and more to the collecting of finger prints and the study thereof. In this science he fondly believed lay the supreme hope of society. With the aid of thumbprints detection of criminals would presently become child's play.

Serenus believed he had discovered what he called the criminal's thumb. Just as there is a cricketer's nose, a bicycle face, a billiard eve, and a boxer's ear, he believed there was a criminal's thumb. In the thumbprints of politicians he could trace a marked family resemblance; and was looking forward to the time when criminals would be known by their thumbs, and would be imprisoned on the evidence of their thumb-prints pure and simple.

"Prevention is better than cure," said Serenus A. Nowll, inventing a happy phrase, "and if we can detect a criminal by the markings of his thumb, why permit him to commit shocking crimes merely to provide further proof that he is a criminal?"

Now, having perfected himself on the scientific side, Serenus A. Nowll became anxious to demonstrate the proof of his theories by practical experience. He began to think about catching criminals. It was high-time, for the burglars, embezzlers, spielers. and crooks, of all sorts were very busy in the city, and were prospering amazingly.

Serenus appealed to be sent for in all important cases, and as he was highly regarded by his superiors as the cleverest theoretical detective in the Commonwealth, his wishes were granted.

Nowll tried several times to run to earth jewel robbers, gold stealers, bank breakers and a murderer or two, but his theories never quite worked, out.

"Entirely the fault of the criminals, we see that, Nowll," said the Chief encouragingly, patting him on the back. "If the criminal classes persistently ignore those scientific principles upon which your life's work is founded, we cannot blame you for your failure, the stigma falls upon the criminal."

"That's true," said Nowll sadly. "Their conduct in wearing gloves after hundreds of thousands of pounds had been devoted to perfecting the system of detection by thumb-prints confirms my worst suspicions; these criminals are utterly depraved."

"Persevere, my boy, persevere!" said the Chief heartily.

Serenus persevered, and then came the great Right Bower diamond robbery.

This was a beautiful case, named after one of the stolen jewels, a brooch fashioned like the Jack of Hearts, the figure worked with emeralds, diamonds and rubies. The stolen jewels belonged to the wife of a thriving bookmaker named Yacob Yacoops. The criminals had broken into the residence of Mr. Yacob Yacoops at the dead of night, and abstracted the jewels from the secret drawer of an old black iron safe set in an oaken bureau.

The work had been done with marvellous neatness, while the occupants of the house slept undisturbed. One side of the safe had been cut clean out. How the thieves could possibly have done this without waking the sleepers the great detective could not understand, until Mrs. Yacoops explained.

"Perhabs it is dot fadder suleep so sound dot you don'd hear a house fall for the sound of him sleeping."

This was a clue, and when Serenus heard Yacob Yacoops's snore he understood that Gabriel's trump might not be heard within a mile of it.

Serenus took up the Right Bower robbery with tremendous zeal. He spent a whole week looking for thumb-prints. Everybody but the official seekers was

ordered out of the house, and Nowll and his assistants went over the place with microscopes, seeking thumb-prints.

The search started in the cellar, and worked upwards, going over every inch of the house, in and out, and at length on the stout bureau itself, from which the safe had been torn, quaint and curious prints were discovered. There were many of these prints. Serenus A. Nowll had never seen anything quite like them before. Pieces of the bureau on which the prints were plainest were sawn out, and Serenus took them away and photographed them.

"Never saw such an extraordinary thumbprint in my life," Serenus told Miss Rachel Yacoops after he had studied it for a week.

"But," said Rachel, with natural petulance, "ve do not want the thumb-print, is it? Ve get any old thumb-prints ve vant 2d. a bushel. Vot about the tiamonts?"

"We are coming to the diamonds, my dear young lady."

"Then you bring me to them pretty, soon quick," said the young lady. "I am anxious aboud those tiamonts, not for my own sake, but pecause dey vill pe my properties when ma dies."

"Yes, yes, but don't be impatient. Here is the thumb-print. You see it has all the characteristics of my ideal criminal thumb-print worked up from the prints of ten thousand criminal thumbs."

"Yes, that I see me, but vere is the man with the thumb?"

"That I cannot say, but we have only got to catch him—"

"Dot is all?" said Miss Yacoops with nice sarcasm. "Nodding more. Off you do id pefore dinner I shall please me."

"You are too impetuous. When we do catch him, here, you see, is undeniable evidence against him."

"But vere is the tiamonts ?"

"Give us time. With this thumb-print we are certain to track him down."

"I do not see dot it contains his name and address," said the practical Rachel.

Serenus went away with his precious thumbprint, and compared it with a few thousand more, and the more he compared it the more convinced he was that it was the sign manual of a daring and desperate criminal. Nowll was particularly anxious to succeed in restoring the Yacoops diamonds. He had come from his studies late in life, and had been thrown into the society of charming Rachel Yacoops, and had succumbed to her florid, Oriental charms. Already he was desperately in love. If he could give Yacoops back his diamonds, Yacoops might willingly give his daughter, and, as Rachel would eventually get the diamonds, the prize was worth working for.

Serenus worked. He collected thumb-prints with a tremendous assiduity. He applied to Parliament for a permit to take thumb-prints from all sorts and conditions of people. He got search-warrants to secure citizens' thumbprints. He ran people down on bicycles, and pursued them on motors, and took their

thumbprints by force. Nobody was safe from him. He actually took his own chief's thumbprint, and it was found that one man he had run down was a State Governor. The thumb-print of the Right Bower jewel robber was a curious one; it was shaped in three sections, something like a clover-leaf or a shamrock, and each section was boldly lined.

For a time Serenus A. Nowll made certain that he had got his man. He discovered amongst his vast store of prints a photograph of the thumb-print of a quarryman whose hand had been smashed in a crane. In this print there were three sections, and there were other marked similarities.

"Eureka!" cried Nowll, giving another expression to the language.

He applied for a strong force, and at dead of night led his men to the residence of the quarryman. He posted his men, all of whom were armed, around the house. Then Serenus made his way in through a window, followed by ten men, placed all the occupants under arrest in their beds— and found that the quarryman had been dead a year.

Nowll was not discouraged. He continued his hunt, abroad in the land. He went all over the Commonwealth, collecting thumb-prints. He strove to have an Act passed making the taking of thumb-prints free, compulsory and secular, like vaccination, that the prints of every person in the country might be passed under review.

Meanwhile he was falling more deeply in love with Rachel every day. He kept a few of his men about Yacoops's' house hunting for clues, and taking thumb-prints of everyone who had ever been near the place or was ever likely to be. Every day, when in Melbourne, Serenus A. Nowll called for reports. Never had a detective been more assiduous. He had declared his passion, and Rachel had replied: "Better dot you ask for my hand ven it haff those tiamont rings on it."

One day Serenus demanded the thumb-print of old Yacoops himself, and was kicked out of the house, but there came an afternoon when he was met in the garden by Detective Earlypert, a smart young disciple of his own. Earlypert's face was alive with eagerness.

"You have discovered something!" cried Nowll.

"Yes," said Earlypert. "Look at this." He drew a thumb-print on blotting-paper from his pocket and held it towards Nowll.

"By heaven, the identical thing!"

"Yes, in every detail."

"When did you take it?"

"Half-an-hour ago."

"Where ?"

"Here!"

"You have the party?"

"I have him here. I can produce him at any moment."

"Then, thank God, the job is done. I shall get the family together. We must do this with dramatic effect, Earlypert. Every detective capture should, be smartly stage-managed. Bring him to the dining room in five minutest" Detective Nowll hurried' indoors, and called Mr., Mrs. and Miss Yacoops together.

"I have the thief where I can put my hand on him," he said. "He is here!"

At that dramatic moment Detective Earlypert entered. In his hand he held a large black Tom-cat.

"What!" cried Nowll, "is that the villain?"

"Observe, sir," said Earlypert. He pressed the cat's forepaw on the blotting-pad, producing a thumb-print exactly like that found in the dust on the old bureau.

"Yes, yes," said Nowll, ecstatically, "it is the same. Here we have the criminal who broke your safe and stole your diamonds. Mr. Yacoops. This evidence cannot be denied; it is scientific and irrefragable. Officer," he said, raising his voice, "arrest that cat!"

When the cat was carried away, struggling violently, and swearing at the top of his yowl, Detective Serenus A. Nowll turned to the amazed Miss Rachel.

"And now," he said, I have accomplished my purpose. I have fulfilled my mission. I claim my reward— your darling hand."

He got it, and it was rather more than a week before Rachel Yacoops's thumb-print disappeared from the region of his right eye.

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## 7: Tradition

***Georges Surdez***

1900-1949

Sun (Sydney) 29 Oct 1939

THE small room, a cube of whitewashed walls, seemed to have become very still, the Saharan heat to have grown more oppressive. Captain Gressard, recently appointed to command the 10th Squadron, First Foreign Regiment of Cavalry, watched the lieutenant's finger resting on the black and white designs of the large-scale regional map.

"From there we go to the Mensif Pass, *mon capitaine*," the crisp voice continued. "We usually get sniped at there, as they somehow contrive to dodge our point scouts and lurk in wait for officers."

Involuntarily, Gressard's eyes lifted. But there had been no irony intended; the smooth-faced young fellow was looking down at the map.

"We're big game for those chaps, you know. Obviously, we cannot blame them."

"Naturally not," Gressard admitted. His trained eye scanned the map. "Unless I am mistaken, Lieutenant," he observed casually "that is where my predecessor was killed,"

"Right, Captain: On our last patrol in that direction."

The 'young' 'Officer paused, resumed; "Two shots, head and throat. He was the third in eighteen months to go out within a stretch of four or five hundred yards. There had been Captain Mongarret, then there was Captain Chaupas. Yes, Captain Roubaux was the third. You see, he would not wear a kepi cover like the rest of us. I argued with him again and again, but he was an old Legionnaire, you see, and as long as the others had not covered their braid, he wouldn't."

"Three officers, almost in the same spot," Gressard' repealed. "And all for want of a bit of khaki cloth over their kepis, eh?"

"Precisely, Captain. Foolishness, isn't it?"

The Lieutenant's voice was lightened by a ring of humor. "Imagine yourself a sniper, Captain, lying hidden somewhere. You see a file of cavalrymen coming along. Naturally, you aim at the one who attracts your attention first—"

"Naturally—"

Without looking up, Gressard knew that his subordinate had cast a glance toward the captain's kepi, suspended from a hook stuck in the plaster. That kepi was covered by a khaki hood.

"That will be all the information I shall need now, Lieutenant. Thank you. Have the men ready in ten minutes."

"All right, Captain."

The door opened and closed. The young man was gone; Gressard was left alone.

"Mensif Pass," he mused. "Unhealthy spot for this squadron's commanders. Three in eighteen months. I am the fourth. And just because some ass— that poor devil of a Chaupas probably — set the style for discarding the cover, I am supposed to— nonsense!" He, Gressard was not a middle-aged schoolboy in uniform, anxious to parade his courage. He was thirty-six, with a long life ahead, a career. Courage? The palms, and stars on his War Cross should be a guarantee. And even these Legionnaires must suspect that he had not picked the red ribbon for valuable contributions to French arts!

Gressard was a temporary Legionnaire. With any luck, he would pick up the grade of major out here. Unless designated for bullets by a glistening kepi, a man did not run much risk. There should be almost one hundred targets to pick from, and he was enough of a gambler to risk such odds carelessly.

He folded and cased the map, glanced a last time at the reports on forage, water and ammunition. This was a patrol, an ordinary patrol, like any other, he kept repeating. Perhaps the ghosts of Chaupas, Mongarret, Roubaux would be somewhat shocked that he did not imitate his predecessors.

He knew that the Legionnaires would be disappointed. They dearly loved a dose of elegant foolishness in their chiefs. But why accept their standards? They were lost men— good soldiers surely; but vainglorious, childish fellows. Gressard would not risk his life for their admiration.

"I'm no sucker," he grumbled. Then he passed a hand over his eyes. The heat must be affecting him, for he experienced a sort of vision: He saw a half-naked, bearded, brown-skinned man stretched in the lee of a boulder, three hundred yards above Mensif Pass. He was peering down at a long file of mounted men on the trail below, his eyes seeking, seeking, as he unwound oiled rags from the breech of his rifle. And Gressard saw him grin, saw him whisper to a comrade behind him:

"They have a new leader. One not of the Legion."

For the sniper would know that at once. Not of the Legion, for a captain replacing the three who had died would not have worn a kepi cover. Gressard shook himself together with an effort.

He buckled on his pistol holster, reached for his kepi and moved toward the door. It would open and he would see the squadron assembled before him, men standing by the heads of their horses, ready to start; to start toward the Mensif Pass, where three captains had been killed in eighteen months. And all of them would look at his head immediately!

"Fools," he murmured. His hand was on the handle.

Then he was outside, in the full light, and he saw their eyes centering upon him. And he saw their expectant anxiety melt, saw them relax into confidence,

saw his young officers smile. He crossed toward the horse that his orderly held for him, hastily stuffing a khaki cloth into a pocket.

On his head, the only patch of brilliant color in the assembled detachment, he wore his full-dress kepi, shorn of any covering. It was lilted at a rakish angle, the broad leather peak shone, and around the black and red crown circled the triple loops of braid that branded him as the chief and the largely puerile, defiant braid that glittered in the dazzling light.

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## 8: Another Ghost Story

***Anonymous***

Queenslander 25 April 1868

THE FOLLOWING is a simple narrative, taken down in short hand from the lips of the narrator. He is a man now getting on in years, who distrustful of all other people's experience verging on what we impertinently term the supernatural, scarcely even ventures to believe his own. As a statement at first hand of an appearance testified to by the narrator and corroborated by his wife, both living, it has seemed to me, while simply transcribing the notes, to possess an interest often wanting in more artistic stories of artificial manufacture.

MY WIFE'S sister, Mrs. M., was left a widow at the age of thirty-five, with two children, of whom she was passionately fond. She carried on the draper's business at Bognor, established by her husband. Being still a handsome woman, there were several suitors for her hand. The only favored one among them was a Mr. Barton.

My wife never liked this Mr. Barton, and made no secret of her feelings to her sister, whom she frequently told that Barton only wanted to be master of the haberdasher shop in Bognor. He was a man in poor circumstances, and had no other motive in his proposal of marriage, so my wife thought, than to better himself.

On the 23rd of August, 1831, Mrs. M. arranged to go with Mr. Barton to a picnic party at Goodwood Park, the seat of the Duke of Richmond, who had kindly thrown open his grounds to the public for the day. My wife, a little annoyed at her going out with this man, told her she had much better remain at home to look after her children and attend to the business. Mrs. M., however, bent on going, made arrangements about leaving the shop, and got my wife to promise to see to her little girls while she was away.

The party set out in a four-wheel phaeton with a pair of ponies driven by Mrs. M. and a gig for which I lent my horse.

Now we did not expect them to come back till 9 or 10 o'clock, at any rate. I mention this particularly to show that there could be no expectation of their earlier return in the mind of my wife to account for what follows.

At 6 o'clock that bright summer's evening my wife went out into the garden to call the children. Not finding them, she went all around the place in her search till she came to the empty stable; thinking that they might have run in there to play, she pushed open the door; there, standing in the darkest corner, she saw Mrs. M.

My wife was surprised to see her, certainly, for she did not expect her return so soon; but, oddly enough, it did not strike her as being singular to see her

there. Vexed as she had felt with her all day for going, and rather glad in her woman's way, to have something entirely different from the genuine *casus belli* to hang a retort upon, my wife said, "Well Harriet, I should have thought another dress would have done quite as well for your picnic as that best black silk you have on."

My wife was the elder of the twain, and had always assumed a little air of counsellor to her sister. Black silks were thought a great deal more of at that time than they are just now, and silk of any kind was held particularly inconsistent wear for Wesleyan Methodists, to which denomination we belonged. Receiving no answer, my wife said, "Oh, well, Harriet, if you can't take a word of reproof without being sulky, I'll leave you to yourself," and then came into the house to tell me the party had returned and that she had seen her sister in the stable, not in the best of tempers.

At the moment it did not seem extraordinary to me that my wife should have met her sister in the stable. I waited in doors some time, expecting them to return my horse. Mrs. M. was my neighbor, and living so close, and being always on friendly terms, I wondered that none of the party had come to tell us about the day's pleasure. I thought I would just run in and see how they had got on. To my great surprise, the servant told me they had not returned. I began then to feel anxiety about the result.

My wife, however, having seen Harriet in the stable, refused to believe the servant's assertion, and said there was no doubt of their return, but that they had probably left word to say that they were not come back, in order to offer a plausible excuse for taking a farther drive, and detaining my horse for another hour or so.

At 11 o'clock, Mr. Pinnock, my brother-in-law, who had been one of the party, came in, apparently much agitated.

As soon as she saw him, and before he had time to speak, my wife seemed to know what he had to say.

"What is the matter?" she said. "Something has happened to Harriet, I know!"

"Yes," replied Mr. Pinnock. "If you wish to see her alive, you must come with me directly to Goodwood."

From what he said, it appeared that one of the ponies had never been properly broken in; that the man from whom the turnout was hired for the day had cautioned Mrs. M. respecting it before they started; and that he had lent it reluctantly, being the only pony to match he had in the stable at the time, and would not have lent it at all had he not known Mrs. M. to be a remarkably good whip.

On reaching Goodwood, it seems the gentlemen of the party had got out, leaving the ladies to take a drive round the park in the phaeton. One or both of

the ponies must have taken fright at something in the road, for Mrs. M. had scarcely taken the reins when the ponies shied.

Had there been plenty of room she would readily have mastered the difficulty, but it was in a narrow road where a gate had obstructed the way. Some men rushed to open the gate, too late. The three other ladies jumped out at the beginning of the accident, but Mrs. M. still held on to the reins, seeking to control her ponies, until, finding it was impossible for the men to get the gate open in time, she, too sprang forward; at the same time the ponies came smash on to the gate. She had made her spring too late, and fell heavily to the ground on her head. The heavy old-fashioned comb of the period, with which her hair was looped up, was driven into her skull by the force of the fall.

The Duke of Richmond, a witness to the accident, ran to her assistance, lifted her up and rested her head upon his knee. The only words Mrs. M. had spoken were uttered at that time: "Good God, my children!"

By direction of the Duke she was immediately conveyed to the neighboring inn, where every assistance, medical and otherwise, that forethought or kindness could suggest, was offered her. At 6 o'clock in the evening, the time at which my wife had gone into the stable and seen what we both knew had been her spirit, Mrs. M., in her sole interval of returning consciousness, had made a violent but unsuccessful attempt to speak. From her glance having wandered round the room, in solemn, awful watchfulness, it had been conjectured she wished to see some relative or friend not then present.

I went to Goodwood in the gig with Mr. Pinnock, and arrived in time to see my sister-in-law die at 2 in the morning. Her only conscious moments had been those in which she labored unsuccessfully to speak, which had occurred at 6 o'clock. She wore a black silk dress.

When we came to dispose of her business, and to wind up her affairs, there was scarcely anything left for the two orphan girls. Mrs. M.'s father, however, being well to do, took them to bring up. At his death, which happened soon afterward, his property went to his eldest son, who speedily dissipated the inheritance.

During a space of two years the children were taken as visitors by various relations in turn, and lived an unhappy life with no settled home. For some time I had been debating with myself how to help these children, having many girls and boys of my own to provide for. I had almost settled to take them myself, bad as trade was with me at the time, and bring them up with my own family, when one day business called me to Brighton. The business was so urgent that it necessitated my travelling at night.

I set out from Bognor in a close-hooded gig on a beautiful moonlight winter's night, when the crisp frozen snow lay deep over the earth, and its fine glittering dust was whirled about in light eddies on the bleak night wind— driven now and

then in stinging powder against my tingling cheek, warm and glowing in the sharp air.

I had taken my great dog "Bose" (short for "Boatswain") for company. He lay blinking wakefully, sprawled out on the spare seat of the gig, beneath a mass of warm rugs. Between Little Hampton and Worthing is a lonely piece of road, long and dreary, through bleak and bare open country, where the snow j lay knee deep, sparkling in the moonlight. It was so cheerless that I turned round to speak to my dog, more for the sake of hearing the sound of a voice than anything else.

"Good Bose," I said, patting him; there's a good dog!"

Then suddenly I noticed he shivered and slunk under the wraps. Then the horse required my attention, for he gave a start and was going : wrong, and had nearly taken me into a ditch. Then I looked up. Walking at my horse's head, dressed in a sweeping robe, so white that it shone dazzling against the white snow, I saw a lady, her back turned to me, her head bare; her hair dishevelled and strayed, showing sharp and black against her white dress. I was at first so much surprised at seeing a lady, so dressed, exposed to the open night, and such a night as this, that I scarcely knew what to do.

Recovering myself, I called out to know if I could render assistance—if she wished to ride? No answer. I drove faster, the horse blinking and shying and trembling the while, his ears laid back in abject terror. Still the figure maintained its position close to my horse's head. Then I thought that what I saw was no woman, but perchance a man disguised for the purpose of robbing me, seeking an opportunity to seize the bridle and stop the horse. Filled with this idea, I said, "Good Bose! hi! look at it boy!" but the dog only shivered as if in fright.

Then we came to a place where four cross-roads met. Determined to know the worst, I pulled up the horse. I fetched Bose, unwillingly, out by the ears. He was a good dog at anything from a rat to a man, but he slunk away that night into the hedge, and lay there, his head between his paws, whining and howling. I walked straight up to the figure, still standing by the horse's head. As I walked, the figure turned, and I saw Harriet's face as plainly as I see you now— white and calm— placid, as idealized and beautified by death.

I must own, that, though not a nervous man, in that instant I felt sick and faint. Harriet looked me full in the face with a long, eager, silent look. I knew then it was her spirit, and felt a strange calm come over me, for I knew it was nothing to harm me. When I could speak, I asked what troubled her. She looked at me still— never changed that cold fixed stare. Then I felt in my mind it was her children, and I said: "Harriet? Is it for your children you are troubled?"

No answer.

"Harriet," continued I, "if for these you are troubled, be assured they shall never want while I have power to help them. Rest in peace!"

Still no answer. I put my hand to wipe from my forehead the cold perspiration which had gathered there. When I took my hand away from shading my eyes, the figure was gone. I was alone on the bleak, snow-covered ground. The breeze, that had been hushed before, breathed coolly and gratefully on my face, and the cold stars glimmered and sparkled in the fair blue heavens.

My dog crept up to me, and furtively licked my hand, as if he would say, "Good master, don't be angry, I have served you in all but this."

I took the children and brought them up till they could help themselves.

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## 9: The Talliaferro Twins

***Temple Bailey***

1869-1953

*Queenslander* 27 May 1905

*Irene Temple Bailey was a popular American novelist and short story writer.*

OLMSTEAD WAS AWAKE. For hours he had punched his pillow into every corner of the berth, and had flung his great frame from one side to the other with a grim determination to sleep in spite of agitating thoughts and the ramble of the train. At last he had given it up and lay looking out of the window into the wind-swept night.

Suddenly out of the darkness sprang a great square of yellow light. In some house a door had opened, and in the door Olmstead saw a girl. Her arms were beating the air above her head in seeming agonised fright, her mouth was opened as if she screamed, but the roar of the train made silence of the sound. Then the train swept on.

Olmstead sat up and groaned. Something was happening there, and he was helpless. Slipping on his clothes he made his way to the smoking compartment. A sleepy porter nodded in one corner. By much questioning Olmstead discovered that in a few minutes a stop would be made for orders.

The spirit of adventure was upon him. He crowded his things into a bag, and, with the eyes of the porter and conductor following him suspiciously, at the next station plunged from the prosaic Pullman straight into the unknown. At the end of a little platform there was a tiny point of light. Near the lantern Olmstead found a telegraph operator. He questioned tactfully. He did not want to unearth any family skeleton for the benefit of inquisitive neighbours. His friends, he explained, lived near the track.

"You don't mean the old Talliaferro house?"

On a venture Olmstead nodded.

The operator expanded at once.

"Any friend of the Colonel's?" he began.

Olmstead felt guilty. "It's a business matter," he asserted, and decided that he would make good his statement.

With a nod to the operator he started away with a long, swinging stride. As the sun rose the mists of the early morning rolled up the mountain side, and clung to Olmstead with soft, warm touch. There was a spicy scent of pines, and the subdued occasional notes of belated birds.

Then all at once there rose a song that was not the song of a bird. Olmstead took a step forward and stopped. Coming down a little path toward the road was a girl, who, two hours before, he had seen in the sudden picture, her face

convulsed with fear. Now, with the song on her lips, she seemed the incarnation of care-free youth.

She was strangely attired for early morning. Under the folds of an enveloping cape he caught a glimpse of a filmy gown, and as she held her ruffles up from the wet grasses she showed slippers, dainty and thin-soled.

All at once she saw him and hesitated. "Oh!" she said. Evidently young men in correct tweeds were not of daily occurrence.

Then she came on, all blushes, but holding her head high.

"I beg pardon—" She stopped, and he asked his question of direction. Her eyes— gray eyes— were lifted, startled. "Colonel Talliaferro?"

"Yes."

"I— I am going there. I am Miss Sallie Talliaferro. You wish to see my father?"

Olmstead's brain groped for an excuse. All at once he knew that it was Fate that had brought him. But that was a foolish reason to offer to a girl whom he had known but a possible sixty seconds. However, the gray eyes demanded explanations.

"I wish to see him about a book— that— we think of publishing— I understand his library—" He was safe, he thought. All Southern colonels have fine libraries, or the remnants and knowledge of one.

"Yes, he is interested in books."

They exchanged conventionalities as they trod the narrow path side by side. In charming confidence she explained that she had been to a dance the night before, had danced all night, and then sat talking to her dear friend, Betty Dale, until morning. Betty's brother, Don, was to take her home, but he could not be found, and in spite of protests she had started alone.

"You were not at home last night?"

"No, indeed," said Miss Sallie's tender voice.

Yet Miss Sallie was the girl he had seen in the door of the old house! And looking straight down into the limpid eyes he doubted her.

A sudden curve had brought them close to the Talliaferro mansion. It was white pillared and white porticoed, and had a general look of rundown grandeur. On the dying grass of the lawn were the marks of hoofs.

A little frown gathered on Miss Sallie's fair face— a little worried frown, and as she went up the porch she stooped as if to examine something. Then, drawing herself up sharply, she flitted on.

Olmstead, following her, saw that muddy footsteps extended from the steps across to the door that last night he had seen flung wide open. It was shut and barred now, and Miss Sallie struck it with the brass knocker— once, twice.

In the big hall a fireplace faced the door, and Olmstead was invited to sit down while Miss Sallie went to prepare her father for his coming. The door was

open, and Olmstead could see straight down the path to a little summer house at the end. Several times he thought he saw the flutter of a dress behind the lattice, and this thought was confirmed as a girl came out with a basket on her arm, heaped with late roses.

It was Miss Sallie!

But how did she get there? He had heard her go upstairs, her high heels tapping the polished steps, and she could not have come down without his knowledge. She had changed her dress, too, and wore a faded blue cotton, simple and clinging. She came up the path and across the porch. He saw her eyes. But they were not laughing now— in them was weariness unspeakable, and her face was very pale. What had happened to change her in the few minutes since she left him?

She did not enter the hall, but following the porch around the side of the house she disappeared. In another moment he heard her voice on the stairs, and turned and faced— a girl in a pink cotton gown, with eyes that laughed and lips that curved happily. Surely she had worn blue! Surely his head whirled.

"You can come and see father," she said. Then she looked at him curiously as he stood and stared.

"What's the matter?" she asked, her blushes pinker than her dress.

"I saw you down there," Olmstead was pointing toward the summer house, "not more than two minutes ago, and I was sure you wore blue, and now here you are in pink. Are you a lightning change artist, or are there two of you?"

Miss Sallie's head was thrown back in irrepressible laughter. Then she dropped him a little curtsey.

"Please," she said, "there are two of me. This is Sallie and the other is Sophy. Sophy always wears blue," she explained as they went up stairs together.

In the room that Olmstead entered an old man reclined in an invalid's chair. By his side was the girl in blue cotton. She, too, was smiling now.

"They are two good girls," said the old man. "Sophy wanted to go to the dance, but she stayed with her old father and let Sallie go."

As he spoke there crept into the eyes of the girl in blue a shadow that was not in the eyes of the one in pink.

"Did you sleep all right?" asked Miss Sallie, and Olmstead caught a note of eager questioning in her voice.

"All night without a break," and the old man nodded his head like a pleased child. But Olmstead was watching the girl in blue. There was more than a shadow now, there was horror.

Colonel Talliaferro would not hear of his leaving that day. So late that night Olmstead laid himself down in bed and looked out upon the same moon that had stared at him in the sleeper. Through the open window came the sweet air of the mountains, the cool linen sheets smelt like lavender. With one heave of

his tired body Olmstead sank into the quiet sleep of the strong. But the man who has slept on the plains keeps an ear open for sounds.

The sound that wakened Olmstead was the high, sweet laughter of Miss Sallie. Then all at once came the subdued, deep tones of a man. Olmstead slipped into his clothes. In vain he assured himself that it was not his business. Has not a man instincts?

He opened the door softly and stepped out. The wide gallery that followed the square of the house was just above the great hall of the first floor. Olmstead, high up in the shadows, could not be seen by the two people who sat before the fire. There was no light but the light of the flames.

Miss Sallie, in a white, flowing gown, leaned back in the great settee. Opposite her was a man, young and handsome. He wore riding boots and carried a crop. Their conversation, though hushed, was intelligible to the listener.

"So you weren't frightened to-night?" laughed the man.

Miss Sallie tossed her head.

"You're not so very dreadful, Don," she coquetted. "I scared you last night when you opened the door."

Last night? Oh, limpid eyes!

"Oh," remarked the self-contained Miss Talliaferro, "I thought it was— my sister and when you came in, alone, and it was so late—"

"You'll go then, Sophy, dear," urged the man.

Sophy?

Olmstead strained his eyes down into the shadows. He could have sworn to that rippling laugh as Miss Sallie's.

The girl rose and stood with her back to the fire. Her graceful slender figure was outlined against the glowing background. Olmstead could see now the blue ribbons that tied her gown. Her curls, caught up loosely in disorder, fell around her sparkling face. The man was looking at her steadily.

"I never saw you look like this before, Sophy," he said.

"Tell me over again."

"I have the horses outside. We can ride to the station, take the train, go to Richmond and be married, and then you can come back and no one will be the wiser."

"But why not tell father and Sallie?" said the girl slowly.

"There it is again," said the man savagely. "You know your father wouldn't consent."

"I should like to be married from home," said the girl. Her face was white now. "We Talliaferros don't like to do things in the dark."

Suddenly the man rose and caught her in his arms. There was a swift, short struggle, during which Olmstead stood with his nails cutting into the skin of his clenched hands.

Then the girl pushed the man back.

"No, Don, no," she said.

"Sallie, Sallie."

The wail came from across the gallery where the stairway led to the floor below. On the top step stood the other twin, a candle held high above her head. Over her white gown drifted long, pink ribbons. One trembling hand grasped the railings. Then she went swiftly down the steps.

The man in front of the fire looked dazed. Miss Sallie looked from the bewildered man to the accusing sister on the stairs, then she spoke in a slow, even voice.

"When I came home this morning I knew that something had happened. We, Sophy and I, are different from other sisters. What happens to one must communicate itself to the other. I had kept her away from the dance, because I knew you were home again. I let Betty plan to have you bring me home, because I wanted to see you, to plead with you to let her alone."

The man sank on the seat, cowed by the scorn of her voice.

"I stayed with her to-night until she was asleep. Then I shut her window and the door, so that no sound should reach her, and I listened until I heard your whistle. I had on her dressing-gown and left my own in its place. I knew the blue ribbons would confuse you. So I came down to find that you wanted to carry her off in the dead of the night, to marry her— or not— as your fancy—" her voice trailed off into a sob.

"Sallie!" Miss Sophy's eyes were blazing now. "I want to go. I am going. Years ago I promised, and father broke it off. I will go."

"Father broke it off because Don drank— and was not worthy."

"Sophy," said the man. He held out his arms and she crept into them sobbing. She turned her face up to him, and he laid both his hands on her curls. Then over her head he looked at Miss Sallie.

"You can't help it, Sallie," he said. "Do you understand, we are going— to-night."

"Not to-night!"

The three started as the calm tones floated down. Over the rail leaned Olmstead, his big figure obscured by the darkness.

"Who is this?" Young Dale was scowling blackly.

"A gentleman," said Miss Sallie softly. Her cheeks were redder than the flames, and her eyes brighter than the stars.

"From?"

"Nowhere," said Olmstead easily. "A soldier of fortune, if you will, enlisted for a moment in the service of these young ladies."

"Sophy, will you go?" said Dale furiously.

Miss Sallie sprang forward and twined her arms about her sister. "Sophy," she said, "Sophy darling. You can't leave this way. Think of father, of the honour of our women."

Slowly Sophy slid to her knees and buried her face in her sister's dress. Through the darkness Olmstead came down and stood in front of the door. Then all at once Miss Sophy got up from the floor and went over to her lover.

"Don," she said, "dear Don. Go away now. You know I love you, and shall always; bad or good. But won't you please, Don, oh, won't you please try and be good for my sake, so that I can marry you with a proud heart?"

Olmstead turned and looked through the window into the misty night, while Miss Sallie cowered on the settee. When they looked again Miss Sophy was in Dale's arms, but now there were tears on his cheeks.

"I was mad, I think," he said, "to ask her. But I want— her— Perhaps when I come again you'll let me have her."

His words, low in their humility, were addressed to Miss Sallie.

"Indeed we will, Don dear," she said, and then, with a look at Olmstead, she slipped out through the big door to the porch. He followed her, and they walked back and forth in the darkness.

"What do you think of us," said Miss Sallie. The pale moon shone on her uplifted face.

"I don't dare tell you what I think of you," said Olmstead unsteadily. "It is too soon—"

Then in a wonderful silence they wandered down the rose-bordered walk, and saw across the sky the first faint line of dawn. As they stood by the little summer house, Dale came out of the big door and mounted his horse. He rode up to the porch. Miss Sophy rested her cheek for a minute against his coat, and he bent his head. Then he rode away.

"I must go to her," whispered Miss Sallie. But Olmstead held her back. "Could you love like that?" he whispered.

Miss Sallie was pale no longer.

"What do you think?"

Olmstead took her hands and gazed straight down into the limpid eyes.

"I don't think," he ventured. "I know."

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## 10: The Foundering of the *Fortuna*

***Grant Allen***

1848-1899

*Longman's Magazine* Nov 1883,
Collected in: *Strange Stories*, 1884

I AM going to spin you the yarn of the foundering of the *Fortuna* exactly as an old lake captain on a Huron steamer once span it for me by Great Manitoulin Island. It is a strange and a weird story; and if I can't give you the dialect in which he told it, you must forgive an English tongue its native accent for the sake of the curious Yankee tale that underlies it.

Captain Montague Beresford Pierpoint was hardly the sort of man you would have expected to find behind the counter of a small shanty bank at Aylmer's Pike, Colorado. There was an engaging English frankness, an obvious honesty and refinement of manner about him, which suited very oddly with the rough habits and rougher western speech of the mining population in whose midst he lived. And yet, Captain Pierpoint had succeeded in gaining the confidence and respect of those strange outcasts of civilization by some indescribable charm of address and some invisible talisman of quiet good-fellowship, which caused him to be more universally believed in than any other man whatsoever at Aylmer's Pike. Indeed, to say so much is rather to underrate the uniqueness of his position; for it might, perhaps, be truer to say that Captain Pierpoint was the only man in the place in whom any one believed at all in any way. He was an honest-spoken, quiet, unobtrusive sort of man, who walked about fearlessly without a revolver, and never gambled either in mining shares or at poker; so that, to the simple-minded, unsophisticated rogues and vagabonds of Aylmer's Pike, he seemed the very incarnation of incorruptible commercial honour. They would have trusted all their earnings and winnings without hesitation to Captain Pierpoint's bare word; and when they did so, they knew that Captain Pierpoint had always had the money forthcoming, on demand, without a moment's delay or a single prevarication.

Captain Pierpoint walked very straight and erect, as becomes a man of conspicuous uprightness; and there was a certain tinge of military bearing in his manner which seemed at first sight sufficiently to justify his popular title. But he himself made no false pretences upon that head; he freely acknowledged that he had acquired the position of captain, not in her Britannic Majesty's Guards, as the gossip of Aylmer's Pike sometimes asserted, but in the course of his earlier professional engagements as skipper of a Lake Superior grain-vessel. Though he hinted at times that he was by no means distantly connected with the three distinguished families whose names he bore, he did not attempt to exalt his rank or birth unduly, admitting that he was only a Canadian sailor by

trade, thrown by a series of singular circumstances into the position of a Colorado banker. The one thing he really understood, he would tell his mining friends, was the grain-trade on the upper lakes; for finance he had but a single recommendation, and that was that if people trusted him he could never deceive them.

If any man had set up a bank in Aylmer's Point with an iron strong-room, a lot of electric bells, and an obtrusive display of fire-arms and weapons, it is tolerably certain that that bank would have been promptly robbed and gutted within its first week of existence by open violence. Five or six of the boys would have banded themselves together into a body of housebreakers, and would have shot down the banker and burst into his strong-room, without thought of the electric bells or other feeble resources of civilization to that end appointed. But when a quiet, unobtrusive, brave man, like Captain Montague Pierpoint, settled himself in a shanty in their midst, and won their confidence by his straightforward honesty, scarcely a miner in the lot would ever have dreamt of attempting to rob him. Captain Pierpoint had not come to Aylmer's Pike at first with any settled idea of making himself the financier of the rough little community; he intended to dig on his own account, and the *rôle* of banker was only slowly thrust upon him by the unanimous voice of the whole diggings. He had begun by lending men money out of his own pocket— men who were unlucky in their claims, men who had lost everything at monte, men who had come penniless to the Pike, and expected to find silver growing freely and openly on the surface. He had lent to them in a friendly way, without interest, and had been forced to accept a small present, in addition to the sum advanced, when the tide began to turn, and luck at last led the penniless ones to a remunerative placer or pocket. Gradually the diggers got into the habit of regarding this as Captain Pierpoint's natural function, and Captain Pierpoint, being himself but an indifferent digger, acquiesced so readily that at last, yielding to the persuasion of his clients, he put up a wooden counter, and painted over his rough door the magnificent notice, "Aylmer's Pike Bank: Montague Pierpoint, Manager." He got a large iron safe from Carson City, and in that safe, which stood by his own bedside, all the silver and other securities of the whole village were duly deposited. "Any one of the boys could easily shoot me and open that safe any night," Captain Pierpoint used to say pleasantly; "but if he did, by George! he'd have to reckon afterwards with every man on the Pike; and I should be sorry to stand in his shoes— that I would, any time." Indeed, the entire Pike looked upon Captain Pierpoint's safe as "Our Bank;" and, united in a single front by that simple social contract, they agreed to respect the safe as a sacred object, protected by the collective guarantee of three hundred mutually suspicious revolver-bearing outcasts.

However, even at Aylmer's Pike, there were degrees and stages of comparative unscrupulousness. Two men, new-comers to the Pike, by name Hiram Coffin and Pete Morris, at last wickedly and feloniously conspired together to rob Captain Pierpoint's bank. Their plan was simplicity itself. They would go at midnight, very quietly, to the Captain's house, cut his throat as he slept, rob the precious safe, and ride off straight for the east, thus getting a clear night's start of any possible pursuer. It was an easy enough thing to do; and they were really surprised in their own minds that nobody else had ever been cute enough to seize upon such an obvious and excellent path to wealth and security.

The day before the night the two burglars had fixed upon for their enterprise, Captain Pierpoint himself appeared to be in unusual spirits. Pete Morris called in at the bank during the course of the morning, to reconnoitre the premises, under pretence of paying in a few dollars' worth of silver, and he found the Captain very lively indeed. When Pete handed him the silver across the counter, the Captain weighed it with a smile, gave a receipt for the amount— he always gave receipts as a matter of form— and actually invited Pete into the little back room, which was at once kitchen, bedroom, and parlour, to have a drink. Then, before Pete's very eyes, he opened the safe, bursting with papers, and placed the silver in a bag on a shelf by itself, sticking the key into his waistcoat pocket.

"He is delivering himself up into our hands," thought Pete to himself, as the Captain poured out two glasses of old Bourbon, and handed one to the miner opposite. "Here's success to all our enterprises!" cried the Captain gaily.

"Here's success, pard!" Pete answered, with a sinister look, which even the Captain could not help noting in a sidelong fashion.

That night, about two o'clock, when all Aylmer's Pike was quietly dreaming its own sordid, drunken dreams, two sober men rose up from their cabin and stole out softly to the wooden bank house. Two horses were ready saddled with Mexican saddle-bags, and tied to a tree outside the digging, and in half an hour Pete and Hiram hoped to find themselves in full possession of all Captain Pierpoint's securities, and well on their road towards the nearest station of the Pacific Railway. They groped along to the door of the bank shanty, and began fumbling with their wire picks at the rough lock. After a moment's exploration of the wards, Pete Morris drew back in surprise.

"Pard," he murmured in a low whisper, "here's suthin' rather extraordinary; this 'ere lock's not fastened."

They turned the handle gently, and found that the door opened without an effort. Both men looked at one another in the dim light incredulously. Was there ever such a simple, trustful fool as that fellow Pierpoint! He actually slept in the bank shanty with his outer door unfastened!

The two robbers passed through the outer room and into the little back bedroom-parlour. Hiram held the dark lantern, and turned it full on to the bed. To their immense astonishment they found it empty.

Their first impulse was to suppose that the Captain had somehow anticipated their coming, and had gone out to rouse the boys. For a moment they almost contemplated running away, without the money. But a second glance reassured them; the bed had not been slept in. The Captain was a man of very regular habits. He made his bed in civilized fashion every morning after breakfast, and he retired every evening at a little after eleven. Where he could be stopping so late they couldn't imagine. But they hadn't come there to make a study of the Captain's personal habits, and, as he was away, the best thing they could do was to open the safe immediately, before he came back. They weren't particular about murder, Pete and Hiram; still, if you *could* do your robbery without bloodshed, it was certainly all the better to do it so.

Hiram held the lantern, carefully shaded by his hand, towards the door of the safe. Pete looked cautiously at the lock, and began pushing it about with his wire pick; he had hoped to get the key out of Captain Pierpoint's pocket, but as that easy scheme was so unexpectedly foiled, he trusted to his skill in picking to force the lock open. Once more a fresh surprise awaited him. The door opened almost of its own accord! Pete looked at Hiram, and Hiram looked at Pete. There was no mistaking the strange fact that met their gaze— the safe was empty!

"What on airth do you suppose is the meaning of this, Pete?" Hiram whispered hoarsely. But Pete did not whisper; the whole truth flashed upon him in a moment, and he answered aloud, with a string of oaths, "The Cap'n has gone and made tracks hisself for Madison Depôt. And he's taken every red cent in the safe along with him, too! the mean, low, dirty scoundrel! He's taken even my silver that he give me a receipt for this very morning!"

Hiram stared at Pete in blank amazement. That such base treachery could exist on earth almost surpassed his powers of comprehension; he could understand that a man should rob and murder, simply and naturally, as he was prepared to do, out of pure, guileless depravity of heart, but that a man should plan and plot for a couple of years to impose upon the simplicity of a dishonest community by a consistent show of respectability, with the ultimate object of stealing its whole wealth at one fell swoop, was scarcely within the limits of his narrow intelligence.

He stared blankly at the empty safe, and whispered once more to Pete in a timid undertone, "Perhaps he's got wind of this, and took off the plate to somebody else's hut. If the boys was to come and catch us here, it 'ud be derned awkward for you an' me, Pete."

But Pete answered gruffly and loudly, "Never you mind about the plate, pard. The Cap'n's gone, and the plate's gone with him; and what we've got to do

now is to rouse the boys and ride after him like greased lightnin'. The mean swindler, to go and swindle me out of the silver that I've been and dug out of that there claim yonder with my own pick!"

For the sense of personal injustice to one's self rises perennially in the human breast, however depraved, and the man who would murder another without a scruple is always genuinely aghast with just indignation when he finds the counsel for the prosecution pressing a point against him with what seems to him unfair persistency.

Pete flung his lock-pick out among the agave scrub that faced the bank shanty and ran out wildly into the midst of the dusty white road that led down the row of huts which the people of Aylmer's Pike euphemistically described as the Main Street. There he raised such an unearthly whoop as roused the sleepers in the nearest huts to turn over in their beds and listen in wonder, with a vague idea that "the Injuns" were coming down on a scalping-trail upon the diggings. Next, he hurried down the street, beating heavily with his fist on every frame door, and kicking hard at the log walls of the successive shanties. In a few minutes the whole Pike was out and alive. Unwholesome-looking men, in unwashed flannel shirts and loose trousers, mostly barefooted in their haste, came forth to inquire, with an unnecessary wealth of expletives, what the something was stirring. Pete, breathless and wrathful in the midst, livid with rage and disappointment, could only shriek aloud, "Cap'n Pierpoint has cleared out of camp, and taken all the plate with him!" There was at first an incredulous shouting and crying; then a general stampede towards the bank shanty; and, finally, as the truth became apparent to everybody, a deep and angry howl for vengeance on the traitor. In one moment Captain Pierpoint's smooth-faced villany dawned as clear as day to all Aylmer's Pike; and the whole chorus of gamblers, rascals, and blacklegs stood awe-struck with horror and indignation at the more plausible rogue who had succeeded in swindling even them. The clean-washed, white-shirted, fair-spoken villain! they would have his blood for this, if the United States Marshal had every mother's son of them strung up in a row for it after the pesky business was once fairly over.

Nobody inquired how Pete and Hiram came by the news. Nobody asked how they had happened to notice that the shanty was empty and the safe rifled. All they thought of was how to catch and punish the public robber. He must have made for the nearest depôt, Madison Clearing, on the Union Pacific Line, and he would take the first cars east for St. Louis— that was certain. Every horse in the Pike was promptly requisitioned by the fastest riders, and a rough cavalcade, revolvers in hand, made down the gulch and across the plain, full tilt to Madison. But when, in the garish blaze of early morning, they reached the white wooden depôt in the valley and asked the ticket-clerk whether a man answering to their description had gone on by the east mail at 4.30, the ticket-clerk swore,

in reply, that not a soul had left the depôt by any train either way that blessed night. Pete Morris proposed to hold a revolver to his head and force him to confess. But even that strong measure failed to induce a satisfactory retractation. By way of general precaution, two of the boys went on by the day train to St. Louis, but neither of them could hear anything of Captain Pierpoint. Indeed, as a matter of fact, the late manager and present appropriator of the Aylmer's Pike Bank had simply turned his horse's head in the opposite direction, towards the further station at Cheyenne Gap, and had gone westward to San Francisco, intending to make his way back to New York *viâ* Panama and the Isthmus Railway.

When the boys really understood that they had been completely duped, they swore vengeance in solemn fashion, and they picked out two of themselves to carry out the oath in a regular assembly. Each contributed of his substance what he was able; and Pete and Hiram, being more stirred with righteous wrath than all the rest put together, were unanimously deputed to follow the Captain's tracks to San Francisco, and to have his life wherever and whenever they might chance to find him. Pete and Hiram accepted the task thrust upon them, *con amore*, and went forth zealously to hunt up the doomed life of Captain Montague Beresford Pierpoint.

## ii

SOCIETY in Sarnia admitted that Captain Pierpoint was really quite an acquisition. An English gentleman by birth, well educated, and of pleasant manners, he had made a little money out west by mining, it was understood, and had now retired to the City of Sarnia, in the Province of Ontario and Dominion of Canada, to increase it by a quiet bit of speculative grain trading. He had been in the grain trade already, and people on the lake remembered him well; for Captain Pierpoint, in his honest, straightforward fashion, disdained the vulgar trickiness of an alias, and bore throughout the string of names which he had originally received from his godfathers and godmothers at his baptism. A thorough good fellow Captain Pierpoint had been at Aylmer's Pike; a perfect gentleman he was at Sarnia. As a matter of fact, indeed, the Captain was decently well-born, the son of an English country clergyman, educated at a respectable grammar school, and capable of being all things to all men in whatever station of life it might please Providence to place him. Society at Sarnia had no prejudice against the grain trade; if it had, the prejudice would have been distinctly self-regarding, for everybody in the little town did something in grain; and if Captain Pierpoint chose sometimes to navigate his own vessels, that was a fad which struck nobody as out of the way in an easy-going, money-getting, Canadian city.

Somehow or other, everything seemed to go wrong with Captain Pierpoint's cargoes. He was always losing a scow laden with best fall wheat from Chicago for Buffalo; or running a lumber vessel ashore on the shoals of Lake Erie; or getting a four-master jammed in the ice packs on the St. Clair river: and though the insurance companies continually declared that Captain Pierpoint had got the better of them, the Captain himself was wont to complain that no insurance could ever possibly cover the losses he sustained by the carelessness of his subordinates or the constant perversity of wind and waters. He was obliged to take his own ships down, he would have it, because nobody else could take them safely for him; and though he met with quite as many accidents himself as many of his deputies did, he continued to convey his grain in person, hoping, as he said, that luck would turn some day, and that a good speculation would finally enable him honourably to retrieve his shattered fortunes.

However this might be, it happened curiously enough that, in spite of all his losses, Captain Pierpoint seemed to grow richer and richer, visibly to the naked eye, with each reverse of his trading efforts. He took a handsome house, set up a carriage and pair, and made love to the prettiest and sweetest girl in all Sarnia. The prettiest and sweetest girl was not proof against Captain Pierpoint's suave tongue and handsome house; and she married him in very good faith, honestly believing in him as a good woman will in a scoundrel, and clinging to him fervently with all her heart and soul. No happier and more loving pair in all Sarnia than Captain and Mrs. Pierpoint.

Some months after the marriage, Captain Pierpoint arranged to take down a scow or flat-bottomed boat, laden with grain, from Milwaukee for the Erie Canal. He took up the scow himself, and before he started for the voyage, it was a curious fact that he went in person down into the hold, bored eight large holes right through the bottom, and filled each up, as he drew out the auger, with a caulked plug made exactly to fit it, and hammered firmly into place with a wooden mallet. There was a ring in each plug, by which it could be pulled out again without much difficulty; and the whole eight were all placed along the gangway of the hold, where no cargo would lie on top of them. The scow's name was the *Fortuna*: "*sit faustum omen et felix*," murmured Captain Pierpoint to himself; for among his other accomplishments he had not wholly neglected nor entirely forgotten the classical languages.

It took only two men and the skipper to navigate the scow; for lake craft towed by steam propellers are always very lightly manned: and when Captain Pierpoint reached Milwaukee, where he was to take in cargo, he dismissed the two sailors who had come with him from Sarnia, and engaged two fresh hands at the harbour. Rough, miner-looking men they were, with very little of the sailor about them; but Captain Pierpoint's sharp eye soon told him they were the right sort of men for his purpose, and he engaged them on the spot, without

a moment's hesitation. Pete and Hiram had had some difficulty in tracking him, for they never thought he would return to the lakes, but they had tracked him at last, and were ready now to take their revenge.

They had disguised themselves as well as they were able, and in their clumsy knavery they thought they had completely deceived the Captain. But almost from the moment the Captain saw them, he knew who they were, and he took his measures accordingly.

"Stupid louts," he said to himself, with the fine contempt of an educated scoundrel for the unsophisticated natural ruffian: "here's a fine chance of killing two birds with one stone!" And when the Captain said the word "killing," he said it in his own mind with a delicate sinister emphasis which meant business.

The scow was duly loaded, and with a heavy cargo of grain aboard, she proceeded to make her way slowly, by the aid of a tug, out of Milwaukee Harbour.

As soon as she was once clear of the wharf, and while the busy shipping of the great port still surrounded them on every side, Captain Pierpoint calmly drew his revolver, and took his stand beside the hatches. "Pete and Hiram," he said quietly to his two assistants, "I want to have a little serious talk with you two before we go any further."

If he had fired upon them outright instead of merely calling them by their own names, the two common conspirators could not have started more unfeignedly, or looked more unspeakably cowed, than they did at that moment. Their first impulse was to draw their own revolvers in return; but they saw in a second that the Captain was beforehand with them, and that they had better not try to shoot him before the very eyes of all Milwaukee.

"Now, boys," the Captain went on steadily, with his finger on the trigger and his eye fixed straight on the men's faces, "we three quite understand one another. I took your savings for reasons of my own; and you have shipped here to-day to murder me on the voyage. But I recognized you before I engaged you: and I have left word at Milwaukee that if anything happens to me on this journey, you two have a grudge against me, and must be hanged for it. I've taken care that if this scow comes into any port along the lakes without me aboard, you two are to be promptly arrested." (This was false, of course; but to Captain Pierpoint a small matter like that was a mere trifle.) "And I've shipped myself along with you, just to show you I'm not afraid of you. But if either of you disobeys my orders in anything for one minute, I shoot at once, and no jury in Canada or the States will touch a hair of my head for doing it. I'm a respectable shipowner and grain merchant, you're a pair of disreputable skulking miners, pretending to be sailors, and you've shipped aboard here on purpose to murder and rob me. If *you* shoot *me*, it's murder: if *I* shoot *you*, it's justifiable homicide. Now, boys, do you understand that?"

Pete looked at Hiram and was beginning to speak, when the captain interrupted him in the calm tone of one having authority.

"Look here, Pete," he said, drawing a chalk line amidships across the deck; "you stand this side of that line, and you stand there, Hiram. Now, mind, if either of you chooses to step across that line or to confer with the other, I shoot you, whether it's here before all the eyes of Milwaukee, or alone in the middle of Huron. You must each take your own counsel, and do as you like for yourselves. But I've got a little plan of my own on, and if you choose willingly to help me in it, your fortune's made. Look at the thing, squarely, boys; what's the use of your killing me? Sooner or later you'll get hung for it, and it's a very unpleasant thing, I can assure you, hanging."

As the Captain spoke, he placed his unoccupied hand loosely on his throat, and pressed it gently backward. Pete and Hiram shuddered a little as he did so.

"Well, what's the good of ending your lives that way, eh? But I'm doing a little speculative business on these lakes, where I want just such a couple of men as you two— men that'll do as they're told in a matter of business and ask no squeamish questions. If you care to help me in this business, stop and make your fortunes; if you don't, you can go back to Milwaukee with the tug."

"You speak fair enough," said Pete, dubitatively; "but you know, Cap'n, you ain't a man to be trusted. I owe you one already for stealing my silver."

"Very little silver," the Captain answered, with a wave of the hand and a graceful smile. "Bonds, United States bonds and greenbacks most of it, converted beforehand for easier conveyance by horseback. These, however, are business details which needn't stand in the way between you and me, partner. I always was straightforward in all my dealings, and I'll come to the point at once, so that you can know whether you'll help me or not. This scow's plugged at bottom. My intention is, first, to part the rope that ties us to the tug; next, to transfer the cargo by night to a small shanty I've got on Manitoulin Island; and then to pull the plugs and sink the scow on Manitoulin rocks. That way I get insurance for the cargo and scow, and carry on the grain in the slack season. If you consent to help me unload, and sink the ship, you shall have half profits between you; if you don't, you can go back to Milwaukee like a couple of fools, and I'll put into port again to get a couple of pluckier fellows. Answer each for yourselves. Hiram, will you go with me?"

"How shall I know you'll keep your promise?" asked Hiram.

"For the best of all possible reasons," replied the Captain, jauntily; "because, if I don't, you can inform upon me to the insurance people."

In Hiram Coffin's sordid soul there was a moment's turning over of the chances; and then greed prevailed over revenge, and he said, grudgingly—

"Well, Cap'n, I'll go with you."

The Captain smiled the smile of calm self-approbation, and turned half round to Pete.

"And you?" he asked.

"If Hiram goes, I go too," Pete answered, half hoping that some chance might occur for conferring with his neighbour on the road, and following out their original conspiracy. But Captain Pierpoint had been too much for him: he had followed the excellent rule "*divide et impera*" and he remained clearly master of the situation.

As soon as they were well outside Milwaukee Harbour, the tug dragged them into the open lake, all unconscious of the strange scene that had passed on the deck so close to it; and the oddly mated crew made its way, practically alone, down the busy waters of Lake Michigan.

Captain Pierpoint certainly didn't spend a comfortable time during his voyage down the lake, or through the Straits of Mackinaw. To say the truth, he could hardly sleep at all, and he was very fagged and weary when they arrived at Manitoulin Island. But Pete and Hiram, though they had many chances of talking together, could not see their way to kill him in safety; and Hiram at least, in his own mind, had come to the conclusion that it was better to make a little money than to risk one's neck for a foolish revenge.

So in the dead of night, on the second day out, when a rough wind had risen from the north, and a fog had come over them, the Captain quietly began to cut away at the rope that tied them to the tug. He cut the rope all round, leaving a sound core in the centre; and when the next gust of wind came, the rope strained and parted quite naturally, so that the people on the tug never suspected the genuineness of the transaction. They looked about in the fog and storm for the scow, but of course they couldn't find her, for Captain Pierpoint, who knew his ground well, had driven her straight ashore before the wind and beached her on a small shelving cove on Manitoulin Island.

There they found five men waiting for them, who helped unload the cargo with startling rapidity, for it was all arranged in sacks, not in bulk, and a high slide fixed on the gangway enabled them to slip it quickly down into an underground granary excavated below the level of the beach. After unloading, they made their way down before the breeze towards the jagged rocks of Manitoulin.

It was eleven o'clock on a stormy moonlight night when the *Fortuna* arrived off the jutting point of the great island. A "black squall," as they call it on the lakes, was blowing down from the Sault Ste. Marie. The scow drove about aimlessly, under very little canvas, and the boat was ready to be lowered, "in case," the Captain said humorously, "of any accident." Close to the end of the point the Captain ordered Pete and Hiram down into the hold. He had shown them beforehand the way to draw the plugs, and had explained that the water

would rise very slowly, and they would have plenty of time to get up the companion-ladder long before there was a foot deep of water in the hold. At the last moment Pete hung back a little. The Captain took him quietly by the shoulders, and, without an oath (an omission which told eloquently on Pete), thrust him down the ladder, and told him in his calmest manner to do his duty. Hiram held the light in his hand, and both went down together into the black abyss. There was no time to be lost; they were well off the point, and in another moment the wreck would have lost all show of reasonable probability.

As the two miners went down into the hold, Captain Pierpoint drew quietly from his pocket a large hammer and a packet of five-inch nails. They were good stout nails, and would resist a considerable pressure. He looked carefully down into the hold, and saw the two men draw the first plug. One after another he watched them till the fourth was drawn, and then he turned away, and took one of the nails firmly between his thumb and forefinger.

NEXT WEEK everybody at Sarnia was grieved to hear that another of Captain Pierpoint's vessels had gone down off Manitoulin Point in that dreadful black squall on Thursday evening. Both the sailors on board had been drowned, but the Captain himself had managed to make good his escape in the jolly boat. He would be a heavy loser, it was understood, on the value of the cargo, for insurance never covers the loss of grain. Still, it was a fortunate thing that such a delightful man as the Captain had not perished in the foundering of the *Fortuna*.

iii

SOMEHOW, after that wreck, Captain Pierpoint never cared for the water again. His nerves were shattered, he said, and he couldn't stand danger as he used to do when he was younger and stronger. So he went on the lake no more, and confined his attention more strictly to the "futures" business. He was a thriving and prosperous person, in spite of his losses; and the underwriters had begun to look a little askance at his insurances even before this late foundering case. Some whispered ominously in underwriting circles that they had their doubts about the *Fortuna*.

One summer, a few years later, the water on Lake Huron sank lower than it had ever been known to sink before. It was a very dry season in the back country, and the rivers brought down very diminished streams into the great basins. Foot by foot, the level of the lake fell slowly, till many of the wharves were left high and dry, and the vessels could only come alongside in very few deep places. Captain Pierpoint had suffered much from sleeplessness, combined with Canadian ague, for some years past, but this particular summer his mind was very evidently much troubled. For some unaccountable reason, he watched

the falling of the river with the intensest anxiety, and after it had passed a certain point, his interest in the question became painfully keen. Though the fever and the ague gained upon him from day to day, and his doctor counselled perfect quiet, he was perpetually consulting charts, and making measurements of the configuration which the coast had now reached, especially at the upper end of Lake Huron. At last, his mind seemed almost to give way, and weak and feverish as he was, he insisted, the first time for many seasons, that he must take a trip upon the water. Remonstrance was quite useless; he would go on the lake again, he said, if it killed him. So he hired one of the little steam pleasure yachts which are always to let in numbers at Detroit, and started with his wife and her brother, a young surgeon, for a month's cruise into Lake Superior.

As the yacht neared Manitoulin Island, Captain Pierpoint insisted upon being brought up on deck in a chair— he was too ill to stand— and swept all the coast with his binocular. Close to the point, a flat-topped object lay mouldering in the sun, half out of water, on the shoals by the bank.

"What is it, Ernest?" asked the Captain, trembling, of his brother-in-law.

"A wreck, I should say," the brother-in-law answered, carelessly. "By Jove, now I look at it with the glass, I can read the name, '*Fortuna*, Sarnia.'"

Captain Pierpoint seized the glass with a shaking hand, and read the name on the stern, himself, in a dazed fashion.

"Take me downstairs," he said feebly, "and let me die quietly; and for Heaven's sake, Ernest, never let *her* know about it all."

They took him downstairs into the little cabin, and gave him quinine; but he called for brandy. They let him have it, and he drank a glassful. Then he lay down, and the shivering seized him; and with his wife's hand in his, he died that night in raving delirium, about eleven. A black squall was blowing down from the Sault Ste. Marie; and they lay at anchor out in the lake, tossing and pitching, opposite the green mouldering hull of the *Fortuna*.

They took him back and buried him at Sarnia; and all the world went to attend his funeral, as of a man who died justly respected for his wealth and other socially admired qualities. But the brother-in-law knew there was a mystery somewhere in the wreck of the *Fortuna*; and as soon as the funeral was over, he went back with the yacht, and took its skipper with him to examine the stranded vessel. When they came to look at the bottom, they found eight holes in it. Six of them were wide open; one was still plugged, and the remaining one had the plug pulled half out, inward, as if the persons who were pulling it had abandoned the attempt for the fear of the rising water. That was bad enough, and they did not wonder that Captain Pierpoint had shrunk in horror from the revealing of the secret of the *Fortuna*.

But when they scrambled on the deck, they discovered another fact which gave a more terrible meaning to the dead man's tragedy. The covering of the

hatchway by the companion-ladder was battened down, and nailed from the side with five-inch nails. The skipper loosened the rusty iron with his knife, and after a while they lifted the lid off, and descended carefully into the empty hold below. As they suspected, there was no damaged grain in it; but at the foot of the companion-ladder, left behind by the retreating water, two half-cleaned skeletons in sailor clothes lay huddled together loosely on the floor. That was all that remained of Pete and Hiram. Evidently the Captain had nailed the hatch down on top of them, and left them there terror-stricken to drown as the water rushed in and rose around them.

For a while the skipper and the brother-in-law kept the dead man's secret; but they did not try to destroy or conceal the proofs of his guilt, and in time others visited the wreck, till, bit by bit, the horrible story leaked out in its entirety. Nowadays, as you pass the Great Manitoulin Island, every sailor on the lake route is ready to tell you this strange and ghastly yarn of the foundering of the *Fortuna*.

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## 11: Mary England

***Sarah Addington***

1891-1940

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THE ship had just eased out of New York harbor and already Lucia was at her unpacking.

"That woman will keep house in her coffin," Rodney said of her. And it was true that her eyes so loved order that her hands were ever striving for it. Now she was making a beautiful straight parade of Rodney's coats and trousers, composing brushes and bottles into chaste geometric forms. Not that her stateroom would remain composed and patterned and seemly. Any woman with one husband and five children knows better than even to hope that her four walls will be anything but a shambles.

Across the corridor Miss Gospel was also unpacking— for four children. Lucia could hear her now, whisking about as only Gossy could whisk— she had been whisking for the Leith family for fifteen years now.

"I wonder," thought Lucia, "if she brought the white shoe polish," and knew that she had for Gossy had never forgotten anything yet in these fifteen years. "I wonder what women do who dont have a Gossy. I wonder," she thought then mildly, "why we're taking four children abroad. Because it's certainly insane."

The invitation had come one May morning, postmarked London, signed Mary— Lucia's Pittsburgh cousin married to an English husband. "We shall be in Venice this summer for some reason. Why don't you bring your bevy and use our Sussex house for a few weeks? I'll leave everything, servants, a car, a pony— you'd all love it."

Lucia had merely smiled as one does at a butterfly dream, but Rodney had surprised her by saying, "Well, why don't we? I'll grab eight weeks' vacation, well take the whole bunch. Why, it's perfectly obvious!" There was one thing about living with Rodney; you never knew what was going to happen next.

Well, this had happened, apparently. They were now on a ship, complete with four children, one Gossy, five trunks and so many suit-cases, bags, kits, boxes and bundles that no one of them knew the exact number. Only Lucie, the eldest, had been left behind. England did not attract Lucie: she had a boy on her mind. She was supposed to have Latin on it; Rodney had paid a pretty penny for his daughter's coaching, but he admitted that he didn't expect anything to come of it.

Rodney had brought the strangest collection of objects, thought his wife as she drew them forth. Boswell's *Life of Johnson*. Five razors. A movie camera— dear soul, he still hoped, after five years of experimenting, that he would learn

to operate it. An atlas. Six pipes. A box of something called Digest-its. An army blanket. "That will add a nice touch to Mary's Georgian house." Saddle soap. And, of course, all his clothes, dinner suit, full dress, everything he owned for fishing, golf, tennis, riding, bathing.

"Oh, dear," said Lucia finally.

Gossy came to the door. "All through, Gossy?"

"Yes, ma'am." She was an American, this Miss Hannah Gospel, and had been since the age of two, but she had been born in Yorkshire and Yorkshire was still in her pink complexion, her high-pitched cheek-bones, her cheerful passion for work. "There are seventeen pairs of shoes, Mrs. Leith, not counting rubbers."

"Yes." They smiled at each other. It was one of their jokes, this mul-tiplicity of articles— food, clothing, equipment, gear— with which they daily wrestled for the health and well-being of the children. A joke against them. Lucia sometimes thought, for the multiplicity was sometimes too much for Lucia, although never too much for Gossy. "Where are the children?"

"Up on deck with Mr. Leith, ma'am."

"We'll be having tea. They ought to come down and wash."

"Yes, ma'am. I'm just going to fetch them."

Lucia heard their thunder up the corridor, the noise of a herd of elephants.

"Ssh!" She poked her head out of the door, but Chris shouted. "We're going to the engine room. To-morrow! Father fixed it up!" And Marda cried, "Why didn't you tell me a ship was so wonderful? I didn't know it!" And John chanted. "I like ships, I like ships." And Jeff bawled, "Hurry up, mother. They've got cakes up there!"

Lucia and Gossy smiled at each other above the heads, the din. That was the trouble with these two women; they always smiled when the children roared like this, and forgot to scold.

Rodney had two tea tables placed together and waiting. The Leiths always had two tables in public arning places as they always had four rooms in an hotel and three compartments on a train. There was music during tea, which merely meant to the children that they had to talk a little louder. They were also a little too hungry for sweet decorum's sake. But Rodney promised that the next fellow who grabbed with both hands would be led out by the ear, and manners improved perceptibly.

Lucia looked at her sons. Chris and Jeff, big and blond and hearty, like Viking boys— where had they got this arrangement of bone and tissue, this red-cheeked fairness? Not from her or Rodney, indeed. She could see the family strains in Marda and Lucie, dark-haired, tallish, stringy. But some unknown forbear must have leaped the generations to live again in Chris and Jeff. And John. John was inexplicable, too. Small even for six, odd-featured, pale, thin-haired John was their quaint one, their sprite. And their only distinguished

member. Her other children were average, but John wore distinction like a star on his brow.

Lucia looked at her living sons and thought of her dead one. "I am happy. How can I be?" She wondered, too, if Jeff ever grieved for that adored older brother. No. Jeff was the bland one of the family. Trouble, the troubles of a ten-year old, struck that armor of blandness and lightly bounded away.

On Sunday Marda accepted the nomination of her older brothers to write the first letter back to West-chester County. Marda, being eight, had not learned that letter-writing is a bore. She sat at a desk in the writing-room and worked for forty minutes.

*Dear Sis.*

*We are now on our way to see Mary England; we are having a good time; the weather is blue; we have movies and church this morning and go in swimming; 11 times around the deck is 1 mile; we saw the engines and tomorrow is fourth of July.*

*Love to aunt Gertrude,*

*Marda.*

Chris and Jeff were rude enough to read the letter without being invited to.

"Gee, you didn't tell her anything. You didn't tell her the engines were turbines!"

"And you didn't even mention the fire drill," said Jeff. "Or the whale."

"That wasn't a whale, Jeff," said Chris.

"Well, she could have told her it was a whale. That would have made her sit up."

"But it would have been a lie," said Chris coldly.

"Oh, well, that's all right. Just to make her sit up."

"It is not all right. You cant lie at all. If I catch you lying, I'll knock your teeth in."

"Oh, sure." Jeff grinned and strode off airily.

John lifted his grey eyes to Marda. "Did you tell her there was no land?" To John that was the great marvel. He had made up words that he sang to himself. "There is no land any more. It is water now, all water. The land is gone."

Fourth of July on a ship. The children couldn't quite imagine it. "What'll it be like, mother?" asked Marda.

"Well, let me see. There'll probably be music and speeches and flags."

"I'm glad we're on an American ship," said Chris.

"Why?"

"Because, dummy, an English ship wouldn't exactly celebrate the Fourth, would it?"

"Why not?"

"Why not? Because the Fourth is an American day." Marda looked helpless and Chris cast a glance of despair at his mother. "Mother, she doesn't know the difference!"

"Yes, you do, don't you, Marda? You know about England— where we're going."

"Yes, Mary England. I'm going to play with her!"

"Mother!" Chris' face was pure horror. "Oh, Mother," he groaned, "she thinks it's a girl!"

"Well, suppose you explain."

"Well, listen, fathead. England is a country, a place, we're going there. It isn't a girl—"

"But her name is Mary—"

"It isn't! It's 'merry.' That means happy or—or—well, you know Merry Christmas. Well, this is Merry England. Happy England, see?"

"Y-yes." said Marda, but she didn't quite. Where had Mary gone suddenly?

"Tell about the Fourth," said Jeff. "Aw, she's so silly she wouldn't understand it."

Chris' mother spoke then. "You're being very unkind, Chris. She's eight and you're eleven. You were silly yourself when you were eight."

"Hah!" guffawed Jeff.

"I wasn't that silly!" Chris' outrage was noble. "I knew about the Fourth of July, I guess."

"Well, tell Marda then. Don't be so superior."

"Well—" Chris took a long breath. "Fourth of July is Independence Day, when the Americans signed the Declaration of Independence against the British."

"The British?" quavered Marda.

"The English. Oh, gosh, I can't make her see." But he caught his mother's eye. "Well, you know how we play Revolution, Marda. Jeff is always Paul Revere and you're the embattled farmer and I'm—"

"Oh, that," said Marda. "Yes, I know. When we play war."

"Yes, sure! Well, Fourth of July is the big day for Americans, you see, because that's the day we declared we wanted to be a free country. And then after we stopped fighting the British we were a free country, because we won."

"Oh, have we stopped?" Inquired Marda, astonished.

"Oh, good gracious! Oh, good night!" Chris was likely to explode now. "Of course we've stopped. How could we be going to England if the war was still on?"

"I don't know," said poor Marda Lucia put her aim around her daughter. "It'll all come clear Marda. Don't worry about it. Chris learned about it at school. You'll learn it too."

But Marda mourned the rest of the voyage. She had lost Mary England, that girl with gold curls and laughing voice who was to have been her dear, new friend. She had secrets to tell Mary and she had brought three dolls to show her. But Mary wasn't there beyond the water. Only a place was there, a place called variously England and London and Sussex.

Fourth of July afternoon. On the broad aft decks and on stairways stood the passengers, their faces towards the New World and towards the speakers who told of the be-ginnings of the New World. Aloft, the Stars and Stripes were proud and airy in the breeze. The band played, everybody sang "The Star spangled Banner."

Chris was red with emotion when it was over. "Gee, I'm glad I'm an American," he said, not tactfully since several British citizens were within hearing.

"Yes," said Rodney, "but don't get stuck-up about it."

Chris stared. "Aren't you patriotic?" he demanded.

"I am. But being patriotic doesn't mean being supercilious, if you know what that means."

"What does it mean?"

"It means, literally, raising your eyebrows. Latin. Super-above; cilium-eyelid. Supercilious people think that nobody else is as good as they are."

"Well, nobody else is as good as Americans."

Whereat Rodney raised his eye-brows, at his wife. "Whew," he said. "There's a nice job cut out for us."

Plymouth. Tender, Customs, boat-train. Again, the parental Leiths wondered why they had ever thought it would be anything but torment to bring their family abroad, for getting four children out of a country was nothing to landing them in one. John got lost, walked out of the railway station— and was found in the town of Plymouth earnestly inspecting a cabhorse. Jeff got sick. Having crossed the ocean with no digestive qualms, the mo-ment he set his foot on land he became afflicted with many. Marda wept. This female child, trained in the hard school of brotherly tyranny, almost never wept, but she was weary and Mary England was horrid. Just a railway station, all noise and waiting and fatigue.

Only Chris was efficient. It was he who first spied John, he who discovered wayward bags, he who fetched coffee to the elders—with great pride in his ability at shillings.

Matters did not improve a great deal on the train. The children behaved monstrously. That is, they pointed and criticised and thought everything that was novel was "funny" or wrong or inferior. Jeff said, on beholding an automobile, "Why, they drive on the wrong side of the road." Chris said, with distaste. "The houses are awful old, aren't they?" Marda said. "Why don't they

have money like ours?" They all said, "Why don't they have trains like ours? Isn't it a funny little engine? Why do you have to have a ticket for dinner?" Lucia and Rodney were not proud of their arrogant, ignorant little provincials.

John alone took the new sights without shock or offence. He sat quietly by the carriage window, his grey eyes resting on gentle gardens, old trees, stone houses, and there was a small light in his face. Lucia pointed out some cows. "Devonshire cream cows, John," and he smiled as if he saw that they were very special cows.

And Gossy? She did not need to forgive her dear children their stupidities about her birthland, because for once the children did not exist for her. She smiled broadly, nodding at the landscape, almost speaking to it. It was as if every rose, every roof, every feather of smoke was an old acquaintance to whom she had returned. This was England. She was an American. And Gossy knew this afternoon the especial privilege of those who love and belong to two countries.

There was a big, rackety, friendly hotel near Piccadilly Circus, which Rodney had chosen for the sole rea-son that he could house his family there without going bankrupt. There was no nonsense about this hotel; that is, there were no private baths, bedside telephones, radios, reading lights, running ice-water, or any other such irrelevancies. This hotel was for sleeping and eating. The Leiths slept, ate the next morning and Rodney's promised three days of sightseeing began.

LONDON looked enchanting to the elders on this cool, thin summer day. The sun was not abroad but his ghost was there, teasing Londoners, as he loves to do, chuckling to himself, no doubt, as he slipped secretly about, his broad face, his gold robes, shadowed and invisible.

Lucia said, "This is London as I always think of it. The grey city. No sun and beautiful."

"But you know the sun is there," said John.

"Yes, darling, that's what I mean. I'd like to have been here at Jubilee, Rodney, when it was so joyful and mad. But it looks cheerful, doesn't it?"

"Yes," said Rodney. "British cheer. Made of beef and ale and hardship and courage."

Rodney was playing a game all by himself. He had long been wanting to find a husband for Miss Gospel, a husband in name only, as he said, for all he wanted to do was to discover a name in the world that would be worthy of Hannah's surname. "London's the place for names," he said, so now he was reading signs fiercely, husband hunting for Miss Gospel. "Dr. Tidy" he thought rather nice, and "David Cuspid" and "Augustus Twittey" pleased him, although they were obviously unsuitable to be bracketed with the heroic name of Gospel.

Three mornings and three late afternoons, they clambered on and off the buses and gazed upon new sights. The children ceased objecting to the strangeness. It absorbed them now. Westminster Abbey, where Chris looked deeply at Kipling's new gravestone and said, "I wish he weren't dead." Kensington Gardens, where John said, "But Peter Pan isn't an iron boy." The Tower of London and Chris telling Jeff all about Sir Francis Drake. The Children's Library in Johnson Street, where Charles Dickens lived as a wretched little boy. "But it's a sweet little house," said Marda. "I'd love to be poor and live in this little house." The Changing of the Guard, where John's only question was, "What are the horses' names?"

Lunch at the Strand Corner House, something delightfully called bubble and squeak and something else called gooseberry fool. Dinner at Simpson's, bright green cabbage cut in blocks and beef from a cart. Lunch at the George and the Crown, where John said, looking around, "This is oldness." Dinner at Lyons' near the hotel, where a lady orchestra played and Jeff said, "Hello" to the lady cellist.

And on the last day Rodney found Miss Gospel's mate. He was a carpenter in Mornington Crescent, his sign said "Thomas Baptist," and Rodney went home in glee to Gossy who said, "Oh, Mr. Leith," and laughed, although she had never thought this joke was very funny.

Then came a limousine and Reginald Evans, Mary's secretary, to convey them to Sussex. A blithe young man and a capable one. "How do you do. This is awfully nice. You're quite ready? We'll go right along then. I do hope you'll like it down there. It's quite nice, really. View of the downs and all that. All right, young chap, there you are." He swung John into the car, swung them all in, directed the bestowal of the luggage, in no time at all had them bowling between the high arches of England's old trees in the greatest comfort and good fellow-ship.

Mary's house was stone and square and chimneyed. Lucia saw the green turf, the gardens, indoors let her eyes take their fill of wide, polished oak rooms. "It's perfect," she told Mr. Evans.

"It is rather good, I think. There are masses of rooms, nurseries, dressing-rooms, an office, baths. I think it may do you."

"I think it may," said Lucia.

The children had an invitation to tea. "Who are the Dunlaps, Mother?"

"Friends of Cousin Mary. They called yesterday, remember? They have three children, Margery, Francis and Noel. We're all to go to tea to-morrow."

The juvenile part of the tea was a failure. The Dunlap three were stiff, polite, and bored. The Leith four were abashed and gauche. Food was consumed, rabbits were inspected, conversation was attempted but unsuccessfully.

On the way home Chris said, "Did you ever see such crummy kids?"

Marda didn't think Noel was crummy. He was gentle and scornful and clever and she adored him, but she said, "Margery's the worst. She's so stuck-up. Mother, do we have to have them back to tea?"

"Why, I should think so, shouldn't you?"

"Oh, socks," moaned Chris, "do we have to?"

"You'll like them better when you know them."

The Dunlaps were invited for Wednesday and Marda said she wanted to have her hair cut.

"But why, darling? You never had your hair cut in your life!"

"I Just want to." One of the remarks addressed to her by Noel had been, "I don't care for girls with straight hair." The other had been, "Will you have a currant bun?"

"But Marda, your hair won't curl. Besides, I think it looks silly for little girls to be all prinked up."

CHRIS found her moping In the garden. "What's the matter?"

"Nothing."

"Well, why arent you getting ready for tea?"

"I'm not coming."

"Not coming? What's eating you?"

She finally confessed. "It's my hair. It's so straight and Mother won't let me—"

Chris' jaw dropped in masculine wonder. But she did look miserable, poor little nut. He had to comfort her somehow. "But Marda, look, I like straight hair. Why, gee, I hate curly hair. Your hair is pretty. It's the best kind of hair."

"Oh, Chris, is it?"

"Why, sure. That curly stuff— why, gee it just looks nasty. Yours is all smooth. Goodness, didn't you know straight hair was better?"

"No."

"Well, I do. And I'm older than you, so I know, don't I?"

"Well—" It was not the supreme accolade but it was approval from one's most respected brother. She decided to attend the party.

It was the strangest thing, but that party went like a house afire. Chris, being gallant to Margery for mere politeness' sake, discovered that he enjoyed gallantry and also discovered Margery. Francis was curious about baseball. Jeff undertook to explain and a friendship was born.

Marda sat watching Noel. He was so unlike her lusty brothers, with his slim head, his narrow features, his beautiful lofty smile. He was eating bread and butter ardently and paying no one any heed.

John sat as if he were alone in the world. He was thinking how it would feel to be a tea leaf float-ing in a gold-and-white cup.

After a rousing game of croquet and a visit to Susy, the pony. Noel said to Marda carelessly, "What about the lily pond? Are there any fish down there?"

"Oh, yes!" She was going to walk alone with Noel!

Noel said, as they sat by the lily pond, "We didn't like you at first, you know. We voted on you after you left that day and we all thought you were hot oil-cans. I expect we'll have to vote again now."

"You mean we're not hot oil-cans, after all?"

"That's it. And it's not bad having some kids around, you know. We're usually the only ones here in summer. We can do things together, picnics and walks. I might even take you to Wells' Bridge one day. There's no cinema there, but there's a larky tea shop and a canal and a castle. I've got some money saved."

"Oh, Noel."

"We could go on the bus. Would you have to take your Gossy?"

"Gossy's going to Yorkshire."

"Well, we'd have to take somebody, I expect. Or, I say, we could bike! Oh, you haven't got a bike."

"I could get one," said Marda, plunging. "When could we go, Noel?"

"Oh, to-morrow, I expect."

"But Gossy's going to-morrow. I have to be here to see her off."

"Oh, well, the next day, then Whenever you like."

Marda was eight and her passion was not eternal, but at moments that evening she would remember that she was not a hot oil-can and that she was going to bike with Noel some day.

Gossy, having settled the family was to have a month in York-shire. They all walked to the motor bus with her. Chris carried her bag, a preposterous old valise mostly filled with photographs of her darlings, and John gave her a nubbin of elderly chocolate. Gossy wept at that, for John's vice was chocolate.

Then Rodney said, "Well, what about going to the village for bikes? I'm not buying any, but if we can rent some— want one, Lucia?"

"I do," confessed Lucia.

John didn't want a bicycle. He said they weren't alive. But that was because he had given his heart to Susy, who had ancient bones and a white face and fat hips and a gait just short of coma.

They pedalled the countryside "the galloping Leiths." They pic-nicked with the Dunlaps. There were other teas and lunches with other new grown-ups. But Marda's high day was that one on which she and Noel went alone to Wells Bridge. The aloneness took no little managing and propaganda, but fin-ally Mrs. Dunlap said, "Oh, well, it is perfectly safe, I suppose, and I think Noel will take good care of her."

Shops to look at, tiny toy-like shops in old-timbered, picture-book houses. A castle to gaze upon from afar, with a turret, if you please.

Tea in a little shop garden by the canal, Noel giving her the best oi everything and telling her jokes and trying to explain the delights of the Christmas pantomimes hi London

"I'll take you at Christmas time," he said.

"Oh, Noel, I won't be here!"

"You-what?" His plum cake stopped in mid-air.

"We're going home."

"When?"

"I don't know exactly. The last of August, I think."

"But it's August now."

"Oh, but we aren't going yet."

"Well, I should think not," said Noel almost crossly.

BUT she had forgotten about home-going when an announcement crashed down on her head. This was the last week. "Oh, Mother, it can't be!"

"Yes, darling, we sail Saturday."

"But we haven't done all the things. I haven't even started to learn tennis."

They were all as startled and Horrified as Marda. "Gee, Francis and I were going to the rector's to see his birds' eggs," complained Jeff

"Well, get to work,'" advised Lucia. "Get everything in this week."

And they tried, indeed. Their day were as full as a bank president's.

On Friday came the farewell party, supper with the Dunlaps. The elders, a lot of them, were in the big dining-room, the children in the little one. A heavenly party, favors, presents, paper caps, boiled chicken, peaches and cream, and a monster cake, pink-iced and saying in choco-late writing, "Chris, Jeff, Marda John— Come Back Soon."

They played tag on the lawn until the stars came. Indoors they batted ping-pong and billiard balls. Francis turned on the gramophone and they whirled, wild and laughing. Francis and Jeff got the gloves and boxed. Jeff was knocked clean off his feet and his head struck a chair.

"Oh, Jeff!" Francis was white.

"Count!" croaked Jeff "I'm not out!"

Chris began. "One-two-three-" ("But he's hurt!" cried Margery.) "Shut up. Four-five-"

Jeff struggled to his feet. Sharp tears of pain were in his eyes. "Okay," he said, and looked as if he were going to fall.

Francis rushed to hold him up, but Jeff shook him off. "I'm all right. I was just seeing stars for a minute. Come on, Francis. Finish the round."

Francis hesitated only a moment. Admiration for his friend and pity for his friend's hurt flooded in him. But pity must not win. It killed him to punch Jeff

now, but you had to let the other fellow be a sport. That was the first law of sportsmanship.

"Draw!" announced Chris, when lt was over. The two took off their gloves, stuck out their hands. They looked straight at each other as their clasp held for a moment. "There's a good guy," thought Jeff. "There's a good chap," thought Francis. They smiled. It was great to have a good guy, a good chap, for a friend.

They were having a tug of war when Rodney came to fetch them, all but tearing each other's arms out of their sockets, screaming fiend-ishly.

"Sorry, kids. It's terribly late."

All hands dropped abruptly. "Do we have to go?" asked Marda.

"Afraid so."

The six looked at each other blankly. Only John did not seem to understand. "Well," said Chris.

"Gather your loot," said Rodney. They collected penny whistles, chocolate bars, games, books and the pink paper sunbonnets that had seemed so funny a few hours before.

"Well," said Marda as they stood about, laden.

"I'll see you in the morning, Marda." Noel spoke softly. "We'll come to the gate and wave, you know."

"Yes."

"And think how jolly it will be in a ship."

"Yes. It's lots of fun."

"Come on, children," called Lucia. "Hats and coats."

Coats were helped on, good-byes were beginning. "Dear little John," Mrs. Dunlap was saying, as he solemnly shook her hand.

"Marda." Noel whispered, motioned her with his eyes. She followed to a corner behind the hallstand. "I want to tell you something," said Noel. "It's this. I've changed my mind about a girl's hair. I like it long now, much better."

"Oh, Noel," groaned Marda and darted away.

"WELL, JOHN, how does home look?"

"Looks just the same to me," said Jeff. "Listen, there are the kids Come on!"

They pelted out of the house. "Hello," said everybody, which disposed of the formalities.

Lucia, struggling with unpacking, saw her husband at her door. "Chuck that for a minute. Come on down and sit on the porch and look at your garden."

"All right. Where's Lucie?"

"Gallivanting. She thinks she's going to marry him, Lucia. I asked her when and she said ten years. It seems he has three years of prep school, four years at college, and three years of engineering before he'll be ready to wed."

"Oh, dear."

They sat on a swinging seat, saw the quiet suburban street, heard the voices of the children in the back.

"What'll we play?" Chris resuming his role as boss.

"Tag!" Daisy Milroy squeaked.

"Aw, no." The males dissenting "War!" shouted Freddy Taggart. Enthusiastic roars at this and then Chris: "What war?"

"Any war. American Revolution!"

"No," said Chris, "I don't like that game any more."

"Why not?"

"Because I've been to England. I don't like to fight the English."

"Aw, come on. Who wants to be George Washington?"

"No." This was Jeff now. "I've got an English friend. We box, but we don't fight."

A queer silence. "Well, then," said Jimmy Dale, "let's play Ethiopia. I'll lead the Ethiopians and I'll bet we'll beat the Italians."

"You won't beat the Italians!" Marda cried. "There was an Italian boy on the boat coming home and he was lovely and you won't beat him!"

"Good-night—" began Freddy.

"Let's play Run, Sheep, Run," suggested Jeff.

"Aw," came a disgusted chorus.

"Well, we won't play war." said Chris clearly. "It isn't fun for us any more. We've been around, you see, and met people."

Lucia and Rodney sat quite still. Then Rodney said, "Well, Lucia, now maybe we know why we did it."

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## 12: Mrs Biffin's Party

***Charles Hanson Towne***

1877-1949

*Australian Women's Weekly* 14 Jan 1939

*American poet, short story writer, and critic*

ABOUT a year after Dick Holton, of Dayton, had been transferred from the New York offices of the Eversure Sewing Machine Company to their London branch, I found myself in the British capital; and of course I looked him up. I was anxious to see what England had done to the son of an old college friend. For he was the antithesis of everything British. Nice young Dick, red-headed and roystering, how could he ever settle down to the comforts of English ways, and remember to drive his car on the left side of the road?— the road mind you, not the street.

But Dick had gone in for athletics, I recalled; so perhaps he would find much to interest him away from home. He would get along with his English cousins, in his blustering, happy-hearted way, unless he had criticised too many of them before they got to know him well.

He came over to my small but comfortable hotel in Jermyn Street. To my amazement, he was more American than ever, if such a thing could be. His clothes still had that Dayton look, and there was not a trace of an English accent. He had remained just what he had always been— a stalwart Middle-Westerner with a smile that would have won anybody from a barmaid to a duchess.

He was uproariously glad to see me, despite the difference in our ages. His voice boomed out In greet-ing, and his handclasp almost broke my knuckles. Then, looking around my chamber, he said, as I had half expected he would say. "You're not going to stay here, old Peter. You're coming over to my diggings."

There it was— "diggings"— the one English expression he had seemed to pick up.

"Oh, no; I wouldn't impose on your hospitality to that extent," I said.

"I've got to see my English publishers, and do some writing, and..."

"Don't be an ass, old Peter. Mrs Biffin will make you far more comfortable than you could be here."

There was nothing to do but go; so I packed my bags which I had only just unpacked, and we took a taxi to his "diggings," and I met Mrs. Biffin.

HE had told me about her on the way over, through the crowded London streets, to Lincoln's Inn Fields.

"A bachelor can't live here without an old housekeeper to make him happy, she's a Jewel— a pearl beyond price, old Peter. The same story— a widow who used to support her good-for-nothing husband until he mercifully died; a dear

old soul who's been buffeted about, yet is proud of her servitude and the long line of her family who have scrubbed and cooked for hard-hearted aris-tocrats,

"Homely as a hedge-fence, but with a heart of gold; and how she worships me! She'll make a fuss over you, too; and you'll learn for the first time what a good servant really is... Now tell me all the news from back home."

We had climbed two frights of dim stairs, and there was Mrs. Biffin, smiling and bland and cordial, coming out to help with the luggage when she heard our rackety foosteps.

She wasn't a day under sixty, a thin little wisp of a woman, with colorless tight hair screwed in a blot at the back of her head.

"Get out of our way, Mrs. Biffin!" Dick ordered, in his cheery manner. "We're strong, husky fellows, but we can fetch some whisky and soda. This is Mr. Tolliver, and I want you to live up to everything I've told him about you."

"Thank you, sir. Pleased to meet you, sir," said Mrs. Biffin, in her thin voice. And I never liked an old woman more. Dickens, too, would have loved her.

It was a cosy place, with panelled walls and a great open fireplace, mullioned windows that looked over a stretch of green; and there was ancient polished furniture that gleamed and shone.

"O.K., old Peter?" Dick wanted to know. "It's all yours. I'm away from nine till six." And he looked around, proud of his domain.

What a tea Mrs. Biffin laid out for us! It was a banquet of scones, thin buttered bread, tarts and marmalade. And the silver urn sang in the semi-darkness This was the way to live; but I wondered how long Dick could stick it out alone. There had been, vaguely, a girl back home. With a sea between them, there was probably another in this great, sprawling romantic town. I as much as said so, as we touched the syphon and watched the amber liquid in our tall glasses.

"Oh, of course," Dick said, with no inhibitions.

"Good!" I answered, and lifted my glass.

"Toodle-e-oo!" said Dick, and lifted his.

"By the way, Muriel's dining with us to-night. Hope you'll like her I do, but I'm glad you're here, for I want you to meet her—"

"I'll not be here," I said at once "You two young people— you don't want a doddering old fossil like me around when ..."

"Cut that out, old Peter. I'll gain prestige by showing off an author."

Then, as the golden light flowed into the room, and the great world of London seemed far away, I got Dick to tell me of his new life here.

"Oh, I like England all right, old Peter. They're jolly good people here, once you get to know them. But I do hate one thing about them— so many are snobs. Funny, isn't it, how an Englishman still loves a lord? Even Muriel... but maybe I shouldn't say it."

"Say anything to me. Or don't say it."

He put down hts glass. "She's a lovely girl," he said, "but..."

There was that same innate kindness in Dick that had been so notable a quality in his father— that hatred of saying anything ill of anyone. I kept still and waited.

"...but she treats maids, and all servants, as if they were the dust under her pretty little feet. She never even notices Mrs. Biffin— won't say a word to her. You'll see. And Mrs. Biffin— why, she's practically my mother over here. I love the old girl."

I could have embraced him for that. He went on, quickly:

"Why, I was sick for a week with the flu when I first came over, and you should have seen her nurse me! She never left my side. You can't forget a thing like that."

It was wiser to say nothing. I didn't like the picture I had of Muriel; but that evening when she came I could see how any youth would be a fool not to fall in love with her. Her hair was like spun gold, tossed over a brow of ivory, above blue eyes like stars; and her voice was soft, and she seemed to bring a radiance into the old mansion.

I watched Muriel Dorchester carefully; and sure enough, when Mrs. Biffin came to help her off with her cloak, she never addressed her, never glanced in the old housekeeper's direction.

"She is rich and spoiled," I thought. "It can't be that, it's because she's English."

Our little dinner went off amazingly well. I saw, in the soft candlelight, how Muriel kept looking at Dick, and he at her; how they had sly little glances which must have told each other much that I could not understand. I did not mind. I was happy for him; I wanted him to marry this girl.

I liked her voice particularly when she began telling us of a little incident that had happened on her way to the Mansions.

"A cat was crawling across the road— I don't know how I ever happened to see it. except that a light fell on its black little body. I pounded on the taxi glass, and cried to the driver to stop and pick it up. He did. I got out and took it into a chemist's, and I asked him to get lt some food and keep it there for me. I'll go to-morrow and fetch lt home. It must have wandered from Soho. It looked like Soho. It had Soho written all over it, dear little starved thing. There's a story for you. Mr. Tolliver. Write it for me, won't you? You could call lt 'From Soho to Mayfair'," and she laughed.

I looked at Dick. His eyes were sparkling.

It was close on midnight when Dick took Muriel home. I was waiting up for him when he came back.

"She's marvellous," I said. "You bet," agreed Dick.

Nothing else was said.

I turned into my comfortable room and dreamed of a cat that, oddly enough, resembled Mr. Biffin.

I had to come to London for a purpose, of course, and I was busy. Mrs. Biffin served me lunch when I wished to stay in; and after about a week, one noon, I could see that she was anxious to talk with me.

"Oh, Mr. Tolliver, what a good young man Mr. Holton is," she ventured to say. "E's almost a saint. 'E took out some insurance for me, so when I'm real old I shan't 'ave to worry none."

"JUST like him." I said. "A piece of his father, Mrs. Biffin. You're in luck."

"An' don't I know that, sir!" she exclaimed. "None of our own people would do so much for me; and now 'e wants to take me to Paris for a little trip! I, who've never poked my nose outside of London, sir! I can't go. I'd be scared to death. Won't you please, sir, ask 'im not to take me?" Her eyes were almost filled with tears.

"Take you to Paris?" I repeated.

"Yes, sir, If you can believe such a thing, sir!"

"I'll speak to him," I told her. "But it isn't too good to be true, Mrs, Biffin. Miracles do sometimes happen, you know."

"But not to me, sir; unless it's a miracle I ever got with such a fine young gentleman, sir."

I took Dick to a club that evening, so that I might have a quiet Ulk with him.

He laughed when I told him what Mrs. Biffin had said.

"Of course I'm doing it. Had the idea for days, and you're going with us," he said. "I've got some business in Paris, and I want to give Mrs. Biffin a spree. Think of it, old Peter, she's never been anywhere!

"But say nothing of this, old Peter. It's our little secret— yours, and Mrs. Biffin's, and mine."

As a matter of fact, I, too. had some business in Paris, and Dick's plan fitted in well with mine.

There was a day when the old housekeeper disappeared with Dick, and when they both came in at tea-time I knew why they had gone away. A whole new wardrobe had arrived for Mrs. Biffin. And when I looked at our ancient women I saw that no longer was her hair tied in a tight knot at the back of her head. She had been shampooed, she had been curled, she had been triumphantly put in the hands of a beauty specialist for a massage, and whatever else it is those mysterious blessings of the earth do to elderly ladies. Her eyes were bright beyond belief; she was positively pretty.

"From this moment," Dick cried, "she's my Aunt Eliza for three days and nights, and I'm taking that dear relative to gay Paree! Aunt Eliza Plunkett, from Dayton, Ohio, who's never been abroad!"

The next morning we started. And what a sweet old lady Mrs. Biffin seemed to be, with a bunch of violets in her corsage, and the scent of lavender following her where she walked. An aunt to be proud of.

"I CAN'T do it, sir," she pleaded, as we reached the taxi door. "Oh, sir, I can't get in first, sir! I'm just..."

"You're my Aunt Eliza, and I must insist," said Dick, bowing to her.

And Aunt Eliza in the train with the beautiful country flying by. How she drank the loveliness in. And the lunch served to her— she was not serving it, for once in her weary, drudging life.

Then the first glimpse of the Channel, the first stepping, for her, on a boat of any size, the mystified look in her eyes, and the cool breeze warming her ancient forehead as we got her a comfortable chair on the deck.

Her mouth quivered as she watched the coast of France appear— France, that she had never hoped to see.

Only the Hotel Crillon would do. I thought it mighty extravagant of him, but this was Dick's party, and I had no intention of interfering in any way. He even got a sitting-room for Aunt Eliza, and she was to have her breakfast served in bed.

Next morning she came bustling out of the hotel to take the open fiacre he had ordered for us; and we drove in the rich sunshine.

We had lunch in Montparnasse, over on the Left Bank, at Jouven, which has stood for so many years within a hundred feet of the Dome and the Rotonde.

"Loving it. Aunt Eliza?" Dick asked.

And "Oh!" was all she could say. We did it all, allowing the old lady to rest now and then In the luxury of her suite. Then, on our last evening, we took her to a night-club on Montmartre. What would she think of *Pile ou Face*, in the rue Pigalle, with Americans dancing all night, the women in shimmering gowns, the music playing incessantly? And what would she think of those jaded faces, and the dancers spinning about on the contracted floor, so close together that they were like words crowded upon a pin-point?

We engaged a corner table so that we could see everything. "I used to waltz, oh, years ago, when I was a young girl," Aunt Eliza amazed us by saying, after she had tasted one little cocktail.

"Really!" almost shouted Dick. "Come, then, you've got to spin with me, Aunt Eliza!" And before she was aware of it she had been seized about the waist and I watched them whirl out upon the crowded floor.

Dick was a fine dancer, and he managed, in some adroit way, to keep Aunt Eliza in step with him; but I could see how she faltered now and then. Scared, she reached our table after one delirious turn.

"My poor feet!" she exclaimed, as she was plumped into her seat. "They do hurt me now. But oh, it was fun!" Then, as people in her station often do, she said a wise thing: "Pleasure makes you tired, too."

Across the room I saw a beautiful face. Dick saw it at the same instant. He gave a little gasp. For it was Muriel, with a party of friends; and if we looked astonished there is no describing the interest in Muriel Dorchester's eyes.

Dick rose, but before he left us he whispered to Aunt Eliza: "When I bring her over, don't speak but one word. She'd know that Dayton, Ohio, never talked as you talk!" And he was gone.

AUNT ELIZA had caught his meaning. Soon, for the first time, perhaps, she was to be noticed by the young lady over there.

"Oh!" came from her lips— nothing else. For in an instant Muriel was leaning over the table meeting Aunt Eliza Plunkett; shaking hands with her, saying how happy she was to make her acquaintance and hoping she was enjoying Paris and all its wickedness. She was sweetness itself.

"Oh!" was the only word Aunt Eliza uttered. She was used to obeying orders.

And then Muriel turned to me, laughed with Dick, and he took her back to her friends.

I dreamed that night of an alley cat whose fur had been brushed by gentle hands until it shone. And again the cat strangely resembled Mrs. Biffin.

Three evenings later, in London, Muriel, her shopping in Paris done, came to dine at the Mansions. She swept in, more glorious than ever; and Mrs. Biffin, slipped back once more into her servitude, came out to help her off with her cloak. It was as though she had never been away. It was as If her drab life had run in the same dull groove. I thought Muriel gave the barest suggestion of a start as her eyes flicked across the old lady's face. But, if she did, it was only a suggestion. Muriel turned slightly and half-lifted her arms to be relieved of her coat, otherwise Ignoring Mrs. Biffin as completely as if she were the old desk in the corner.

Then I was aware that Dick had noticed. His voice, warm, vibrant as always, asked:

"And what became of Soho...?"

"Oh, she is cosily ensconced in my boudoir... probably on a pillow in a sunny window at the moment. Do you know, I have come to adore her! In the presence of her sincere affection for me, I never think of her lowly origin..."

"No," agreed DlcK, softly, "one doesn't, does one, in the presence of a real, sincere affection?"

There was a moment's dead silence. Then Muriel looked at him. You could almost see understanding and realisation permeate her whole body. Her eyes softened and there was a lovely, happy break in her voice as she turned swiftly and kissed Mrs. Biffin hard on the lips!

"Aunt Eliza, darling!" she whispered.

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## 13: The Invisible Horseman

***Ernest Favenc***

1845-1908

*Evening News* (Sydney) 7 March 1896

THE moon was full and about half-way to the zenith, and the tall trees on either hand threw black shadows across the bridle track I was riding along. The shadows were abrupt and strongly marked. Presently I heard the sound of a horse's footfall following me, and glanced round to see who it was who was overtaking me. To my surprise, I could see no one, although the footfall had sounded quite close, and appeared to be travelling smartly. Twice this occurred, and I began to fancy that I was encouraging a hallucination, when the station lights came in sight, and I rode gladly on, for a nasty superstitious feeling was beginning to creep over me.

The station was owned by a widow— doubly bereaved— for six months after the death of her husband her only son, a promising young fellow of about 18 or 19, was killed by his house falling on him only three miles from the station. I was living on a neighboring station, so rode up to the bachelors' quarters as a matter of course, and unsaddled and turned my horse out. A hearty welcome, a nip of Mackay, and a rough but plentiful feed, soon drove all thoughts of the supernatural out of my brain.

I told the boys, however, what queer fancies had come into my head on the road, and was astonished to see that they took it gravely and seriously.

'That sound has been heard before,' said Doyle, the oldest man there. 'It was on just such a moonlight night as this that young Murdoch was killed, and at the very place where you heard the footfall. He was cantering along, with the Mack boy riding behind, when his horse tripped and rolled right over on top of him. Killed him instantly.

'And is it only on moonlight nights like this that he walks?'

'So they say; but that is not all the yarn. It was on that same night that Mrs. Murdoch— you know what a severe woman she is— found out that pretty little Maggie, the girl she brought up with her half-servant, half-companion, was likely to become a mother. She got in a terrible state, and when Maggie, in her shame and terror, confessed that young Murdoch was the man, she nearly went mad. Late as it was, she had the horses put in the buggy, and told me to drive Maggie over to the township— she would not have her on the place another night. I protested, but it was useless, and when we got about three miles away, for that bridle track is a short cut on to the road, there was the dead body of the man who had sworn to marry her and save her good name, lying in the moonlight on the dusty track.

'I don't want to go through that scene over again, I can assure you. The black boy had ridden in and raised an alarm, and some men came out to bring the body in. I managed to quieten the girl somewhat and pushed on to the township; but next morning she was in, a raging fever, and what with that and having a dead child born prematurely, poor Maggie nearly died too. She recovered, however, and went away somewhere— nobody knew where. Ever since the clatter of a horse can be heard coming along that bridle track on moonlight nights. I don't know whether Mrs. Murdoch has heard of it or not, but I expect she has.'

MRS. MURDOCH soon left the station which had such bitter memories for her. Doyle and the other fellows had wandered off one by one, until at last there were none of the old hands left. The superintendent had occasion to hire a married couple, and procured one in the neighbouring township. The man was a surly ill-conditioned lout, whilst the woman was neat and tidy, with the remains of past prettiness on her sad and worn face; they were without children. They had not been there long before it was found out that he was in the habit of beating his wife, and being tackled by one of the other men about it, he showed up a cur. But this did not help the poor woman, who probably received extra punishment on the quiet in consequence of the man's interference.

The story of the ghostly footfall had of course been handed down, and it was noticed that often of a moonlight night the poor silent woman would steal out and walk along the ghost's pad, as it was called. One night, when it was almost as clear as day, one of the men, smoking in the verandah of the men's hut, saw the woman steal out along the ghost's pad. Shortly afterwards he noticed the husband slink after her, and, fearing he meant mischief, the man, who was the same one who had interfered before, went after him.

The woman was standing looking expectantly along the road, when her husband went up to her, and, putting his hand on her shoulder, told her roughly to go home. She shrank away from, him and he lifted his fist. At that moment the watcher heard the approach of the invisible horse and rider. Whether the woman really saw anything or not it was not possible to tell; but she lifted her hands up and her face was transformed with joy. As for the husband, he gave one glance in that direction, then took to his heels and ran home.

'After that the woman was free to wander out to the ghost's pad whenever she liked, but it did not alter her husband's behavior to her when on the station. It was about 12 o'clock one night when the whole homestead was awakened by a shriek of mortal terror. It came from the room off the kitchen where the couple slept. Hastening there they found the woman with her face bruised and bleeding from a blow, standing half-dressed in the middle of the room and the man extended on the floor senseless.

'The tale told by the woman was that her husband had quarrelled with and struck her. That then something, she knew not what, had come between them, and her husband had fallen to the floor, uttering the cry they had heard. When the man came to his senses he could tell nothing, excepting that he admitted having struck his wife and being immediately felled by what, he said, was a red hot fist. Strange to say, there was now visible a distinct burn on his temple where he said he had been struck.

'The story was very strange. The poor woman had not the strength to strike such a blow, and the man could not have inflicted it himself. The mystery was never solved, but the man became different after that; less violent, but more taciturn and sullen. Some months after that a distant shot heard in the middle of the night roused one or two sleepers whose rest was light, but nobody took the trouble to rise and investigate the matter. In the morning the husband waited on the super., and told him that he had accidentally shot his wife during the night.

'His story ran that he had followed his wife, suspecting that these visits of hers to the ghost's pad were only a screen for covering an illicit love affair. He saw his wife seated on a log beside a young man or boy, who had his arm round her waist. That he took aim and fired at this man, and that the bullet passed through the man and struck his wife.

The body of the one-time pretty Maggie was found at the place he described, and buried by the side of young Murdoch. And from that date the tramp of the ghostly horse was heard no more.

The author of her death persisted in his story up to the minute that the bolt was drawn and he dropped into eternity. He avowed that the youth embracing his wife was no being of this earth, for the charge had no effect on him at him. And the doctor who had examined the corpse of the murdered woman told a strange story that few could believe.

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## 14: The Saddest Man

***Don Marquis***

1878-1937

*The Red Book Magazine*, Aug 1921

Collected in: *The Revolt of the Oyster*, 1922

THE BENCH, the barrel, and the cracker box in front of Hennery McNabb's general store held three men, all of whom seemed to be thinking. Two of them were not only thinking but chewing tobacco as well. The third, more enterprising than the other two, more active, was exerting himself prodigiously. He was thinking, chewing tobacco, and whittling all at the same time.

Two of the men were native and indigenous to Hazelton. They drew their sustenance from the black soil of the Illinois prairie on which the little village was perched. They were as calm and placid as the growing corn in the fields round about, as solid and self-possessed and leisurely as the bull-heads in the little creek down at the end of Main Street.

The third man was a stranger, somewhere between six and eight feet high and so slender that one might have expected the bones to pop through the skin, if one's attention had not been arrested by the skin itself. For he was covered and contained by a most peculiar skin. It was dark and rubbery-looking rather than leathery, and it seemed to be endowed with a life of its own almost independent of the rest of the man's anatomy. When a fly perched upon his cheek he did not raise his hand to brush it off. The man himself did not move at all.

But his skin moved. His skin rose up, wrinkled, twitched, rippled beneath the fly's feet, and the fly took alarm and went away from there as if an earthquake had broken loose under it. He was a sad-looking man. He looked sadder than the mummy of an Egyptian king who died brooding on what a long dry spell lay ahead of him.

It was this third man of whom the other two men were thinking, this melancholy stranger who sat and stared through the thick, humid heat of the July day at nothing at all, with grievous eyes, his ego motionless beneath the movements of his rambling skin. He had driven up the road thirty minutes before in a flivver, had bought some chewing tobacco of Hennery McNabb, and had set himself down in front of the store and chewed tobacco in silence ever since.

Finally Ben Grevis, the village grave-digger and janitor of the church, broke through the settled stillness with a question:

"Mister," he said, "you ain't done nothing you're afraid of being arrested for, hev you?"

The stranger slowly turned his head toward Ben and made a negative sign. He did not shake his head in negation. He moved the skin of his forehead from left to right and back again three or four times. And his eyebrows moved as his skin moved. But his eyes remained fixed and melancholy.

"Sometimes," suggested Hennery McNabb, who had almost tired himself out whittling, "a man's system needs overhaulin', same as a horse's needs drenchin'. I don't aim to push my goods on to no man, but if you was feelin' anyway sick, inside or out, I got some of Splain's Liniment for Man and Beast in there that might fix you up."

"I ain't sick," said the stranger, in a low and gentle voice.

"I never seen many fellers that looked as sad as you do," volunteered Ben Grevis. "There was a mighty sad-lookin' tramp, that resembled you in the face some, was arrested here for bein' drunk eight or nine years ago, only he wasn't as tall as you an' his skin was different. After Si Emery, our city marshal, had kep' him in the lock-up over Sunday and turned him loose again, it come to light he was wanted over in I'way for killin' a feller with a piece of railroad iron."

"I ain't killed anybody with any railroad iron over in I'way," said the lengthy man. And he added, with a sigh: "Nor nowheres else, neither."

Hennery McNabb, who disagreed with everyone on principle— he was the Village Atheist, and proud of it— addressed himself to Ben Grevis. "This feller ain't nigh as sad-lookin' as that tramp looked," said Hennery. "I've knowed any number of fellers sadder-lookin' than this feller here."

"I didn't say this feller here was the saddest-lookin' feller I ever seen," said Ben Grevis. "All I meant was that he is sadder-lookin' than the common run of fellers." While Hennery disagreed with all the world, Ben seldom disagreed with any one but Hennery. They would argue by the hour, on religious matters, always beginning with Hennery's challenge: "Ben Grevis, tell me just one thing if you can, *where* did Cain get his wife?" and always ending with Ben's statement: "I believe the Book from kiver to kiver."

The tall man with the educated skin— it was educated, very evidently, for with a contraction of the hide on the back of his hand he nonchalantly picked up a shaving that had blown his way— spoke to Ben and Hennery in the soft and mild accents that seemed habitual to him:

"Where did you two see sadder-lookin' fellers than I be?"

"Over in Indianny," said Hennery, "there's a man so sad that you're one of these here laughin' jackasses 'longside o' him."

And, being encouraged, Hennery proceeded.

THIS HERE feller (said Hennery McNabb) lived over in Brown County, Indianny, but he didn't come from there original. He come from down in Kentucky somewheres and his name was Peevy, Bud Peevy. He was one of them

long, lank fellers, like you, stranger, but he wasn't as long and his skin didn't sort o' wander around and wag itself like it was a tail.

It was from the mountain districts he come. I was visitin' a brother of mine in the county-seat town of Brown County then, and this Bud Peevy was all swelled up with pride when I first knowed him. He was proud of two things. One was that he was the champeen corn-licker drinker in Kentucky. It was so he give himself out. And the other thing he was prouder yet of. It was the fact, if fact it was, that he was the Decidin' Vote in a national election— that there election you all remember, the first time Bryan run for President and McKinley was elected.

This here Bud Peevy, you understand, wasn't really sad when I first knowed him: he only *looked* sad. His sadness that matched his innard feelin's up to his outward looks come on to him later. He was all-fired proud when I first knowed him. He went expandin' and extendin' of himself around everywheres tellin' them Indianny people how it was him, personal, that elected McKinley and saved the country from that there free-silver ruination. And the fuller he was of licker, the longer he made this here story, and the fuller, as you might say, of increditable strange events.

Accordin' to him, on that election day in 1896 he hadn't planned to go and vote, for it was quite a ways to the polls from his place and his horse had fell lame and he didn't feel like walkin'. He figgered his district would go safe for McKinley, anyhow, and he wouldn't need to vote. He was a strong Republican, and when a Kentuckian is a Republican there ain't no stronger kind.

But along about four o'clock in the afternoon a man comes ridin' up to his house with his horse all a lather of foam and sweat, and the horse was one of these here Kentucky thoroughbred race horses that must 'a' travelled nigh a mile a minute, to hear Bud Peevy tell of it, and that horse gives one groan like a human bein' and falls dead at Bud Peevy's feet afore the rider can say a word, and the rider is stunned.

But Bud Peevy knowed him for a Republican county committeeman, and he poured some corn licker down his throat and he revived to life again. The feller yells to Bud as soon as he can get his breath to go to town and vote, quick, as the polls will close in an hour, and everybody else in that district has voted but Bud, and everyone has been kep' track of, and the vote is a tie.

It's twelve miles to the pollin' place from Bud's farm in the hills and it is a rough country, but Bud strikes out runnin' acrost hills and valleys with three pints of corn licker in his pockets for to refresh himself from time to time. Bud, he allowed he was the best runner in Kentucky, and he wouldn't 'a' had any trouble, even if he did have to run acrost mountains and hurdle rocks, to make the twelve miles in an hour, but there was a lot of cricks and rivers in that country and there had been a gosh-a-mighty big rain the night before and all

them cricks had turned into rivers and all them rivers had turned into roarin' oceans and Niagara catarac's. But Bud, he allows he is the best swimmer in Kentucky, and when he comes to a stream he takes a swig of corn licker and jumps in and swims acrost, boots and all— for he was runnin' in his big cowhides, strikin' sparks of fire from the mountains with every leap he made.

Five times he was shot at by Democrats in the first six miles, and in the seventh mile the shootin' was almost continual, and three or four times he was hit, but he kep' on. It seems the Democrats had got wind he had been sent for to turn the tide and a passel of 'em was out among the hills with rifles to stop him if they could. But he is in too much of a hurry to bandy words with 'em, and he didn't have his gun along, which he regretted, he says, as he is the best gun fighter in Kentucky and he keeps on a-runnin' and a-swimmin' and a-jumpin' cricks and a-hurdlin' rocks with the bullets whizzin' around him and the lightnin' strikin' in his path, for another big storm had come up, and no power on this here earth could head him off, he says, for it come to him like a Voice from on High he was the preordained messenger and hero who was goin' to turn the tide and save the country from this here free-silver ruination. About two miles from the pollin' place, jist as he jumps into the last big river, two men plunges into the water after him with dirks, and one of them he gets quick, but the other one drags Bud under the water, stabbin' and jabbin' at him. There is a terrible stabbin' and stickin' battle way down under the water, which is runnin' so fast that big stones the size of a cow is being rolled down stream, but Bud he don't mind the stones, and he can swim under water as well as on top of it, he says, and he's the best knife fighter in Kentucky, he says, and he soon fixes that feller and swims to shore with his knife in his teeth, and now he's only got one more mountain to cross.

But a kind of hurricane has sprung up and turned into a cyclone in there among the hills, and as he goes over the top of that last mountain, lickety-split, in the dark and wind and rain, he blunders into a whole passel of rattlesnakes that has got excited by the elements. But he fit his way through 'em, thankin' God he had nearly a quart of licker left to take for the eight or ten bites he got, and next there rose up in front of him two of them big brown bears, and they was wild with rage because the storm had been slingin' boulders at 'em. One of them bears he sticked with his knife and made short work of, but the other one give him quite a tussel, Bud says, afore he conquered it and straddled it. And it was a lucky thing for him, he says, that he caught that bear in time, for he was gittin' a leetle weak with loss of blood and snake bites and battlin' with the elements. Bud, he is the best rider in Kentucky, and it wasn't thirty seconds afore that bear knowed a master was a-ridin' of it, and in five minutes more Bud, he gallops up to that pollin' place, right through the heart of the hurricane, whippin' that bear with rattlesnakes to make it go faster, and he jumps off and

cracks his boot heels together and gives a yell and casts the decidin' vote into the ballot box. He had made it with nearly ten seconds to spare.

Well, accordin' to Bud Peevy that there one vote carries the day for McKinley in that county and not only in that county alone, but in that electorial district, and that electorial district gives McKinley the State of Kentucky, which no Republican had ever carried Kentucky for President for afore. And two or three other States was hangin' back keepin' their polls open late to see how Kentucky would go, and when it was flashed by telegraph all over the country that Bud Peevy was carryin' Kentucky for McKinley, them other States joined in with Kentucky and cast their electorial votes that-a-way, too, and McKinley was elected President.

So Bud figgers he has jist naturally elected that man President and saved the country— he is the one that was the Decidin' Vote for this whole derned republic. And, as I said, he loves to tell about it. It was in 1896 that Bud saved the country and it was in 1900 that he moved to Brown County, Indianny, and started in with his oratin' about what a great man he was, and givin' his political opinions about this, that and the other thing, like he might 'a' been President himself. Bein' the Decidin' Vote that-a-way made him think he jist about run this country with his ideas.

He's been hangin' around the streets in his new home, the county town of Brown County, for five or six weeks, in the summer of 1900, tellin' what a great feller he is, and bein' admired by everybody, when one day the news comes that the U. S. Census for 1900 has been pretty nigh finished, and that the Centre of Population for the whole country falls in Brown County. Well, you can understand that's calculated to make folks in that county pretty darned proud.

But the proudest of them all was a feller by the name of Ezekiel Humphreys. It seems these here government sharks had it figgered out that the centre of population fell right on to where this here Zeke Humphrey's farm was, four or five miles out of town.

And Zeke, he figgers that he, himself, personal, has become the Centre of Population.

Zeke hadn't never been an ambitious man. He hadn't never gone out and courted any glory like that, nor schemed for it nor thought of it. But he was a feller that thought well enough of himself, too. He had been a steady, hard-workin' kind of man all his life, mindin' his own business and payin' his debts, and when this here glory comes to him, bein' chose out of ninety millions of people, as you might say, to be the one and only Centre of Population, he took it as his just due and was proud of it.

"You see how the office seeks the man, if the man is worthy of it!" says Zeke. And everybody liked Zeke that knowed him, and was glad of his glory.

Well, one day this here Decidin' Vote, Bud Peevy, comes to town to fill himself up on licker and tell how he saved the country, and he is surprised because he don't get nobody to listen to him. And pretty soon he sees the reason for it. There's a crowd of people on Main Street all gathered around Zeke Humphreys and all congratulatin' him on being the Centre of Population. And they was askin' his opinion on politics and things. Zeke is takin' it modest and sensible, but like a man that knowed he deserved it, too. Bud Peevy, he listens for a while, and he sniffs and snorts, but nobody pays any 'tention to him. Finally, he can't keep his mouth shut any longer, and he says:

"Politics! Politics! To hear you talk, a fellow'd think you really got a claim to talk about politics!"

Zeke, he never was any trouble hunter, but he never run away from it, neither.

"Mebby," says Zeke, not het up any, but right serious and determined-like, "mebby you got more claim to talk about politics than I have?"

"I shore have," says Bud Peevy. "I reckon I got more claim to be hearkened to about politics than any other man in this here whole country. I'm the Decidin' Vote of this here country, I am!"

"Well, gosh-ding my melts!" says Zeke Humphreys. "You ain't proud of yourself, nor nothin', are you?"

"No prouder nor what I got a right to be," says Bud Peevy, "considerin' what I done."

"Oh, yes, you be!" says Zeke Humphreys. "You been proudin' yourself around here for weeks now all on account o' that decidin' vote business. And *anybody* might 'a' been a Decidin' Vote. A Decidin' Vote don't amount to nothin' 'longside a Centre of Population."

"Where would your derned population be if I hadn't went and saved this here country for 'em?" asks Bud Peevy.

"Be?" says Zeke. "They'd be right where they be now, if you'd never been born nor heard tell on, that's where they'd be. And I'd be the centre of 'em, jist like I be now!"

"And what *air* you now?" says Bud Peevy, mighty mean and insultin'-like. "You ain't nothin' but a accident, you ain't! What I got, I fit for and I earnt. But you ain't nothin' but a happenin'!"

Them seemed like mighty harsh words to Zeke, for he figgered his glory was due to him on account of the uprighteous life he always led, and so he says:

"Mister, anybody that says I ain't nothin' but a happenin' is a liar."

"I kin lick my weight in rattlesnakes," yells Bud Peevy, "and I've done it afore this! And I tells you once again, and flings it in your face, that you ain't nothin' but a accidental happenin'!"

"You're a liar, then!" says Zeke.

With that Bud Peevy jerks his coat off and spits on to his hands.

"Set yo'self, man," says he; "the whirlwind's cornin'!" And he makes a rush at Zeke. Bud is a good deal taller'n Zeke, but Zeke is sort o' bricky-red and chunky like a Dutch Reformed Church, and when this here Peevy comes on to him with a jump Zeke busts him one right on to the eye. It makes an uncheerful noise like 1 heard one time when Dan Lively, the butcher acrost the street there, hit a steer in the head with a sledge hammer. Bud, he sets down sudden, and looks surprised out of the eye that hadn't went to war yet. But he must 'a' figgered it was a accident for he don't set there long. He jumps up and rushes again.

"I'm a wildcat! I'm a wildcat!" yells this here Bud. And Zeke, he collisions his fist with the other eye, and Bud sets down the second time. I won't say this here Zeke's hands was as big as a quarter of beef. The fact is, they wasn't that big. But I seen that fight myself, and there was somethin' about the size and shape of his fist when it was doubled up that kind o' *reminded* me of a quarter of beef. Only his fists was harder than a quarter of beef. I guess Zeke's fists was about as hard as a hickory log that has been gettin' itself soaked and dried and seasoned for two or three years. I heard a story about Zeke and a mule that kicked him one time, but I didn't see it myself and I dunno' as it's all true. The word was that Zeke jist picked up that mule after it kicked him and frowned at it and told it if it ever done that again he would jist naturally pull off the leg that it kicked him with and turn it loose to hop away on three legs, and he cuffed that mule thorough and thoughtful and then he took it by one hind leg and fore leg and jounced it against a stone barn and told it to behave its fool self. It always seemed to me that story had been stretched a mite, but that was one of the stories they telled on Zeke.

But this here Bud Peevy is game. He jumps up again with his two eyes lookin' like a skillet full of tripe and onions and makes another rush at Zeke. And this time he gets his hands on to Zeke and they rastles back and forth. But Bud, while he is a strong fellow, he ain't no ways as strong as a mule even if he is jist as sudden and wicked, so Zeke throws him down two or three times. Bud, he kicks Zeke right vicious and spiteful into the stomach, and when he done that Zeke began to get a little cross. So he throwed Bud down again and this time he set on top of him.

"Now, then," says Zeke, bangin' Bud's head on to the sidewalk, "am I a happenin', or am I on purpose?"

"Lemme up," says Bud. "Leggo my whiskers and lemme up! You ain't licked me any, but them ol' wounds I got savin' this country is goin' to bust open ag'in. I kin feel 'em bustin'."

"I didn't start this," says Zeke, "but I'm a-goin' to finish it. Now, then, am I a accident, or was I meant?"

"It's a accident you ever got me down," says Bud, "Whether you are a accident yourself or not."

Zeke jounces his head on the sidewalk some more and he says: "You answer better nor that! You go further! You tell me whether I'm on purpose or not!"

"You was meant for somethin'," says Bud, "but you can't make me say what! You can bang my head off and I won't say what. Two or three of them bullets went into my neck right where you're bendin' it and I feel them ol' wounds bustin' open."

"I don't believe you got no ol' wounds," says Zeke, "and I don't believe you ever saved no country and I'm gonna keep you here till I've banged some sense and politeness into your head."

Bud, he gives a yell and a twist, and bites Zeke's wrist; Zeke slapped him some, and Bud ketched one of Zeke's fingers into his mouth and nigh bit it off afore Zeke got it loose. Zeke, he was a patient man and right thoughtful and judicious, but he had got kind o' cross when Bud kicked him into the stomach, and now this biting made him a leetle mite crosser. I cal'ated if Bud wasn't careful he'd get Zeke really riled up pretty soon and get his fool self hurt. Zeke, he takes Bud by the ears and slams his head till I thought the boards in that sidewalk was goin' to be busted.

"Now, then," says Zeke, lettin' up for a minute, "has the Centre of Population got a right to talk politics, or ain't he? You say he is got a right, or I mebby will fergit myself and get kind o' rough with you."

"This here country I saved is a free country," says Bud Peevy, kind o' sick an' feeble, "and any one that lives in this here country I saved has got a right to talk politics, I reckon."

Zeke, he took that for an answer and got good-natured and let Bud up. Bud, he wipes the blood off'n his face and ketches his breath an' gits mean again right away.

"If my constitution hadn't been undermined savin' this here country," says Bud, "you never could 'a' got me down like that! And you ain't heard the end of this argyment yet, neither! I'm a-goin' for my gun, and we'll shoot it out!"

But the townspeople interfered and give Bud to understand he couldn't bring no guns into a fight, like mebby he would 'a' done in them mountain regions he was always talkin' about; an' told him if he was to start gunnin' around they would get up a tar-and-feather party and he would be the reception committee. They was all on Zeke's side and they'd all got kind o' tired listenin' to Bud Peevy, anyhow. Zeke was their own hometown man, and so they backed him. All that glory had come to Brown County and they wasn't goin' to see it belittled by no feller from another place.

Bud Peevy, for two or three weeks, can't understand his glory has left him, and he goes braggin' around worse than ever. But people only grins and turns

away; nobody will hark to him when he talks. When Bud tries to tell his story it gets to be quite the thing to look at him and say: "Lemme up! Leggo my whiskers! Lemme up!"— like he said when Zeke Humphreys had him down. And so it was he come to be a byword around town. Kids would yell at him on the street, to plague him, and he would get mad and chase them kids, and when folks would see him runnin' after the kids they would yell: "Hey! Hey, Bud Peevy! You could go faster if you was to ride a bear!" Or else they would yell: "Whip yourself with a rattlesnake, Bud, and get up some speed!"

His glory had been so big and so widespread for so long that when it finally went, there jist wasn't a darned thing left to him. His heart busted in his bosom. He wouldn't talk about nothin'. He jist slinked around. He was most pitiful because he wasn't used to misfortune like some people.

And he couldn't pack up his goods and move away from that place. For he had come there to live with a married daughter and his son-in-law, and if he left there he would have to get a steady job working at somethin' and support himself. And Bud didn't want to risk that. For that wild run he made the time he saved the country left him strained clean down to the innards of his constitution, he says, and he wa'n't fit to work. But the thing that put the finishing touches on to him was when a single daughter that he had fell into love with Zeke Humphreys, who was a widower, and married herself to him. His own flesh and blood has disowned him, Bud says. So he turns sad, and he was the saddest man I ever seen. He was sadder than you look to be, stranger.

THE STRANGER with the educated skin breathed a gentle sigh at the conclusion of Hennery's tale of the Deciding Vote and the Centre of Population, and then he said:

"I don't doubt Bud Peevy was a sad man. But there's sadder things than what happened to Bud Peevy. There's things that touches the heart closer."

"Stranger," said Ben Grevis, "you've said it! But Hennery, here, don't know anything about the heart bein' touched."

Hennery McNabb seemed to enjoy the implication, rather than to resent it. Ben Grevis continued:

"A sadder thing than what happened to Bud Peevy is goin' on a good deal nearer home than Indianny.

"I ain't the kind of a feller that goes running to Indianny and to Kentucky and all over the known earth for examples of sadness, nor nothin' else. We got as good a country right here in Illinois as there is on top of the earth and I'm one that always sticks up for home folks and home industries. Hennery, here, ain't got any patriotism. And he ain't got any judgment. He don't know what's in front of him. But right here in our home county, not five miles from where we are, sets a case of sadness that is one of the saddest I ever seen or knowed about.

"Hennery, here, he don't know how sad it is, for he's got no finer feelin's. A free thinker like Hennery can't be expected to have no finer feelin's. And this case is a case of a woman."

"A woman!" sighed the stranger. "If a woman is mixed up with it, it could have finer feelin's and sadness in it!" And a ripple of melancholy ran over him from head to foot.

THIS HERE woman (said Ben Grevis) lives over to Hickory Grove, in the woods, and everybody for miles around calls her Widder Watson.

Widder Watson, she has buried four or five husbands, and you can see her any day that it ain't rainin' settin' in the door of her little house, smokin' of her corn-cob pipe, and lookin' at their graves and speculatin' and wonderin'. I talked with her a good deal from time to time durin' the last three or four years, and the things she is speculatin' on is life and death, and them husbands she has buried, and children. But that ain't what makes her so sad. It's wishin' for somethin' that, it seems like, never can be, that is makin' her so sad.

She has got eighteen or twenty children, Widder Watson has, runnin' around them woods. Them woods is jist plumb full of her children. You wouldn't dare for to try to shoot a rabbit anywhere near them woods for fear of hittin' one.

And all them children has got the most beautiful and peculiar names, that Widder Watson got out of these here drug-store almanacs. She's been a great reader all her life, Widder Watson has, but all her readin' has been done in these here almanacs. You know how many different kinds of almanacs there always are layin' around drug-stores, I guess. Well, every two or three months Widder Watson goes to town and gets a new bale of them almanacs and then she sets and reads 'em. She goes to drug-stores in towns as far as twelve or fifteen miles away to keep herself supplied.

She never cared much for readin' novels and story papers, she tells me. What she wants is somethin' that has got some true information in it, about the way the sun rises, and the tides in the oceans she has never saw, and when the eclipses is going to be, and different kinds of diseases new and old, and receipts for preserves and true stories about how this or that wonderful remedy come to be discovered. Mebby it was discovered by the Injuns in this country, or mebby it was discovered by them there Egyptians in the old country away back in King Pharaoh's time, and mebby she's got some of the same sort of yarbs and plants right there in her own woods. Well, Widder Watson, she likes that kind o' readin', and she knows all about the Seven Wonders of the World, and all the organs and ornaments inside the human carcass, and the kind o' pains they are likely to have and all about what will happen to you if the stars says this or that and how long the Mississippi River is and a lot of them old-time prophecies of

signs and marvels what is to come to pass yet. You know about what the readin' is in them almanacs, mebby.

Widder Watson, she has got a natural likin' for fine words, jist the same as some has got a gift for hand-paintin' or playin' music or recitin' pieces of poetry or anything like that. And so it was quite natural, when her kids come along, she names 'em after the names in her favourite readin' matter. And she gets so she thinks more of the names of them kids than of nearly anything else. I ain't sayin' she thinks more of the names than she does of the kids, but she likes the names right next to the kids. Every time she had a baby she used to sit and think for weeks and weeks, so she tells me, for to get a good name for that baby, and select and select and select out of them almanacs.

Her oldest girl, that everybody calls Zody, is named Zodiac by rights. And then there's Carty, whose real name is Cartilege, and Anthy, whose full name is Anthrax, and so on. There's Peruna and Epidermis and Epidemic and Pisces.

I dunno as I can remember all them swell names. There's Perry, whose real name is Perihelion, and there's Whitsuntide and Tonsillitis and Opodeldoc and a lot more— I never could remember all them kids.

And there ain't goin' to be no more on 'em, for the fact of the matter seems to be that Widder Watson ain't likely to ever get another husband. It's been about four years since Jim Watson, her last one, died, and was buried in there amongst the hickory second-growth and hazel bushes, and since that day there ain't nobody come along that road a-courtin' Widder Watson. And that's what makes her sad. She can't understand it, never havin' been without a husband for so long before, and she sets and grieves and grieves and smokes her corn-cob pipe and speculates and grieves some more.

Now, don't you get no wrong idea about Widder Watson. She ain't so all-fired crazy about men. It ain't that. That ain't what makes her grieve. She is sad because she wants another baby to pin a name to.

For she has got the most lovely name out of a new almanac for that there kid that will likely never be born, and she sets there day after day, and far into the night, lookin' at them graves in the brush, and talkin' to the clouds and stars, and sayin' that name over and over to herself, and sighin' and weepin' because that lovely name will be lost and unknown and wasted forevermore, with no kid to tack it on to.

And she hopes and yearns and grieves for another man to marry her and wonders why none of 'em never does. Well, I can see why they don't. The truth is, Widder Watson don't fix herself up much any more. She goes barefooted most of the time in warm weather, and since she got so sad-like she don't comb her hair much. And them corn-cob pipes of hern ain't none too savory. But I 'spose she thinks of herself as bein' jist the same way she was the last time she took the trouble to look into the lookin' glass and she can't understand it.

"Damn the men, Ben," she says to me, the last time I was by there, "what's the matter with 'em all? Ain't they got no sense any more? I never had no trouble ketchin' a man before this! But here I been settin' for three or four years, with eighty acres of good land acrost the road there, and a whole passel o' young uns to work it, and no man comes to court me. There was a feller along here two-three months ago I did have some hopes on. He come a-palaverin' and a-blarneyin' along, and he stayed to dinner and I made him some apple dumplin's, and he et an' et and palavered.

"But it turned out he was really makin' up to that gal, Zody, of mine. It made me so darned mad, Ben, I runned him off the place with Jeff Parker's shotgun that is hangin' in there, and then I took a hickory sprout to that there Zody and tanned her good, for encouragin' of him. You remember Jeff Parker, Ben? He was my second. You wasn't thinkin' of gettin' married ag'in yourself, was you, Ben?"

I told her I wasn't. That there eighty acres is good land, and they ain't no mortgages on it, nor nothin', but the thought of bein' added to that collection in amongst the hazel brush and hickory sprouts is enough for to hold a man back. And the Widder Watson, she don't seem to realize she orter fix herself up a little mite. But I'm sorry for her, jist the same. There she sets and mourns, sayin' that name over and over to herself, and a-grievin' and a-hopin', and all the time she knows it ain't much use to hope. And a sadder sight than you will see over there to Hickory Grove ain't to be found in the whole of the State of Illinois.

"THAT IS a mighty sad picture you have drawed," said the stranger, when Ben Grevis had finished, "but I'm a sadder man for a man than that there woman is for a woman."

He wrinkled all over, he almost grinned, if one could think of him as grinning, when he mentioned "that there woman." It was as if he tasted some ulterior jest, and found it bitter, in connection with "that there woman." After a pause, in which he sighed several times, he remarked in his tired and gentle voice:

"THERE'S TWO kinds of sadness, gentlemen. There is the melancholy sadness that has been with you for so long that you have got used to it and kind o' enjoy it in a way. And then there's the kind o' sadness where you go back on yourself, where you make your own mistakes and fall below your own standards, and that is a mighty bitter kind of sadness."

He paused again, while the skin wreathed itself into funeral wreaths about his face, and then he said, impressively:

"Both of them kinds of sadness I have known. First I knowed the melancholy kind, and now I know the bitter kind."

The first sadness that I had lasted for years (said the stranger with the strange skin). It was of the melancholy kind, tender and sort o' sweet, and if I had been the right kind of a man I would 'a' stuck to it and kept it. But I went back on it. I turned my face away from it. And in going back on it I went back on all them old, sad, sweet memories, like the songs tell about, that was my better self. And that is what caused the sadness I am in the midst of now. It's the feelin' that I done wrong in turnin' away from all them memories that makes me as sad as you see me to-day. I will first tell you how the first sadness come on to me, and secondly I will tell you how I got the sadness I am in the midst of now.

Gentlemen, mebby you have noticed that my skin is kind o' different from most people's skin. That is a gift, and there was a time when I made money off'n that gift. And I got another gift. I'm longer and slimmer than most persons is. And besides them two gifts, I got a third gift. I can eat glass, gentlemen, and it don't hurt me none. I can eat glass as natural and easy as a chicken eats gravel. And them three gifts is my art.

I was an artist in a side-show for years, gentlemen, and connected with one of the biggest circuses in the world. I could have my choice of three jobs with any show I was with, and there ain't many could say that. I could be billed as the India Rubber Man, on account of my skin, or I could be billed as the Living Skeleton, on account of my framework, or I could be billed as the Glass Eater. And once or twice I was billed as all three.

But mostly I didn't bother much with eating glass or being a Living Skeleton. Mostly I stuck to being an India Rubber Man. It always seemed to me there was more art in that, more chance to show talent and genius. The gift that was given to me by Providence I developed and trained till I could do about as much with my skin as most people can with their fingers. It takes constant work and practice to develop a skin, even when Nature has been kind to you like she has to me.

For years I went along contented enough, seein' the country and being admired by young and old, and wondered at and praised for my gift and the way I had turned it into an art, and never thinkin' much of women nor matrimony nor nothing of that kind.

But when a man's downfall is put off, it is harder when it comes. When I fell in love I fell good and hard. I fell into love with a pair of Siamese twins. These here girls was tied together somewheres about the waist line with a ligament of some kind, and there wasn't no fake about it— they really was tied. On account of motives of delicacy I never asked 'em much about that there ligament. The first pair of twins like that who was ever on exhibition was from Siam, so after that they called all twins of that kind Siamese twins. But these girls wasn't from none of them outlandish parts; they was good American girls, born right over in Ohio, and their names was Jones. Hetty Jones and Netty Jones was their names.

Hetty, she was the right-hand twin, and Netty was the left-hand twin. And you never seen such lookers before in your life, double nor single. They was exactly alike and they thought alike and they talked alike. Sometimes when I used to set and talk to 'em I felt sure they was just one woman. If I could 'a' looked at 'em through one of these here stereoscopes they would 'a' come together and been one woman, I never had any idea about 'em bein' two women.

Well, I courted 'em, and they was mighty nice to me, both of 'em. I used to give 'em candy and flowers and little presents and I would set and admire 'em by the hour. I kept gettin' more and more into love with them. And I seen they was gettin' to like me, too.

So one day I outs with it.

"Will you marry me?" says I.

"Yes," says Hetty. And, "Yes," says Netty. Both in the same breath! And then each one looked at the other one, and they both looked at me, and they says, both together:

"Which one of us did you ask?"

"Why," says I, kind o' flustered, "there ain't but one of you, is they? I look on you as practically one woman."

"The idea!" says Netty.

"You orter be ashamed of yourself," says Hetty.

"You didn't think," says Netty, "that you could marry both of us, did you?"

Well, all I had really thought up to that time was that I was in love with 'em, and just as much in love with one as with the other, and I popped the question right out of my heart and sentiments without thinking much one way or the other. But now I seen there was going to be a difficulty.

"Well," I says, "if you want to consider yourself as two people, I suppose it would be marryin' both of you. But I always thought of you as two hearts that beat as one. And I don't see no reason why I shouldn't marry the two of you, if you want to hold out stubborn that you *are* two."

"For my part," says Hetty, "I think you are insulting."

"You must choose between us," says Netty.

"I would never," says Hetty, "consent to any Mormonous goings-on of that sort."

They still insisted they was two people till finally I kind o' got to see their side of the argyment. But how was I going to choose between them when no matter which one I chooses she was tied tight to the other one?

We agreed to talk it over with the Fat Lady in that show, who had a good deal of experience in concerns of the heart and she had been married four or five times and was now a widder, having accidental killed her last husband by rolling over on him in her sleep. She says to me:

"How happy you could be with either, Skinny, were t'other dear charmer away!"

"This ain't no jokin' matter, Dolly," I tells her. "We come for serious advice."

"Skinny, you old fool," she says, "there's an easy way out of this difficulty. All you got to do is get a surgeon to cut that ligament and then take your choice."

"But I ain't really got any choice," I says, "for I loves 'em both and I loves 'em equal. And I don't believe in tamperin' with Nature."

"It ain't legal for you to marry both of 'em," says the Fat Lady.

"It ain't moral for me to cut 'em asunder," I says.

I had a feelin' all along that if they was cut asunder trouble of some kind would follow. But both Hetty and Netty was strong for it. They refused to see me or have anything to do with me, they sent me word, till I give up what they called the insultin' idea of marryin' both of 'em. They set and quarrelled with each other all the time, the Fat Lady told me, because they was jealous of each other. Bein' where they couldn't get away from each other even for a minute, that jealousy must have et into them something unusual. And finally, I knuckled under. I let myself be overrulled. I seen I would lose both of 'em unless I made a choice. So I sent 'em word by the Fat Lady that I would choose. But I knowed deep in my heart all the time that no good would come of it. You can't go against Scripter and prosper; and the Scripter says: "What God has joined together, let no man put asunder."

Well, we fixed it up this way: I was to pay for that there operation, having money saved up for to do it with, and then I was to make my choice by chance. The Fat Lady says to toss a penny or something.

But I always been a kind of a romantic feller, and I says to myself I will make that choice in some kind of a romantic way. So first I tried one of these ouija boards, but all I get is "Etty, Etty, Etty," over and over again, and whether the ouija left off an H or an N there's no way of telling. The Fat Lady, she says: "Why don't you count 'em out, like kids do, to find out who is It?"

"How do you mean?" I asks her.

"Why," says she, "by saying, 'Eeny meeny, miney, mo!' or else 'Monkey, monkey, bottle of beer, how many monkeys have we here?' or something like that."

But that ain't romantic enough to suit me and I remember how you pluck a daisy and say: "She loves me! She loves me not!" And I think I will get an American beauty rose and do it that way. Well, they had the operation, and it was a success. And about a week later I'm to go to the hospital and tell 'em which one has been elected to the holy bonds of matrimony. I gets me a rose, one of the most expensive that money can buy in the town we was in, and when I arrive at the hospital I start up the front steps pluckin' the leaves off and sayin'

to myself: "Hetty she is! Netty she is! Hetty she is!"—and so on. But I never got that rose all plucked.

I knowed all along that it was wrong to put asunder what God had joined together, and I orter stuck to the hunch I had. You can't do anything to a freak without changing his or her disposition some way. You take a freak that was born that way and go to operating on him, and if he is good-natured he'll turn out a grouch, or if he was a grouch he'll turn out good-natured. I knowed a dog-faced boy one time who was the sunniest critter you ever seen. But his folks got hold of a lot of money and took him out of the business and had his features all slicked up and made over, and what he gained in looks he lost in temper and disposition. Any tinkering you do around artists of that class will change their sentiments every time.

I never got that rose all plucked. At the top of the steps I was met by Hetty and Netty, just comin' out of the hospital and not expectin' to see me. With one of them was a young doctor that worked in the hospital and with the other was a patient that had just got well. They explained to me that as soon as they had that operation their sentiments toward me changed. Before, they had both loved me. Afterwards, neither one of 'em did. They was right sorry about it, they said, but they had married these here fellows that morning in the hospital, with a double wedding, and was now starting off on their wedding trips, and their husbands would pay back the operation money as soon as they had earned it and saved it up.

Well, I was so flabbergasted that my skin stiffened up on me, and it stayed stiff for the rest of that day. I never said a word, but I turned away from there a sad man with a broken heart in my bosom. And I quit bein' an artist. I didn't have the sperrit to be in a show any more.

And through all the years since then I been a saddened man. But as time went by there come a kind of sweetness into that sadness, too. It is better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all, like the poet says. I was one of the saddest men in the world, but I sort o' enjoyed it, after a few years. And all them memories sort o' kept me a better man.

I orter stuck to that kind of sweet sadness. I orter knowed that if I went back on all them beautiful memories of them girls something bitter would come to me.

But I didn't, gentlemen. I went back on all that sentiment and that tenderness. I betrayed all them beautiful memories. Five days ago, I went and married. Yes, sir, I abandoned all that sweet recollection. And I been livin' in hell ever since. I been reproachin' myself day and night for not provin' true and trustworthy to all that romantic sadness I had all them years. It was a sweet sadness, and I wasn't faithful to it. And so long as I live now I will have this here bitter sadness.

THE STRANGER got up and sighed and stretched himself. He took a fresh chew of tobacco, and began to crank his flivver.

"Well," said Ben Grevis, "that is a sad story. But I don't know as you're sadder, at that, than the Widder Watson is."

The stranger spat colourfully into the road, and again the faint semblance of a smile, a bitter smile, wreathed itself about his mouth.

"Yes, I be!" he said, "I be a sadder person than the Widder Watson. It was her I married!"

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## 15: Romance

***Frank Reid***

Alexander Vindex Vennard, 1884-1947

*Smith's Weekly* (Sydney) 16 June 1923

PREGNANT with star-lit mystery, the sea lay brooding at Pavey's feet. A low-hung crescent moon softened the sombre beauty of the hills encircling the little harbour, and with a witching finger made fairy galleons of the pearling fleet. A vagrant breeze came softly up to meet him. Pavey breathed deeply.

"Romance is in the air to-night," he whispered, turning homeward.

The glamour of the mild evening suffused his thoughts. After all, it was the shadows he had clutched— always the shadows. His life had been empty. Perhaps, he mused—

A voice spoke softly at his elbow: "Let me show you something."

He started at the sound. Embedded in a swarthy, deep-lined face two keen black eyes regarded him searchingly. He caught the gleam of ear-rings.

"A Malay pearling hand," he told himself. "What is it?" he asked cautiously.

"Let me show you," the stranger repeated. His voice sank huskily. "A fortune in the hollow of my hand!"

Deep in the evening's spell, Pavey motioned toward his own half-open doorway. A spluttering, kerosene lamp threw its feeble rays over a battered table, and by its light he watched his visitor, sinister and silent, stand fumbling at a belt; watched him draw a crumpled handkerchief from its hiding place; a silken, eastern fabric— peacock blue, and place it on the table. Released, the silk unfolded slowly. Pavey reached a tapering hand, and drew the handkerchief toward him. He leaned over the table. Lying in the silken folds was a large round pearl, its slumbrous depths a changing iridescent pool of pure and delicate beauty.

"A wonderful pearl," the Malay breathed. "A gem fit to adorn the neck of the lovely nymph that the Yogi of Lutpore saw sitting before the throne of Buddha. I had it weighed in Singapore; thirty grains."

The words came surging bitterly: "I wish to God that I had never seen it!"

Pavey turned reluctantly from the pearl. "Why?"

The stranger cast an apprehensive glance behind him.

"It was brought North by a Jap diver from Broome, and he was knifed by a rat, half Chink, half Portugee, the dregs of Singapore. I saw him first aboard the *Otterburn*. We discharged rice at Batavia, and ran east to load Java sugar. Two hours out I felt him watching me, and dragged him from beneath the plates between her boilers. I took him for'ard when the watch was changed, and the skipper signed him up.

"A hundred and thirty in the stoke-hole, we slathered down the Java coast, making a cargo; a little here, a little there; him working like a slave, but always watching. I don't believe he ever slept.

"It happened at Soerabaja. A knife came slithering through the fiddley-opening, fifty feet above, and all but got him. It got his nerve. For'ard that night, I listened to his story.

"A child of sin, he knew the East— the East the white man only senses. He was a runner for awhile, had peddled whisky from a bum boat, slaved in the Molulkkas. They got him in a pearl deal, and chased him from the Straits. He drifted to Padang, and then to Singapore. And in Singapore he got the pearl.

"Stupid with arrack, the Jap foolishly displayed his treasure in a place that had only a tissue paper between it and hell. There were human devils there by the score, Malays and Chinese, Hindus and Burmese, Japanese and Shans, with hearts in them that were as black as the caves of Brule. The child of sin got the pearl. He left his knife between the Jap's ribs. They chased him to Penang, and back again to Singapore. Here he slipped aboard the *Otterburn* and got away. Once in Surabaya, a Greek he knew would turn it into money. 'Thousands!' he said. We jumped her at Surabaya. The Greek seemed pleased to see us. He fried us eggs in oil and opened wine. It was too easy; I mistrusted him. We got a room that opened on a court below, a single window on the balcony; a lively hole. I had to leave it.

"Just such a night as this. I leaned upon the balcony and tried to think it out. That cursed pearl had got me. How long I stood I do not know, but gradually there came to me a dripping sound, a splash as though of water dropping. Silence, then another splash. I tried to place it. Beneath the door I saw a darker shadow creeping, and stooping, touched it. I felt my fingers wet, and, turning toward the moon, held them up to see— 'BLOOD!'

"I thrust against the door and it gave slowly, stubbornly, as though a weight were pressing against it. Something tripped me, and I fell— and waited in the darkness there for mine.

"It never came. I struggled to my knees and struck a match. God! Pinned to the door he was. A sword— I swear it— a sword was through his middle. But he was living; gibbering, talking—

" 'Kill me,' he begged.

The pearl fell from his mouth and rolled toward me. I picked it up, and as I did the match fell from my fingers. I seemed to hear a mocking laugh—"

Pavey felt his scalp tingle. He recalled scornfully his dull, money grubbing existence. Here was Romance.

"—I left him there, and, springing to the balcony, leaped to the court below, and ran, and ran until I fell, and, rising, ran again.

"That night I swam aboard the *Mendara*, and made Townsville. Then I walked inland, begging, and with a fortune in my belt. I could not sell it. Take it— for twenty pounds."

Pavey reached for his purse with trembling fingers. The crackling notes changed hands. He looked again toward the pearl, and, turning, found himself alone. From just beyond came a dripping sound— a splash, as though of water dropping; a silence, then another splash.

Stark terror seized him. He staggered to the door. Low in the east the crescent moon peopled the night with vague malignant shadows. Another ominous splash.

Out from the whirling chaos of his mind a single thought detached itself. Escape!

Slamming the door, he ran, and ran until he fell; and, rising, ran, again. The sea rose up before him, rolling its changing, moon-kissed fabric to his feet. A phantom shape beyond— a schooner glided toward the open sea. Breast deep in the water now, he bent toward her, heading out. A hundred feet beyond, his stroke— a long erratic overhand— laboured, grew feeble, paused— the arm extended ovorhead. For just a meagre instant the moon-light glinted on the pearl held between the fingers of an upraised, clutching hand.

ALONG the beach, beneath an upturned lugger, a swarthy Malay stooped by a guttering candle bedded in the sand. Beside him on a piece of driftwood lay a flannel roll, and in its dirty folds were five large, round, artificial, pearls. He fumbled in the bosom of his shirt, and listened with avid interest to the crackling sound of notes.

"It was easy," he whispered to himself. "I should have asked him for another thirty."

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## 16: The Unforgotten Hour

***Louis Arthur Cunningham***

1900-1954

*Australian Women's Weekly* 15 Sep 1934

*Canadian author of novels and many short stories*

CHRISTINE had taken one small appreciative nibble off the ginger-snap she filched from the kitchen table on her way through to the hall. The ginger-snap stopped mid-way on its second trip to her mouth, and she stood very still— so still that she could hear the tick-tock of the tall clock that had belonged to Grandma Medfield and, like a faster echo of that sound, the pulse and beat of her own heart, quickened in an instant by the sound of that one loved voice.

He was back! Pat Derwent had come home!

She leaned against the white newelpost. She was in shadow there: the copperish sunset light filled the front of the house, a long finger of it came almost to her feet. She could see him. He was standing looking out of the great bow-window in the sittingroom to the left of the hall, and Clione was beside him. Clione had her arm through his, and Clione's hair, like gold gossamer in the sunset, came just above his shoulder.

Christy saw possessiveness in the way Clione held his arm. Why, it was preposterous! Clione was only a child— or was she? Three years ago, when Pat Derwent was last here, Clione had been a child. But not now.

Suddenly, Christy felt a wave of anger sweep over her—anger against Clione. Always wanting, always grasping, always taking. "Why, it was because of her, so that she might finish her business-college course that I sent him away and told him I wouldn't marry him. And now—"

She hated herself for being bitter and resentful. Clione, after all, was hers. She had mothered her sister now for ten years. She had worked and succeeded, denied herself that Clione might have all she wanted.

Often Clione scolded her for working so hard, for sticking at the job even when she was worn and tired after long nights of poring over dull and stupid manuscripts.

But Clione didn't know how great the need had been, three years ago, when their small income from divi-dends had ceased.

It was just at that time that Pat Derwent had asked her to marry him, to go to South Africa with him, and she had refused, and not told him why. Had she told him, he would have insisted on paying Clione's fees. And he was poor himself, and Christy was proud as all the Medfields were.

His voice, deep, with always the suggestion of laughter in it, mingled with Clione's babyish drawl. What did they have to talk about? Clione had been away

at school when he was last here, and Clione had been so young in the years before, when he and Christy were young lovers. But Clione bewil-dered her sometimes— the way she pounced on things.

"I won't go in to meet him now." She thought how tired she was, and untidy from her tramp through the woods. John Blake had driven her out from town, and she had got out of his car for the half-mile walk home.

Strange, she had been thinking of Pat, and wondering about him. He hadn't written to her after the first few months. He had gone away angry, hurt, his first great dream defeated in that hour.

That hour!

Christy went quietly upstairs to her room. She took off the little black felt hat and laid it with her gloves and her bag on the bed. She walked to the window and sat on the yellow cushions of the window seat and looked down on the garden—looked, as she had so often looked at that rustic seat under the cedars, and thought of that hour forever unforgotten.

A great moon had rolled through a sea of sky that night and wispy grey clouds were the waves that broke away from its passage. It was an autumn night, late September, and Clione had gone back to school. But the lawns were green under the moon, and the gay phlox, pink and white, had a mys-tic beauty in the silver halo that the moon spread over and around the earth.

That hour— his arms about her. His words— so boyish, so throbbing with wild, impassioned fire, the touch of his lips on her hair, on her cheek, their eager pressure against her own, the strength of his arms, holding her as if they knew and feared that some awful hand would draw her relentlessly away.

As it had!

The little fingers of Clione, who was her charge and her trust, who must not be left now, who must be kept at school, so to be prepared for a world in which she must work. Christy hadn't told Pat why she refused. Perhaps, even though she would never permit him to shoulder the extra burden of Clione, she might have told him had he not been angry with her, had he not said:

"You haven't any heart, then, I suppose. I took it for granted that you loved me and would marry me. I suppose I took too much for granted. Are you afraid to go to a new country, to fight with me? I'll get there, Christy. I'll make good, even without you; but the fight could be so easy, such great fun, if I had you—"

But there was the job with John Blake's publishing firm, the good salary, and Clione's school fees waiting to be paid. She wanted to tell Pat that the Medfields had no money, that they might even have to sell the old house and its garden. But it would sound like a hard-luck story; so she said only:

"You'll be back again, and things will be different perhaps. I'll feel different perhaps."

"Maybe," he said grimly, "I'll feel different, too. You are my first and only love, Christy. You fill my heart even now. But you don't care the way I do, or you wouldn't let anything keep you away from me. And I love you so much, and have planned so many things for you."

He knelt on the grass at her feet and slipped his arms about her. He laid his head in her lap, against the white satin of her gown, and she knew his face was contorted with young unhap-piness, and she had a hard fight not to cry, not to blurt out all her own agonising troubles.

She had stood up— a slim, virginal, mystic figure, in shimmering satin and sequins, like a moon-maiden that wor-ships at a shrine of sorrow. And they walked silently out of the garden, which had never since been the same garden to her, but which had become a place where moonlight brought ghostly whispers and the suggestion of tears and the winds sighed with sad voices among the lofty cedars. For that hour was ended, but never by her forgotten.

PAT DERWENT and Clione walked into the garden and round the comer of the house. Christy heard the whirr of a starter, the sudden roar of an engine, then the whine of gears. She was sitting in the window-seat when Clione came running upstairs and boisterously into the room. Clione's cheeks were pink from excitement and the winter wind, her blue eyes were bright, and she came to Christy, put her small, strong hands on Christy's shoulders, and kissed her.

"Darling. I'm so happy! Isn't it wonderful? Why didn't you come in and talk to him? He asked for you."

"I didn't feel like it, Clione. I'll see him soon. I suppose he will be here for a little while?"

"A few weeks. Then he's going back to South Africa, and Chris, do you know, I feel that I'm going with him."

"Silly!"

"Oh, no. I—well, I've always dreamed about someone like him, someone I could fall madly in love with. You used to be fond of him, too, didn't you?"

"Yes. Once." No one else, not even Clione, knew of that vanished hour and of what had been said then. It was locked up, put away in an old chest that was seldom opened, and with it, never worn before or since that night, was the white satin frock with sequins. So much was locked away in that ironbound chest in Christy's cupboard.

Clione had never looked inside that chest. Christy kept the key hidden on the cornice above the cupboard door. Clione would never see the dress. To Christy it was like a wed-ding garment, worn once, then kept reverently, with memories folded away in its softness.

"He's going to take me to the dance at the golf club to-night. Now what shall I wear? Oh, Chris, lend me your blue velvet, will you, and your little fur cape? You're going with John Blake, aren't you?"

"Yes. He said he'd call for me," said Chris lifelessly. She resented Clione, resented her possessiveness, her swift assumption of proprietary rights in Pat Derwent. "You may wear the blue velvet, if you want to."

"Darling! You always have such nice things, don't you?"

Chris reflected that she had nice things because she kept them nice. She had given Clione a generous allowance for clothes, but Clione's clothes never suited her. The green dress she was wearing now belonged to Chris. It was new, and Chris had worn it only once. Clione was always doing things like that. Gloves, stockings, hats, anything in the way of clothes, she looked upon as common property, but it was Chris who suffered, who looked often in vain for a frock, for a pair of gloves, or a scarf she especially wanted. They would be found in Clione's room, soiled or rumpled, thrown carelessly aside.

But Chris was indulgent. After all Clione was five years younger, and bubbling with life and laughter. Soon she would have to settle down and be serious. Might as well have her fun now.

"John told me, Clione, that the job is waiting for you, and you can begin on the first of the month."

"Maybe." Clione was putting rouge on her lips in front of the mirror. "I'm not looking forward to it. I have a vision of sailing over blue seas—you know 'dipping through the tropics by the palm-green shore.'

" 'All laden with diamonds, emeralds, amethysts—'

"Quite." She turned seriously to look into Christy's grave brown eyes. "Why not? He likes me. I could tell it the moment he saw me. He said, 'Gosh, how you've grown! You were just a provoking little brat when I last saw you, and now you're a provokingly lovely woman.' And he kissed me." Clione didn't mention that she had said, "And you used to kiss the provoking little brat when you came home."

"I hope you get him," said Christy, wearily. She didn't feel like talking. Didn't feel like anything. The pros-pect of going to the dance with John made her feel depressed.

"You look tired, Chris." Clione was all concern. She came and sat beside Christy and put soft arms about her. Christy caught the fragrance of Lys Renoir, a special perfume she had bought recently, and also noticed how becoming her ear-rings looked in Clione's little ears.

"I've been working pretty hard. Clione." She knew it wasn't her work that made her feel tired and somehow old. It was just the last few minutes that had aged her, that made her see something dismal and significant of decay in the yellow leaves that fluttered down and blew away on the wind.

"Poor Chris." Clione laid her soft cheek against Christy's. "When I'm married, you'll come and live with me."

Christy said nothing. She smiled mirthlessly, thinking how she might, a few years ago, have said those identical words to Clione, and on surer grounds. She felt like telling Clione now that Pat Derwent had loved her and might love her again, and that it wasn't right to take so much for granted. But Clione was so intoxcated with her dreams, riding so high and fast on the wings of a new infatuation, that Christy did not want to spoil it. She had always'stood aside for this blonde little sprite. Perhaps now, once more and finally, she would be thrust aside. Two years did much to a man. He might see her with other eyes.

And she had altered, she knew. She was paler, thinner. She didn't have much color now. He would turn to youth, careless and ready for any fun, to whose lips laughter rose more swiftly, in whose eyes brightness hid the shallows. If it were some other girl, she could fight, could draw him to her as of old, but Clione—she couldn't fight Clione.

JOHN BLAKE called first that evening, and Christy was getting into his car when Pat Derwent arrived. She turned to him and gave him her hand, and a quiet smile. She could not trust herself to speak, to look at him very long. She knew his face, anyway; she did not need to look. Every lineament, every little wrinkle about the grey eyes, every quirk of his wide mouth.

"I'm so glad to see you, Christy. I—"

Clione came down the steps, a vision of loveliness in Christy's blue velvet and little fur cape, her hair like a soft, bright crown about her small head. She called gaily to them, and Pat turned to her. Hastily he said:

"I'll see you at the dance, Chris." Then shook hands with John, and went to meet Clione.

Christy talked, though she did not feel like talking. After two years of loneliness, of hard, driving work, of shutting out of her life all that she loved and wanted: after so long, to have only the clasp of his hand, only a few commonplace words, when her very heart hungered for his arms about her, for his kiss, for him to say, "I love you!"

John Blake was her employer, junior partner in the publishing house for which she worked. He was a quiet reserved, very earnest young man. He loved Christy and wanted to marry her. He had told her so in many words, and she answered him with one that tolled the knell of hope.

HE didn't press her.

He was content to be with her. He knew nothing of that which once had been between her and Pat Derwent, and, if she talked more than usual and laughed with a little more gaiety, his surprise was not such as to make him

probe deeply to find the reason. He took things as they came, and judged by what he saw.

" 'Love's young dream,' " he said, and jerked his head back at the following car. "Clione has a conquering gleam in her eye. Likely chap, that Derwent. I've heard of him. Quite a big shot with his company. Maybe she won't be wanting a job with us after all."

"It's hard to tell." Christy stared at the wavering needle of the speedo-meter. "She has an excellent technique, I'll admit."

"The poor wretch hasn't a chance, my dear. It's all over but the formalities."

Was it? wondered Christy. So soon! So swiftly! Could Clione in a few hours possess him when she had loved so long, so faithfully? Was love such a light thing that, if he had ever cared for her, he could pass her by and turn to her sister, and love her.

That wasn't what Christy understood by love— not a facile, chameleon thing like that. One loved— it meant some-thing strong and splendid and perma-nent, rooted deep, deep in the heart, so that any uprooting must cause pain and leave a wound that would not heal.

But Clione was in his arms most of the evening. He danced a few times with Christy, but he said nothing, did nothing, that bridged the gap of years. He was casual, friendly. He was the same gay and lovable Pat Derwent, a little older, quieter. He seemed to have put something away from him. Was it the memory of that hour?

"Clione," he said, "is a revelation to me. One of the 'new women,' isn't she? When we were youngsters, Chris—"

"Don't talk like that." She kept staring at the black cloth that covered his square shoulder. "You speak as if youth was dead and buried."

"And isn't it?" There was a harsh-ness in his voice. "It's a foolish time, youth. And it's funny to look back on it— on the things you said and did, on the sense of values you had then. Life and love were simple, straight-forward things and the future was so easy to plan— a straight, wide road leading through pleasant vistas. But all that fades and reality takes shape, and here we are, you and I, dancing together again. Two ghosts, Chris— ghosts of the boy and girl we were."

She bit her lip, hard, till she felt the pain of it. Ghosts— out of a moon-lit garden. Only that? He spoke for himself. Where did that bitterness come from? How did it live in him, who was so kind? She was bewildered. She didn't understand. Had she hurt him so much that there was nothing she could do now to atone for that hurt? Didn't he care enough to try again, now, when it would be different?

Perhaps, as he had said that night long ago— perhaps he was different. Perhaps he did not care any more. But the dance ended, and she didn't know why he should be like that, so aloof, so different. He must have forgotten, put it

all away from him, refused to make it, as she had done, part of her life, a living part between the dead past and the future yet unborn.

Now he was with Clione once more and he didn't dance with her again.

John Blake, in his quiet, thorough way, took care of her, and when the dance was over, brought her safely home.

It was a long time after when Clione returned, and Christy lay awake in the darkness of her room and was very quiet when her sister passed the door. She didn't want to talk to Clione to-night. Life was cruel; Clione, in her thoughtless, predatory way, was cruel.

FOR a long time Christy lay awake in the darkness, thinking, wondering in a hurt and puzzled way. Should one be so ruthless and forward in love? Should one rush headlong, as Clione did at love, that is a fragile, tender thing? Was it, as Clione in her hard, metallic young way once said: "Just a business, and you have to use business methods to compete with the rest."

If that were true, Christy thought, she should have taken Pat long ago and left Clione to shift for herself. Ironical that she should deny herself, give up her love, because of Clione and now have that love taken from her by the very object of her sacrifice.

At last she slept, that slumber from which one awakes unrested. And it was day, and there was work.

Work each day! she saw little of Pat. He came to dinner a few times but John was there, too, for Clione always asked him and some others of their friends. There was another dance to which Christy went still more unwillingly than to the first one.

It was the same; dull, aimless, getting nowhere. And Pat seemed to grow closer and closer to Clione. Always it was she, clinging to his arm, looking up in his face. Christy wondered if he had proposed to her, and they were keeping it secret.

Clione seemed to look on him as already hers, and she wore, when with Christy, that look peculiar to women who have conquered. Christy knew he would be going away in a few days.

She said to Clione:

"I'm working late in town to-night. Probably won't be home until after eleven." And Clione looked at her musingly, with a queer little smile, and said:

"Darling, did you guess?" Christy looked puzzled.

"Did you guess that it would be to-night? He's going away soon, and I know it will be to-night. Wish for me."

"I—" Christy winced, then looked hard at her sister. "I won't wish for you. I can't somehow."

Clione's gold-fringed lids dropped, then lifted, and she smiled without parting her lips. She said presently:

"Oh, can't you? And why not? Don't tell me you don't wish me luck? You surely couldn't be so hard?"

"I do." Christy turned away.

"You're being hateful, Chris. You've been queer ever since he came. Sort of dog-in-the-manger business. You can't have him, though you still love him. and you don't want to see me—"

"That's enough, Clione. I haven't stood in your way— ever. Not in anything. Not even in this."

"It wouldn't have done you any good, though you had tried to. I thought you'd got over that boy and girl affair you had with him. I thought you had grown up."

Christy couldn't say anything. She went out. It was a clear blue night. John Blake was waiting for her. They were busy getting out their new catalogue of books. But the round moon came shouldering up over the sunset hills as they drove towards town, and she kept thinking and saying to her-self: "On such a night as this— on such a night as this—" And she worked like a robot.

It was late when Christy got home. The downstairs lights were out, but Clione's room was lighted. Christy went slowly into the house— slowly, yet she was eager to hear what surely must hurt her.

Clione's door was open when she went upstairs, and Clione was lying face down on her bed, wearing black pyjamas trimmed with gold and looking grotesquely like a French doll thrown carelessly there by some in-different hand. Crying!

Christy walked in and stood above her for a moment, then sat down on the bed and slipped her arms about the warm, young body, and lifted Clione's head to her breast. After all, she was Clione, and she was hurt.

"Tell me, dear. "

Clione shook her tousled yellow head. Her eyes were red with weeping. She spoke slowly, as if she didn't understand.

"Pat came quite late, and I called down to him to wait for me in the garden, and when I came down he was sitting on that seat under the cedars. You know—"

"Yes! I know!"

"He— he seemed so odd. So awfully strange. He just stared at me and hardly said a word, and I knew— I knew as sure as heaven— he meant to ask me to marry him. But he didn't And I got furious and accused him of— of being in love with you, and he said yes, he was, and always had been, and always would be. And I cried then and told him it was all a lie?"

"What was all a lie?"

Clione looked piteously up at her and looked away.

"That you and John were engaged."

"You told him that, Clione?"

"I told him that the first day— and saw how wonderful he was— because I felt he loved you and had come back for you, and I wanted him for myself."

"It was cruel to do that."

"No more cruel than for him to treat me the way he did to-night. Why did he turn so suddenly away from me and belong to you? Why? He's coming for you to-morrow. Why?"

"I can't tell you that, Clione. I'm sorry for you. But I've always loved him."

Christy got up to go to her own room. Clione spoke to her through her tears when she reached the door:

"Chris, don't— don't be furious with me, but I found the key to your chest and poked in, looking for something new to wear, and I found that gorgeous white satin with the darling sequins, and wore it to-night. I thought it would make everything come right—"

"It did," said Christy softly, as she switched off the light.

———————

## 17: Smart Work

***Louis Arthur Cunningham***

*Daily Telegraph* (Sydney) 16 March 1934

AUDLEIGH saw Cora the moment he entered the train. She had a seat at the far end, remote from his.

She was reading a magazine, and it was mostly her shoulder and her quarter-profile he saw, and, though it was six years since he had set eyes on Cora, he knew her in an instant. Even when she had got her divorce he hadn't seen her, hadn't had the opportunity to tell her he did not at all blame her for cutting loose from a man who was so foolish as to lose his money in silly speculation. Audleigh had been cleaned right out that time... broke utterly. And Cora needed plenty of money, thousands a year for such items as perfume and the like. Not much chance of his ever being able to make a fraction of the income he'd used to have. So Cora left him, and, if one could judge by the marten coat slung carelessly over the arm of her chair, and the obviously Parisian hat, ofi-the-face in her favorite style, she had done herself proud.

Audleigh sighed, settled down in his chair, clasped his fingers. Those years... damn it, he was getting pretty grey about the temples, the lines that shot down from his nose to the corners of his thin mouth were becoming deeper, as if the years made little channels of them and wore them down with the swift current of their passage. Cora looked as youthful, as slender, as gloriously long-limbed and racy, as ever. Women were adept at that sort of thing.

Oh, well... quietly, Steve Audleigh surveyed the other passengers in the car. Across from Cora was a big man in a blue suit, square-toed shoes... detective written all over him. Audleigh mused on that. All very well to say that only in trick detective stories or in the movies do detectives in mufti look like that. It isn't the truth. A goodly number of them are that way in real life. They can't help looking like that; they just do.

Audleigh wondered if he shouldn't get up, walk down the aisle, stop by Cora's chair, and say:— "Hello, Cora. How are you? How is the world using you?"

Not that he cared a great deal. Oh, a certain friendly interest— that was all. He had thought, as will a young fellow who loses all his money, most of his friends, and his wife, all in one fell swoop, that life was just about finished, like a clock with a snapped mainspring. That wasn't so. Life went on. New interests came, new activities. Audleigh thought a lot better of life now than he ever had before. He felt pretty well disposed towards everyone.

Cora, now— Cora had been awfully sweet once. He wondered what she had made of life; who paid her bills, bought coats like that for her. Heigh-ho! he had done it once; now he had only himself.

With a pleasant sensation of well-being, he studied his pearl-grey spats, the shining black toes of his shoes, the striped trouser-leg, the good Oxford-grey of his sleeve. Only himself to buy for how.

He must, he decided, go presently and speak to Cora. He would certainly have to speak to her before they reached New York. It had given him quite a shock to run into her here. It brought the past very near, making it stand out sharply in its salient features from the mist that so long had shrouded it.

There was the day he had met Cora, on the boat coming from Albany. She wore, that time, a peach-colored dress, and her face, under the brim of a yellow leghorn hat, was a sweet mystery that had to be closely explored before he saw the blue black of her eyes, the ivory and rose of her cheek, the warm red of her tiny mouth. Then their wedding, their trip abroad... and now he sat at one end of the car and she at the other; and that, even so, was the nearest he had been to her in six years.

A bit of paper, folded, fell into Steve Audleigh's lap. He had been lost, so deeply immersed in his thoughts of the Cora of long ago. Now looking up in amazement, he saw her walk swiftly, swaying a bit with the motion of the train, past him. And, of her, there was only the folded piece of paper.

He was tempted to get up and follow her. He thought better of it. She would have to come back anyway. He opened the note and, though he had trained himself to keep a poker-face no matter what the hand of Fate might deal, his eyes widened now and he passed thin fingers over his crisp graying hair.

*Dear Steve,*

*Will you do something for me? I dare not speak to you. I'm watched closely by the man opposite me. Yes, you guessed right... a detective. If he gets the stuff on me, I'm sunk. Will you pick up my handkerchief when I pass through again? Take the stones out of it and slip them in your pocket. You can give them to me to-night. I'll be at the Lomax. Please, Stevie. You always were so decent. Perhaps—"*

Steve folded the note and put it away. He watched the door, waiting for Cora to return from the club-car. It was ten minutes before she appeared. She did not look at him. Her handkerchief, as she passed his chair, fell at his feet. It was knotted loosely, so that it was easy for him to pocket the softly gleaming gems, concealed in its folds. She pretended to discover her loss, turned, and took the kerchief from him with a sweet smile of acknowledgment and a gentle drooping of her left eyelid over a blue-black eye.

WHEN they reached the Grand Central Audleigh left the train before she had gathered up her paraphernalia. He did not go to the Lomax; he went to Police Headquarters. They seemed to know him there. He got a chair and a cigar

forthwith in Jim Touhey's office, where some got a chair, but very, few the cigar to go with it.

"Say, Audleigh. why aren't you in Boston huntin' up that string of diamonds that was stolen from Mrs, Roth Heminway? Worth a hundred grand, eh? You want to get busy... anything to go on?"

Audleigh put his hand in his pocket, drew it forth, and laid a string of flashing fire on Touhey's desk.

"No," he said. "Nothing to go on."

"You got 'em! Well, I'll be...! Say, you should quit private detectivin', and come up here and get you a real job. How'd you..."

A man opened the door and said, in answer to Touhey's black scowl....

"A hick up from Brockton, New Hampshire, chief. He's here to bring that Walters chap back."

"Oh, yes! Hell, yes! Bring him in, Al. Just a minute. Audleigh, till I give this young fellow a word of encouragement, and find out how the boys are behavin' down to the corner-store."

Audleigh nodded when the strange sleuth came sheepishly in. He wore a blue suit, square-toed black shoes. He was big. He looked what he was. Touhey presented him to Audleigh. His name was Wall.

"I saw you on the train," said Audleigh pleasantly, "coming up from Boston. You were sitting opposite the best-looking woman in the car. Were you talking to her at all?"

Wall looked uneasy, like a small boy caught stealing jam. He got red and hot.

"That dame! Not much. I— well, she musta seen my shield an' she'd know I wasn't goin' to hurt her. I'm old enough to be her father, anyway. I saw the headlines of what she was readin' in the paper and just to make talk, I says, 'That was some, smart job liftin' all those diamonds right off that old dame's neck,' I says. She didn't give me a tumble, just the icy stare. Maybe she didn't even hear me."

"Oh, I think she did," said Audleigh. "Yes, I'm sure she did."

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## 18: The Fortunate Island

***H. De Vere Stacpoole***

1863-1951

*Popular Magazine* 20 Nov 1915

The first of a series entitled overall "The Luck of Captain Slocum"

THE steadily breathing trade wind was giving the *Contra Costa* a good ten knots, and Captain Slocum, who had just come up from below, stood with one huge, mahogany-colored fist grasping the weather rail of the schooner and his eyes scanning the sea.

It was just after sunrise. The morning bank had vanished, and the Pacific, all beautiful with the blue and gold of early day, stretched to the far horizon, unbroken by sail or wing of sea bird.

Slocum might have been fifty. A hard man to look at and a harder man to deal with, he had gone through life without making a fortune, and he had set out in life to find one.

He had poached seals in the Yellow Sea; he had fished for trepang and *béche de mer* on the New Guinea coast; he had tried coconut growing in Portuguese Timor; he had swapped guns and ammunition for gold dust in murky, mangrove-shadowed Bornean rivers with a Dutch gunboat feeling for him in the lower reaches. Dealings with Chinese hatchet men had left him a scar that ran from his left ear to his chin, and had you stripped him you would have found the makings of half a dozen romances in the shot holes and knife wounds marking his epidermis.

Always, or nearly always, on the crooked, he had been followed through life by appalling bad luck as far as the making of money was concerned; time and again he had grasped Fortune, and time and again she had eluded him.

And the strange thing about this pirate lay in the fact that his ideal in life was peace. Some men's dreams of fortune show palaces and yachts; Slocum's nowadays showed a farm; a great big farm where he could drive about in his own buggy and grow pigs and corn and watch the cows coming home to be milked.

Now Slocum some months ago had netted five thousand dollars in a questionable deal in San Francisco. It was just enough money to be of no use to him, so he said, and he was looking about for some new form of crookedness in which to invest it when Captain Rogers, of the schooner *Contra Costa*, made him a proposal. Rogers, who was owner of the schooner suggested that the captain should invest his money in a cargo of trade goods, canned salmon, tobacco, trade gin, knives, printed cottons, and so forth, and, with Rogers for skipper, take the schooner down to the islands and try his luck; the profits were to be

equally divided, Rogers providing the crew and victualing them, the food and drink of the after guard to be paid for equally by Rogers and Slocum.

The captain mused on this proposition for a while, and, attracted maybe by its unaccustomed flavor of honesty, fell in with it.

Said Rogers: "It's a dead sure thing with my knowledge of the islands. I've got the mark to go for and the man— Lyford's his name— and his island is Christopher Island, and it ain't a million miles from the Marquesas. I've known him since a boy. He's doing big business down on Christopher, and he's not tagged on to no firm. He plays a lone hand. There's dead loads of copra on that island, and Byford buys it from the natives. There's islands all round about, and he's got the pull of those. We'll most likely sell him the trade, half for copra and half for cash. We're not goin' to make a fortune on this one shot, but we're goin' maybe to lay the foundations of a big business. You with some money behind you, and me with the *Contra Costa* and the knowledge of the pitch ought to hit it off."

Slocum showing interest, they visited the schooner, which was lying at Rafferty's wharf unloading a cargo of copra, and the sight of her sealed the business as far as Slocum was concerned.

She was a beauty; designed by Daniels, her lines were an exhibition of the genius of that master shipwright. Ships of beauty and of worth are not built; they are born— created from the genius of their designers; they are things truly alive, and Slocum saw the life in the *Contra Costa* even as she lay moored to the wharf and fell in love with her. She had drawn him into this venture as much as the arguments of Rogers, who was now coming on deck rubbing the sleep out of his eyes.

Fully on deck now, the owner and master of the Contra Costa nodded at Setchell, the first mate, who was keeping the watch, swept the deck with a glance, taking in the figure of Slocum, the steersman, and the fellows forward hanging round the caboose, from which was coming a faint scent of breakfast in preparation. Then, having glanced at the binnacle card, he swept the horizon.

He was a lean, sick-looking man. with a face that all the sun and salt air of the Pacific could not bronze, and as he stood looking about him, Slocum. feeling his presence, turned.

The two captains gave each other good morning, and Rogers came to the weather rail.

"If this wind holds steady we ought to raise Christopher before long," said he. "We're doing all ten knots. Balmy, ain't it?"

He sniffed the warm wind, and filled his lungs with it.

"It's flyin'-fish weather," said Slocum; "we can't grumble at the weather; hope the tradin' will be as good."

Setchell drew up to the two others He was undersized, and his face was one mass of freckles; his teeth were black with chewing, and he was the other self of Rogers; the two, to use Slocum's expression, were "as thick as treacle," and this glutinous attachment between the master and the mate did not please our ex-pirate. He was Rogers' partner, and he did not care for the idea that Setchell was Rogers' right hand and confidant. They would parade the deck together, talking, and they would take their grog together in the cabin talking, always talking— what about he could not tell. He only knew that when' he came on them suddenly their talk checked, and if he caught their renewed conversation it was always about the weather, or the working of the schooner. The thing was getting on his nerves.

"If this weather holds," said Setchell, "we'll have made a record run. I've never had better luck in the way of weather than this trip."

"Oh, blast the weather!" said Slocum. "You never can count on Pacific weather, and while you're rubbin' your hands over it a squall will maybe have the sticks out of her, and don't talk of luck; there ain't no such thing."

Setchell's good grammar and fine words were part of his present burden.

"No such thing as luck!" exclaimed Rogers. "Well, there I'm not with you. There ain't nothing else but luck in this blessed world. You ought to know that."

This implication of his bad luck through life, a fact about which he was quite open and on which he was garrulous at times, fired Slocum.

"Luck!" said he. "*I* ought to know! Why, all me life and time I've seen there's no such thing. It's only old women that talk of luck; it's not man's talk. I've no use for such bilge. What has luck to do with wind or weather? D'ye s'pose Gor A'mighty fans up a wind to help such skrimshankers as you an' me to diddle Kanakas outer copra with trade gin and condemned ammunition? My Sam! More like He'd sink us if He took notice of your chatter."

"Well, well, well," said Rogers, "there's no use in arguin' over questions like that; there's some that believe and some that doesn't— and here's breakfast, anyway."

A Kanaka was coming aft from the galley with a big dish of fried bacon and tomatoes; another was following him with the coffeepot. The whole crew of the *Contra Costa* were Kanakas; Slocum, Rogers, Setchell, and Ambrose, the second mate, being the only whites on board; and while the after guard were at breakfast in the cabin, and before Ambrose, the second mate, a perfectly fatuous individual, could be rousted out, a Kanaka stood watch. He was Sirloin Jim, so named for Heaven knows what reason, but a capable navigator when supervised, and a trustworthy when not in the near presence of drink.

Down below, Setchell was holding out his cup for a second helping of coffee when a faraway voice like the voice of a sea gull came on the warm wind blowing down the open saloon hatch.

It was the lookout hailing land.

Then the fatuous face of Ambrose appeared at the hatch.

"We're raising the island, sir."

"Good!" said Rogers. "I'll be on deck in a minute. I guess she'll keep."

He continued what he was saying to Slocum, and the latter, though he was now burning to be on deck, would not show his impatience, but sat listening and making answer till Setchell heaved himself up and led the way.

Yes, there was the island sure enough, and to be seen without the aid. of glasses when they reached the deck, making little enough show amid all that waste of water, but steadily growing, as though the wind that was driving them toward it were spreading it open as one spreads apart the petals of a flower with one's breath.

An hour later and it was quite well defined, a mountainous island, green—green as the greenest emerald with the recent rains, and showing the smoke of a torrent like a white plume amid the cliff foliage.

A broken reef protected it from the full force of the sea.

It was a beautiful spot, and as they drew closer the beauty of it steadily grew before their eyes. The blazing light of morning lay hazy about those high cliffs where from the ceiba and giant convolvulus, the hibiscus and mammea apple, and the earth still moist with the rains of a week ago, rose a vague, luminous haze wrapping the island like a scarf.

"It ain't bad to look at," said Slocum, "if one could tow it up to Frisco blest if one couldn't sell it for an oleograph, But it seems to me it's too durned pretty to make money out of— what's that you say? I'm not makin' no disparaging remarks, but I always mistrusts a smiling mug. I always mistrusts too much civility. You know the sort of chap that keeps washin' his hands as though he was born in a lav'tory, and smilin' as if his mother was a Cheshire cat— well, that sort of chap I've never met without bein' diddled. I'm not sayin' nothin' against this place, on'y that it seems to me too blame civil."

"I guess you've never seen it in a gale," said Rogers, "with the sea rearin' over that reef and the coconut trees thrashin' like whips; there you can see Byford's house beyond the beach and built up against the cliff; there's some native houses by it, but most of the natives live inland; did you ever see the like of the coconut trees, and they're only a sample; beyond, on the other side, where the slope is, it's one mass of them. Dead loads of copra."

He went forward to con the schooner in. There was a fellow in the bows swinging the lead, and every now and then his high-pitched voice mixed with the voices of the gulls clamoring on the reef.

The wind was fair for the reef opening, and Rogers seemed to know the passage by heart, and his directions came aft sure and certain and swift, while the fellows stood ready by the halyards.

Slocum, who had come forward, stood by, watching, as, with the wind spilling out of the sails, the schooner, like a stricken gull rising to the heave of the opening, came with the helm hard astarboard in a great curve over the glassy water of the lagoon.

Underneath them lay a garden of coral clearly visible as though seen through air, but Slocum had no eyes for its beauty. He was gazing shoreward at the white beach, desolate and burning in the sun, at the frame house of the trader that lay beyond the beach, and the native houses that lay near the main building, at the flagstaff from which no flag fluttered, at the canoes on the beach, so long drawn up that the wind had banked the sand against them.

The place seemed deserted. More than that, an indefinable atmosphere of desolation hung over it.

Like the little town on Keats' Greek urn, one felt that here the inhabitants would never come back, but there was no suggestion that, like the urn folk, they were held from returning by some pious festival. The scene suggested nothing of piety or festivity; blank desolation wandered on that beach. Desolation made all the more striking by the brilliancy of the sunshine, the whiteness of the sands, and the gay green of the cliff foliage, where the torrent, audible now, raced downward in a mist of spray.

The rumble tumble of the anchor chain came back in faint echoes from the cliffs, and the *Contra Costa*, swinging to her moorings, nosed round a bit as if to inspect the shore toward which she had been driven through so many days of azure and nights of stars.

"Well," said Slocum, with a sort of gloomy triumph in his tones, "where's your copra and where's your trader? Is this Christopher Island, or is it the bloomin' Garden of Eden? What price is fig leaves gettin' in the Frisco market? Or do you reckon to speculate on snakes? An oleograph, that's what it is, and that's what I said it was."

"Don't crowd me," said Rogers. "It ain't my fault if the blinds are down; b'sides, where's the sense in it? Look at them trees; what's wrong with the trees? Stacks an' tons of copra to be had. The island's here; what's wrong with it? You take my word, the thing's sound. They've most likely changed over to live on the other side. Look at the canoes. They haven't left. Wouldn't be such fools as to leave the canoes behind 'em."

"No," said Setchell, who had come up to them, "the natives are here all right; besides, they couldn't have got away without the canoes, unless the place has been raided, and these are not the days for that sort of work. Bully Hayes has been in his coffin too long. My opinion is that they are all off copra gathering; it's inconceivable they have left, and it's equally inconceivable that they have suffered from some catastrophe."

"Well, let's catastrophy ashore and find out," said Slocum. "Lookin' and talkin' won't bring them— what boat are you taking?"

The *Contra Costa* carried a whaleboat and a ship's quarter boat; the latter was now lowered, a couple of Kanakas got in to row, and Slocum, Rogers, and Setchell crowded into the stern sheets. Ambrose, the second mate, remained to look after the schooner, and his vacuous face as he leaned over the rail gaped after them as they put off.

"That chap's enough to put the kibosh on any show," said Slocum; "onnatural, I call him. What's he want stickin' his calf's head over the rail to put a blight on us for? Blank ijit."

They beached the boat, and the precious trio crowded out. Slocum stamped on the hot, salt, white sand as if to make sure that he was truly on shore again, then he took a glance at the canoes lying warping in the sun, and then he led the way up the beach toward the house.

They had not gone twenty paces when a figure appeared at the open door of the house, came out on the veranda, and stood holding on to one of the main posts.

"Here's the sleepin' beauty," said Slocum, "and sick he looks."

"It's Byford!" said Rogers, catching his breath back, as well he might.

Byford was not pleasant to behold. Dressed in an old dirty drill suit that had once been white, he stood contemplating the oncomers with a look of serene detachment, like some pagan god standing at the door of its temple. His face was white, fish-belly white ; his eyes were red-rimmed, and, though originally a stout man, he had fallen away from his stoutness,

"Stop!" said Rogers. "It's maybe some illness; better be careful. Hi, Byford! Don't you know me? I'm Rogers— what ails you? Is it anythin' 'fectious ?"

"Hello, hello!" replied the figure. "Come along up; no call to be afraid. Gin— gin, nothing but gin, that's all that ails me." Then, as they got on the veranda: "I've been a bit on the razzle. Who's these gentlemen? Glad to see them; come in, all of you; the place is a bit put about, but you'll find seats."

He led the way in to the main room of the building. Once it had been a pleasant enough place. The floor was covered with matting, and there were half a dozen cane chairs standing about, a table stood in the center, the walls were adorned with canoe paddles and island headdresses, and, for the rest, it was a wilderness. Dust and dirt and cigarette ends lay about, a tomato tin had been cast in one corner, and there was a soul-searching, all-pervading smell of gin and paraffin lamps combined, enough to turn a man forever from drink and all that drink implies.

But Slocum, Rogers, and Setchell were, to use an expression of the former, "tough stuff," and when Byford fished a demijohn of square face out of a corner,

glasses from a locker, and water from somewhere in the back premises, they did not refuse the invitation.

"This is better than better," said Byford as he paddled about getting the things. "I did think I'd never have the chance of a drink with a Christian again. You've come just in the nick of time to save me from myself. Not a soul in the blessed place but Rakatupea and his wife and her baby, and they aren't cheerful people, not by a long chalk. Rakatupea is the chief, the only one left of the whole caboodle."

"Look here!" said Rogers, filling his glass. "That's what I want to get at. What's the matter, anyway? What's gone with the natives?"

"What's gone with the natives?" said Byford, holding out a glass for Rogers to fill. "Why, didn't I tell you? The place has been swept by smallpox. Two months and more ago it came, and took the lot. You needn't be afraid of infection; this house is all right; nothing came here; it was the natives that got it all; every one of them gone but Rakatupea, his wife, and the baby."

"Jumping Moses!" said Slocum.

He was not afraid of smallpox; he had been through several epidemics unscathed; he was thinking of the trade goods lying in the hold of the Contra Costa and the time they had lost coming to this place to drink bad gin with a drink-soddened scalawag whose appearance was enough to frighten the Barbary Coast into sobriety.

"You needn't be a bit afraid," said Byford, gulping down his drink.

"Who's afraid?" said Slocum. "I'm thinkin' of the fool asses we've made of ourselves howking a shipload of trade all the way from Frisco to dump it on these blessed sands."

"Well, ain't I standin' in with you?" cried Rogers. "And am I complaining? Besides, is this the only island in the Pacific? Ain't there other places where business is to be done?" Then, turning to Byford: "You have no copra, have you?"

"Not a pound," said Byford almost cheerfully. "Cleaned the whole lot out before the epidemic came."

"Well," said Rogers, "see here! You'll be gettin' labor here presently, and you'll be wantin' goods; why not take our stuff?"

Byford began to laugh at this in a crazy sort of way. Then he rose to his feet and asked them to come out and see something. Chuckling all the time, he led them into the sunlight and along the beach to a godown close to the cliff wall. He opened the door of the storehouse. The place was crammed with goods—bales of cloth, stacks of tinned salmon, boxes of stick tobacco, cases of gin.

"The chaps hadn't been paid for their copra when the epidemic took them," said Byford, "but Saunderson, the chap that took the copra off, had paid me all

right in cash. And to think of you coming with a full cargo and me with a full storehouse— why, it was like taking anthracite coal to Philadelphia."

"Or gin to a grogshop, where the lan'lord's on'y fit for a drunken 'sylum," put in Slocum, furious that this gin-soddened rascal should have the laugh of them. "Well, if that's all that's to be done here, I vote we up stick for somewhere that smells sweeter than this fortunit isle; let's get aboard."

But Rogers had other views. Walking beside Slocum on their way back to the house, he explained them.

"I saw an old deck of cards on the table in there," said he, "and since this chap has the money why shouldn't he part with some of it? He's got the bulge on us, and I propose to have the bulge on him if I've any luck."

"Luck!" said Slocum. "There you go again with your luck. If there was such. a thing, would this be the time to try it? Luck your granny! You take my advice and let's put out before we're done worse. I don't like the look of this place, and didn't from the first. There was too much of the happy, smilin' angel about this place to suit yours trooly, too much of the hat and feathers and the happy face. Spoofed, that's what we've been, and to turn up such a guy as this chap Byford; he seems straight come out of that hymn the salvation blighters used to sing down Tollis Street, whose every aspect pleases and on'y man is vile. 'Strewth, he's vile, an' with a backin' of coconut trees an' smilin' verdure he'd draw the crowd at a missionary show; he'd beat cannibals."

"He's gone to pieces with the drink, that's all," said Rogers. "Shocked I was to see him, an old friend, rejuiced like that, and me expectin' to trade with him. Well, if I can't diddle him one ways I'll do it another; it's not to be trade, it seems. Well, let it be gamblin'."

They entered the house again, Slocum grumbling. Now the captain was not a drinking man under ordinary circumstances, but when his nerves were put about, or, to use his own expression, when he had something on his spine, drink became a dangerous temptation to him, and now, as he entered the house of Byford, seeing the gin on the table, he helped himself to a glass as though the place were his own. This was his second glass of gin in the course of half an hour, and he had eaten nothing since breakfast.

Rogers picked up the cards from the table, toyed with them lightly, took his seat, and laid them out in a pattern on the table with his horny thumb, and then, in the most natural way in the world, suggested a game of poker to Setchell.

These two scamps seemed telepathic in their understanding with one another, for Setchell, falling in with the idea, addressed Byford, asking him to join them.

But Byford, despite his condition of mind and body, was much too cautious a bird to be caught by such amateur fowlers. He excused himself on account of

the state of his health; he was not in a fit state to play cards; he had eaten nothing since yesterday, nothing but two Nabisco wafers and a tomato. "If I had a beefsteak inside me I wouldn't stand out," said Mr, Byford, "but I've made it the rule of my life never to play cards on an empty stomach— and there it stands."

He rolled himself a cigarette, and Slocum, bursting into a laugh, clapped his great thigh with his palm. "He's got you again," said he. "Won't trade, won't play, unless it's with the gin bottle. There! Get into the corner with your tomarter tin, you crazy, good-for-nuthin' and gimme the cards."

He came to the table. Anger with Byford, anger with Setchell, anger with Rogers, all were mixed in his mind with the fumes of gin and the lust of play. He wanted to make money out of some one, to get back something' of the time and energy he had lost in coming to this outrageous place. In his cool moments he did not play cards; a dozen times on the voyage down here Rogers or Setchell had proposed a game with him, but he had always refused. Now Circumstance had him in her grip, and, pouring out another glass of gin, he sat him down before the spoilers.

Byford, looking injured at being called a crazy good-for-nothing, sat back in his cane chair, blowing smoke at the ceiling.

As the game began, two figures darkened the doorway, the figure of Rakatupea and his dark-skinned wife, who. with their baby, constituted the sole remainder of the population of this once fortunate island. The baby was not with them; they had left it outside.

Rakatupea and his wife, an exceedingly gloomy-looking brace of Kanakas, took their seats in cane chairs near Byford without one single word. It was more like the entry of a pair of dogs than of a pair of human beings; and Byford, who had now fallen into a mused state, after the first glance, took no notice of them.

The chief and his wife smoked cigarettes of their own making, and over the card players now the air was hazy with smoke made blue by the brilliant light from the outside world through the open doorway.

Slocum was winning. In a moment his bad temper had vanished and his gloomy view of things. Inflated by gin and success, his mind began to soar, his language to take a jubilant tone,

They were playing for comparatively small stakes, and they continued so for a while, Slocum always winning; then, feeling fortune at his back, he proposed an increase. Rogers and Setchell at once took him, the game was resumed, and then the luck began to wabble.

Slocum lost, won, lost, and then lost again. He grew angry, grew cool, swore frightfully when he lost, and produced some of the newest and most curious and quaintest oaths when he won.

At the end of an hour and a half, he had lost two thousand dollars.

Had you told him in the morning that such a thing was possible he would have laughed at you, but there it was, two thousand precious 'dollars gone, swept clean away and nothing to show for it.

They were not, of course, playing now with coin on the table. They made notes of their winnings and losings, using chips made of torn-up paper for counters.

"Well, there's no gainsaying your luck is out, captain," said Setchell. "I think you said this morning there was no such thing as luck. Weil, what do you say to this?"

"If you'll close your head and hand me the cards I'll show you," said the other. "My deal."

To give up, to make no attempt to recapture his losses, to take defeat lying down, would have been a violation of his nature.

Very grim, and breathing heavily through his nose, the redoubtable captain dealt the cards, and the game proceeded.

Outside now, from the beach blazing in the hot afternoon sun a sound came, insistent, monotonous, and teasing. It was the chief Rakatupea's baby beating on an empty tomato tin with a lump of coral.

Byford was asleep with his mouth open, and the flies were promenading on his face without exciting a twitch, just as they might have promenaded on the face of a marble statue. The Chief Rakatupea and his wife continued smoking, moving, whenever they moved, like automatic figures, and Slocum continued losing.

The tide would turn for a few minutes, and then when just beginning to flood would ebb again, leaving him more stranded than before.

At the end of another hour his total losses amounted to four thousand five hundred dollars.

"I reckon I'll stop," said the captain. "I've lost the worth of all the trade in the hold of that blessed schooner, all but five hundred dollars; I reckon I'll keep that to pay my way back to Frisco and take a cab to the nearest lunatic 'sylum. I ain't grumbling, Sam Slocum's not the man to take his losses grumbling— not him."

He was trying to conceal his breakdown. He would not help himself to more gin for fear that the shaking of his hand might be noticed. He took it well, for the loss meant everything to him, but he wanted to get out of that place and be by himself for a moment, and this opportunity was given to him by the Chief Rakatupea's baby.

That lusty infant, having paused for a while to naturalize over a stray crab, had resumed operations with the tomato tin and the lump of coral.

"Durn that child!" said the captain. "I'll go out and stop its row; no sense in a row like that— I'll be back in a minute."

He went out, and as he cleared the veranda he heard Setchell laughing. It only wanted that to make his fury blaze out, and the sight of the baby before him, like a chocolate-colored football on the sands, did not help to soothe him. He came toward it as if he were going to kick it into the sea.

The baby, seeing the man approach, dropped the lump of coral and held up the tomato tin to show it to him. It was a gorgeous tin, the very latest product of American publicity art and commercial endeavor, but it did not appease Captain Slocum.

"Shut your noise!" cried he. "Whacher want makin' that row for, whacher—"

A roar like the roar of a hundred thousand lions cut him short, a huge howlder the size of a hardware crate skipped past him playfully in a shower of sand, and an artu tree, roots over leaves, came flying after the bowlder.

The captain swung round. The whole cliff face had fallen. Eighty feet of raw, red earth stood clean cut above a mound forty feet high, a mound of rock and earth and rubble, broken trees, and torn-up bushes. The recent rains had undermined the cliff face; under the pile of debris lay the house of Byford and all that it contained, flattened, smashed to matchwood, and covered thirty feet deep by rocks, trees, earth, and rubble.

Captain Slocum, unconscious of the baby screaming at his feet, stood staring at the ruin before him. Then he ran toward it, shouting, and, to use the words of Ambrose, who was watching from the schooner, carrying on like a lunatic.

He seized a tree trunk and tried to lift it. Then he came to his senses; as well try to assist the unfortunates buried under the ruins of Herculaneum. Byford and his crew were beyond the reach of man, part now of the foundations of the island, and destined to remain so till the sounding of the last trump.

His own salvation was rushing in on him; by two minutes he had been saved from all that, by two minutes, and the baby of the Chief Rakatupea.

He walked back along the sands in a dazed way, picked up the child, and came down to the sea edge with it, holding it in his arms. It had ceased crying, and lay still as a frightened rabbit while he stood waiting for the boat that had put off from the Contra Costa.

It was the quarter boat, which had put back to the schooner after landing them that morning, and Ambrose was steering. When the boat's nose touched the sand, Ambrose scrambled out and came wading ashore.

"What's up with the cliff?" said Ambrose.

"Up with the cliff!" cried the captain. "What's down with it, you mean. Can't you see! Where's your eyes? The whole caboodle of them's under there—Rogers and Setchell and Byford and two Kanakas, the whole population of the blessed island."

Ambrose tilted his cap and scratched his head.

"And who's captain of the schooner now?" said he.

"Captain?" replied Slocum. "I guess I'm captain and owner, too, since Rogers hasn't kith or kin; and he'd cleaned me out of the trade on board over a game of cards— I reckon that's mine, too. I guess I've fallen on luck. Never did believe in it, but there's no goin' against facts."

"What are you doing with that thing?" asked Ambrose, his eyes turning to the child.

"Oh, get aboard and close your questions— what d'you expect me to do— leave it behind or fling it into the sea, and fling me luck after it? Why, you double-dashed imige, d'you know what's in front of you right there, untouched by the cliff fall— there's a storehouse full of trade."

Ambrose glanced at the godown, which, in fact, was still standing, untouched, to westward of the fall, without quite comprehending its connection with the baby.

"We'll put it aboard and then come back for as much of the trade as we can find room for," said the captain.

They rowed off to the schooner, the child on Slocum's knee. It was plump and attractive, like most Kanaka babies of a year old, but paler in color as if from a mixture of European blood; but, unlike them, too, it wore a serious expression that seemed the natural habit of its countenance.

"It's like a blessed Billikin," said Ambrose, "only it's wanting the grin."

"And you're like a blessed monkey, only you're wanting the tail," replied Slocum. "It's my luck, and I'd thank you to make no observations about it."

"I thought you said you didn't believe in luck," replied the other, hurt in his feelings and wishing to make a retort

"Just so, me son," replied the captain, clutching his prize under one arm while he prepared to climb the companionway, "but, you see, I hadn't a hold of it then. Touchin' is believin', and don't you forget that."

———————

## 19: Revenge!

***Mary Kyle Dallas***

1830-1897

*Geraldton Murchison Telegraph*, 19 April 1895

"WELL, GOOD-BYE," he said, "I am going away to-morrow. How curious it is to think that we shall probably never see each other again! It has been awfully jolly. I shall think of it often. Good-bye!"

He was gone, and thus it ended!

For the whole long winter that man had made love to her ; by every wile that was his he had won her heart. She had had every reason to believe that he desired her to be his wife, and all the while it had been a mere flirtation on his part. ·

Men like Jack Farnham think nothing of doing this sort of thing; but the simple girl whose heart he had won, had never dreamed that he was not honest and true. She would not have believed it had an angel sworn it to her. ·

At first, she had wondered that a fashionable man should have taken a fancy to a girl who was only a clerk in a store. She knew that she was not plain; but when he began to devote himself to her she was as much astonished as she was pleased. ·

In a boarding-house parlor they had met each other. Their courtship had been commented on by strangers, and Corinne knew that they would comment on its cessation. A sense of mortification took possession of her, and stung her constantly. The grief she could have borne— but not that.

At night she crept up to her bed, crushed with misery. The next morning she was very ill. ·

They were very kind to her, but they were not her own kin. She knew that they could not keep her after her money was gone, and it would go soon.

She lay there wondering what would happen to her, wishing that she might die, when Fortune suddenly took her into favor.

An old uncle dying made her his heiress. She was rich. She had so much money that she scarcely knew how she alone could spend it. ·

Money makes a great difference in a stranger's regard of a woman. People began to discover that Corinne Grey was a beauty; and, indeed, ease, luxury and a perfect dressmaker soon made an immense improvement in the immature girl.

With an old lady friend, who was glad to be her companion, she travelled abroad a year or two, and then returned to Melbourne.

Her face had changed for the better, her figure was finer, her manner improved, but the heart that had been so sweet had grown bitter.

She, who had been all tenderness, wore within her bosom a heart of stone, and the man she had loved she hated.

Her one prayer was that she might some day be revenged upon him. ·

"IS IT possible, Miss Grey!"

It was a crowded parlor; music filled the air, a soprano of society was singing. ·

Miss Grey turned her head and saw Jack Farnham. They had thus met once more! ·

A strange thrill swept through her frame for a moment— she remembered her old feelings for him, and then followed an emotion of triumph. He was here. ·

Somehow she knew he was a bachelor still, and she was now rich and an acknowledged belle. She understood her power and she meant to exert it. This man should be at her feet, and she would humble him as he had humbled her.

So she gave him her hand and looked sweetly up into his face.·

"It is an age since we met," she said, "how did you know me after all this time?"

"One expects a beautiful bud to become a beautiful rose," he answered.

He took her down to supper that night and saw her to her carriage, and he called, as she asked him to do, in a day or two.

He had been a good deal in love with her in those old times, though it had not been prudent to marry a poor girl, and he had always thought her beautiful.

Now the passion of his life fell upon him. Ambition was satisfied and did not restrain his heart.

He adored her. And the fact that she was rich and a belle, inflamed his pride and helped his love along.

He flung himself into the pursuit of her heart with ardor, and gained her promise to be his wife.

At an early hour of the appointed wedding day, —— Church was crammed from one end to the other with people in full dress.

It took two clergymen to manage so fine an affair. They were here. What a bustle! what a crush! And now they are coming! No, only the bridegroom and his party— not the bride yet. She must be here in a few minutes.

The ladies grew more restless. Ten minutes passed— twenty— thirty.

"The hairdresser; that's the delay," said one.

"No — the gloves. They are always tight, " whispered another.

An hour! There must have been some accident. She must be dead, or at least dying, otherwise she would come. People are on their feet now. They look at the door. Some one is coming. It is only a black man, but he wears Miss Grey's livery.

He advances to the bridegroom and hands him a little note. He tears it open. This is what he reads, as the eyes of that great throng turn upon him:

"Poor fool! Do you forget that there is no demon like a woman scorned? When you jilted me long ago you turned my love to hate. When you courted me again, because I was an heiress, you made me burn for revenge. I know you love me now, and I know you are a proud man. I am sure you will suffer very much, for I shall not meet you at the church or ever again, I hope. I leave today for Europe. "

Corinne had written this sitting in her own room in the bride´s dress she had al-lowed her maid to dress her in, that there might be no suspicion of her plot, and she had called her footman and sent him to the church with the note in its white envelope. And now revenge was satisfied— she had punished him ! She was triumphant ; she had avenged the wrong done to that other self who had loved him so!

She stood at her window looking down into the street, watching the footman as he hurried away, when suddenly a dusty tramp, with a kerchief over her head, stepped out into the middle of the street and began to sing, to an old tune Corinne knew well, an old love-song that she had never heard before:·

*I strove to tear thee from my heart;*
*The effort was in vain—*
*The spell was ever on my life,*
*And I am here again.*

*Oh, I have ranged in countries strange,*
*And vowed no more to meet,*
*But power was in thy parting glance*
*To bring me to thy feet. ·*

*We cannot go against Love´s will*
*When he has bound us fast;*
*Forgive the thought that did thee wrong,*
*And be mine own at last.·*

Corinne listened. The tears stood in her eyes. Suddenly her heart softened. What years had not done, this song had accomplished in a few moments. She was a girl again. She loved Jack Farnham once more. All this fiendish longing for revenge was gone. Yes, she loved him, she would be his wife ! She could overtake the messenger yet. Her carriage stood at the door. She rushed down the stairs and hurried into it.

"Drive for your life, " she whispered to the coachman. "Overtake Thomas; he has a note that I must have back. "

And the astonished coachman obeyed. He drove her as bride was never driven yet. But the footman´s feet had crossed the threshold of the church ere they had neared it.

She stepped from her carriage as bride has seldom stepped, unattended. She had forgotten those who were to be with her ; she thought only of him— her lover. The crowd did not turn at her entrance. It had massed itself in the aisles, and stood on the pew cushions. Women were screaming, girls sobbing.

"Let me pass— let me pass!" she pleaded. "What is it?— what has happened?"

Then someone said:

"The bride," and all looked that way; but instead of making room, they tried to bar her advance, and then, somehow, the clergyman had made his way to her, and took her by the arm, and a voice, the voice of an hysterical woman, rent the air.

"He has shot himself! he is dead!" ·

Corinne knew no more.

THERE IS an odd, half-crazed woman wandering in Europe now, with a maid and a courier. She will wander there until she dies. They call her "Old Miss Grey," and tell how her bridegroom died in church on his wedding morning. But they do not know all. No one ever guessed the contents of that little note that was swept away next morning when the church was swept, or guessed why Jack Farnham died.

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## 20: The Manchu Skull

***Emile C. Tepperman***

1899-1951

*Clues Detective Stories*, Oct 1939

THERE was an undercurrent of something strange and ominous in the life of Chinatown tonight. King sensed it at once as he turned into Pell Street from the Bowery. The usual gossiping crowd of yellow men in black alpaca jackets and skull caps was missing from in front of the Chinese Art Theater. The store of Pu Yee, the venerable old curio importer, was closed. The three-story building of the Sung Tong, next door, was likewise dark and deserted. Only the garish neon lights of the Far Long Sin Restaurant, which catered to the sightseeing trade, provided any signs of life in the street.

King walked warily, swinging his silver-knobbed cane in carefully gloved hands. His tall, immaculately clothed figure, and the easy, lithe swing of his body, afforded no indication of the fact that the wallet in his breast pocket contained one hundred thousand dollars in large bills.

It was no new thing for Christopher King to come down to his little office in Chinatown with a small fortune in cash. He was known as a buyer of precious jade, and a man whom the Chinese could trust implicitly. So whenever anything of value had to be sold, King got the first call.

He stopped for a moment to light a cigarette, while still half a block from the Far Long Sin Restaurant. And a short, squat, dark shape sidled out of a doorway.

Instantly, King tautened. He flipped away the match, and gripped the silver-headed cane. But he relaxed at once, upon recognizing the man.

"Hello, Pu Yee," he said in English.

The old curio importer glanced around nervously. Then he shuffled closer.

"Good evening. King san," he said in Cantonese. "Forgive me if I seem to be brusque. But it is dangerous for me to be seen talking to you. You have been a good friend to me, and I must warn you. Death walks at your side tonight! Do not go to your office. Turn back and go home!"

King's eyes narrowed. "You know why I am here?"

The old man shivered. "Indeed I do, my son. And I am afraid for you. There is a woman with black hair who brings death to Chinatown and it is written that you are to meet her. Also, it is written that many must die tonight. Go home, King san, before you meet the woman who brings death!"

Before King could ask him another question, Pu Yee turned and shuffled back into the darkness of the doorway. His squat, alpaca-clothed figure blended with the shadows.

King puffed thoughtfully for a moment at his cigarette. Then he shrugged, and went on. But he walked even more cautiously than before.

He came abreast of the Far Long Sin Restaurant. There was a big rubberneck bus parked at the curb, with a flamboyant streamer tacked along its side, reading:

**WORLD'S FAIR**
**CHINATOWN TOUR— 75c**

A couple of other cars were parked before and behind the bus, indicating that Far Long Sin was getting a nice volume of business tonight. There was music inside, and King got a glimpse of couples dancing on the small island platform in the center of the dining room. He passed the restaurant, and came abreast of the narrow alley alongside the Far Long Sin building.

Suddenly he became taut and motionless. There was something going on in that alley— something silent and sinister. He caught the sound of scuffling feet and muted grunts, and then a queer gurgling oath in Cantonese.

It was pretty dark there in the alley, except for a faint trickle of light slanting down from a hallway window in the side of the restaurant building. He caught a blur of swirling figures— four or five of them in black jackets, with steel flashing dully in their hands— surging in upon a single, lone figure which stood with its back to the wall.

And then King uttered a gasp of amazement. For the light in the window above streamed momentarily across the face of that lone defender, and he saw that it was a woman— a white girl with a slim, supple figure, a long firm throat, and coils of black hair piled high upon her head. She was desperately fighting off the Chinese. Her sole weapon of defense was a black leather handbag, with which she was attempting to ward off the biting thrust of those blades.

King's lips tightened, and he came into the alley on the run. His rubber-soled shoes made no noise. As he smashed into the rear of those Chinese, he vaguely wondered why the girl had not cried out for help.

He brought his cane down with a thud upon the head of the nearest Chinese, and felt bone crack under the blow.

The others hissed in startled alarm and swung around— with knives glistening in their hands.

"Slink away, jackals!" King said in perfect Cantonese. He threw a side glance at the girl and saw that she was staring at him with a queer half-smile upon her lips.

The Chinese hatchet men did not retreat. One of their number hissed a low command, and they all surged in at him with knives held low like swords, for the deadly disemboweling stroke which has been used by Oriental knife men since time immemorial.

King laughed deep in his throat. He always experienced a strange exhilaration at the scent of battle. He took a swift step backward, and felt the comforting solidity of the wall behind him. At the same time, his right hand gripped the middle of the cane while his left seized the silver knob. He pulled on the knob, and a glittering arc of whirring Damascus steel flickered before the astonished eyes of the on-surging knife men. The blade licked out like a striking cobra and bit deeply into the throat of the nearest Chinese.

A gurgling cry escaped from the man's throat. Blood gushed as he fell away. King jerked his sword free, sent it once more in a glittering arc that kept the remaining Chinamen at bay. One of their number, half a dozen feet behind the others, lifted a long knife, holding it by the blade between the tips of his thumb and forefinger, poising to throw.

King saw him out of the corner of his eye. He knew the deadly accuracy with which these men could hurl a knife, for he had seen it done a thousand times both here in Chinatown and in the far reaches of the Orient. He knew that when that man cast the knife, it would travel to its mark with the speed of light and would be as impossible to dodge as the steel-jacketed bullet from a machine gun.

Once more he laughed that deep, booming laugh of his. He took a quick step forward from the wall. His body fell into a long crouch, and his left arm went out in a deadly lunge. The sword pierced the vitals of the nearest Chinaman. The man screamed. King freed his sword, stepped in quickly and caught the falling man by the lapels of his alpaca jacket. He swung the wounded man around just as the knife thrower made his cast. The dagger hurtled through the air, straight and true. But instead of striking King's heart, it bit into the back of the wounded man whom King was holding.

Now there were only three of the knife men left. King came in at them, his swift-moving sword flashing in a blinding series of dazzling arcs as it lunged and circled before their eyes.

Suddenly one of the yellow men uttered a shrill squeal. "It is the Left-handed Swordsman!" he squeaked in Cantonese. "Flee... flee for your lives!"

And as abruptly as it had begun, the deadly battle ended. Three dark shapes scurried down the alley, running with their queer shuffling gait, and leaving their dead behind.

King did not attempt to pursue them. He stooped, and swiftly wiped the blade of his sword-cane on the jacket of the dead knife man. Then he sheathed the sword and turned to the girl. His eyes narrowed, and a thin smile tightened his features. The girl was gone!

He ran swiftly back to the street. He was just in time to see a black coupe gathering speed as it pulled away. He caught a fleeting glimpse of the white face of the girl at the wheel.

And then the coupe was gone, disappearing down the street with a spurt of power.

King gripped his sword-cane tightly. He had saved that girl from death— and she had not even stopped to thank him.

He turned, and went back to the alley. One of the Chinamen was dead. The other, whom he had run through the body and then used as a shield, was still living. King knelt beside this one. The man had only a few moments to live. He was breathing with difficulty. His slanted almond eyes squinted up at the Left-handed Swordsman with the peculiar look of Oriental fatalism which King knew so well. King's hands went to the man's shirt, opened it. They touched the small gold medallion hanging on a golden chain from the man's neck. The medallion had the figure of a four-headed dragon engraved upon its face, with each of the heads so cunningly wrought that streams of fire seemed to be darting from the nostrils.

King fingered the medallion, and his blood raced.

That same figure of a four-headed dragon was carved on the granite block above the entrance of the darkened Sun Tong building across the street.

The dying man never took his slant-eye gaze from King. There was a rattle in his throat as he spoke in Cantonese.

"Death walks by your side, Left-handed Swordsman! My tong brothers will know how to pay my debt for me— "

A horrid gurgling cough broke off the man's words. His body grew rigid with agony and then went limp. His head dropped back. He was dead!

## *2. The Manchu Skull*

KING stood up with a thoughtful frown. His mind went back to the warning of old Pu Yee. The venerable curio importer had used the same words: Death walks at your side!

And Pu Yee's prophecy was also being fulfilled: It is written that many shall die tonight!

As King turned away from the dead Chinaman, he felt the strange, mystic power of the Orient all about him.

His eye traveled to the lighted window in the side of the Far Long Sin building. It was only seven or eight feet above the ground, and it was open. He reached up and pulled a piece of black silk from a nail in the sill. That girl had been wearing a black silk dress.

His foot kicked against something small and hard, which rolled up against the wall and lay there glittering strangely. He bent and picked it up in his gloved fingers. And then, a long, low whistle escaped from his lips. The object he was

holding in his hand was round and smooth, almost half an inch in diameter. But, even in the semi-darkness, its scarlet pigeon-blood color was unmistakable.

Its presence here explained a good deal. In his pocket there was the letter which had brought him down here tonight. It was carefully and laboriously written in longhand:

*Honorable Christopher King:*

*I address myself humbly to you, a Superior Man. Knowing that you interest muchly yourself to purchasing Chinese objects of value, I making you the offer to sell to your Honorable Self the collection of Sung Dynasty Rubies of which I have been speaking with you in the past weeks. The Sung Rubies are about to coming to my hands tonight. One hundred and seven perfectly matched rubies of gorgeous color and purity. These rubies being worth almost a quarter million dollars American, but I wishing to sell at once. So if you will bring with you one hundred thousand dollars American tonight at nine, I gladly selling. Meet me outside of my restaurant at nine of the P.M. And please coming with great promptitude, for there is much danger with this undertaking.*

*I am begging to be considered your most humble, obedient and trustworthy slave,*

*On Long Sin.*

It was not the first time that King had done business with On Long Sin. King had lived in the Orient most of his life. It was there he had learned to use a rapier, and earned the name of Left-handed Swordsman. Now he was the United States purchasing agent for the American Museum of Oriental Art. He had bought several valuable objects from On Long Sin on behalf of the museum. Always the transactions had been secret, with much stage management. Tonight something had gone wrong!

He couldn't figure where the black-haired girl fitted into the picture. But she must have come out of that window, and she must have dropped the ruby. Now she was gone! And On Long Sin was late for his appointment. It was eleven minutes after nine o'clock.

King slipped the ruby into his pocket, and stepped warily out of the alley. He threw a swift glance up and down the street. Two slant-eyed Chinamen were shuffling casually along on the opposite side as if they were out for a stroll, without any definite objective. They did not look in his direction, did not show in any way that they were interested in him. But King's scalp crawled just a little. In some uncanny way, he was aware that many hidden eyes were focused upon the mouth of the alley. He had just killed two men of the Sung Tong, and the honor of the society would not permit those killings to go unavenged. From this moment on, he would be walking in constant danger of a knife in his back.

He turned away from the alley and walked over in front of the lighted entrance of the Far Long Sin Restaurant. He held his cane lightly in his left hand. His right was in his pocket, fingering the ruby. He saw the two Chinamen across

the street stop and look over toward him. By the cut of their alpaca jackets and by the build of their huge, rawboned bodies, he knew them for paid hatchet men of the Sung Tong. Men like these were brought in from the North of China to do the tong's killings. They were of a different race from the smaller knife men he had encountered in the alley. These big, raw-boned North-of-China boys were raised from infancy for the sole purpose of being apprenticed out to tongs in America. If they died in a foreign land in the service of the tong, their bodies were shipped back for honorable burial at home; and their families were paid a sum in American dollars which enabled them to live in comfort for the rest of their lives. These hatchet men would not flee from his sword as had the knife men in the alley.

King smiled crookedly to himself. He turned his back on the two hatchet men, and went into the Far Long Sin Restaurant.

They were no longer dancing inside. The dancing had given place to a floor show which was focusing the breathless attention of the pop-eyed sightseers upon the stage, where two huge, iron-muscled Manchus were putting on a ceremonious broadsword contest. The two contestants were clad in white tights. They faced each other, moving about with skillful and wary footwork to the accompaniment of wheezy Chinese music which came from somewhere in the wings. Each man had a tremendous broadsword almost six feet long which was so heavy that it required two hands to lift and swing. They danced about each other with the swords held high above their heads, and, as opportunity presented, they swung down with such deadly force that if the sword connected, it would split the opponent's head in two. But these men were so skillful in warding and parrying, that the blows never landed.

King threaded his way among the tables toward the rear of the restaurant, making for the door which he knew led to the private rooms above, as well as to the office of the owner. But before he reached that door, he was intercepted by a stout, suave Chinaman in evening dress who managed to get in his way without actually seeming to bar his progress.

"Welcome, indeed, King san. We are honored by your presence."

The fat Chinaman's lips were smiling, but there was no smile in his eyes. He did not move out of the way.

"Hello, Fung Tze," King said with deceptive mildness. "Do you mind if I go up to see On Long Sin?"

Funz Tze did not move. "I am so sorry, Mr. King. My master, On Long Sin, is not here now. Perhaps I could help you."

"I am wondering if there was a girl here tonight— a very beautiful white girl, with great coils of black hair. She was wearing a black silk dress."

Abruptly, Fung Tze's eyes became veiled. "I have not seen such a girl in the dining room, Mr. King."

"Perhaps she was upstairs. I think I'll go up and look around."

"I am still so sorry, Mr. King. The upstairs is closed."

"Not to me, my friend!"

King took a short step forward, very slowly.

Fung Tze's slanted eye dropped to the cane. Then his glance lifted to King's face. He shrugged.

"The wise man knows when to yield to superior force!" he quoted. "But I warn you, King san, that if you go upstairs tonight, you go into a danger that is more deadly than even your sword!"

King smiled thinly. "Thank you for the warning, Fung Tze," he said.

The fat Chinaman moved aside reluctantly.

King opened the door and stepped through.

There was no one in the hall here. He mounted the first flight of stairs, and stopped beside the open hall window. This was the window which faced on the alley. He looked out, and his hand tightened on his cane. The bodies of the two dead Chinamen were no longer there. The Sung Tong had come quickly to take away its dead. There would be no recourse to the law of the white man. The tongs administered their own law here in Chinatown.

King shrugged, and went on up the stairs. The old, musty building had an air of staleness and death. Nobody knew how many unfortunates had died in the countless rooms along this corridor— under the knives of yellow killers. King walked stiffly along the corridor, with the cane in his right hand, the knob gripped in his left. He trod lightly on the floor, making no sound, his ears keenly attuned for the first whisper of movement from any quarter. At the rear of the building, he stopped before a door. He rapped lightly with the knob of his cane. There was no answer.

Only a faint trickle of Chinese music drifted up from the restaurant below. Otherwise there was no sound. King's gloved hand turned the knob of the door. He thrust it open. A single light from a desk lamp illumined the room. Alongside the desk a leather hatbox stood on the floor.

King's glance rested only for an instant upon that hatbox. Then he gazed bleakly upon the body of On Long Sin in the chair behind the desk.

On Long Sin was sprawled out with his arms dangling at his sides, his head hanging almost straight down over the back of the chair. His throat had been cut from ear to ear. The knife lay on the desk where it had been dropped by the killer.

Tautly, King came into the room. His glance swung keenly from object to object, and returned to that hatbox on the floor beside the dead body.

He knelt beside the desk, carefully lifted the lid of the hatbox.

He sucked in his breath sharply. A shimmering iridescently green skull rested in the hatbox. It was not a human skull. It was carved out of lustrous jade. But so

cunningly had the sculptor wrought, that were it not for the shimmering luster of the precious jade, one might have thought it to be the skull of some long-dead Manchu emperor. The artist had sealed the open orifices of the mouth, nose and eyeballs with patches of white nephritic jade which contrasted sharply with the greenish color of the rest of the skull.

King carefully lifted the Manchu skull out of the hatbox. There was an excited glitter in his eyes. He had come here to buy the Sung Dynasty Rubies. But here was a Chinese antique which was impossible to purchase at any price. To his knowledge, there were only three of them in the world. One of them was at present in the American Museum of Oriental Art, for which he worked. The other two were known to be in the possession of old and honorable Chinese families, who would never have parted with them for an emperor's ransom.

King ran his fingers expertly over the surface of the exquisitely wrought jade. In a moment he assured himself that this was an authentic Manchu skull— one of the three known to be in existence.

He held it up to the light, and the gaunt, scarified bones of the Manchu emperor seemed actually to come to life in his hands. At the top of the skull there was a small opening; plugged with a cork of white jade. He removed the cork, and inserted his finger. The inside of the skull had been carved out so that there was a hollow receptacle. He shook the skull but got no sound. The receptacle was empty.

Carefully, almost religiously, King replaced the Manchu skull in the hatbox and closed the lid.

Abruptly, he heard a noise behind him. He whirled, lithe as a panther, in time to see the door thrust open.

The stout, suavely smiling Fung Tze carne into the room. He said nothing, but stepped to one side. Immediately after him, entered the two broadsword fighters who had been giving the exhibition of deadly skill downstairs. They still wore tights. Each still gripped his huge six-foot broadsword. Those blades were not pointed at the end, but they were honed to a deadly cutting-edge which could bite through flesh and bone without effort.

The second of the two swordsmen kicked the door shut behind him. Then the two athletes gripped their swords in both hands and stood with their eyes upon King.

King gripped the silver knob of the sword-cane in his left hand. He grinned crookedly at Fung Tze.

"Is this what you meant when you warned me that I would be walking into danger?"

The fat Chinaman nodded gravely.

"I am so sorry, King san. I have just learned of the fight in the alley. The girl with the black hair escaped. But it is believed that she gave you the Sung

Dynasty Rubies. You must turn them over to me at once. Do so, and you may go from here unharmed. You shall even be forgiven for the deaths of two men of the Sung Tong."

"And if I don't turn them over, Fung Tze?"

"Then I am so sorry, King san. You will be killed by these two swordsmen, and we will take the rubies from you. The Sung Dynasty Rubies are not to be sold. They must be returned to the homeland."

"I have no rubies," said King.

Fung Tze sighed. "You have been long known among the Chinese as the Left-handed Swordsman. You have been honored by our countrymen, who have found you a man of your word. If you say you have no rubies, then it must be so. But if that is the case, it follows that the black-haired girl has them. We must know where she is to be found. Tell us, King san, and you may still go free."

King shook his head. "I don't know who she is. I never saw her before."

"You are only trying to protect her. It is honorable for a white man to lie to protect a white woman. But in this case it means your life, King san. The girl killed On Long Sin. She must pay the tong penalty. Speak, King san. Where is she?"

King smiled faintly. "You're right on one point, Fung Tze. Even if I knew who she was, or where to find her, I'd certainly not tell you."

Once more the fat Chinaman sighed. He spoke a sharp command to the two Manchu swordsmen.

"I am so sorry for everything, King san," he murmured, and he opened the door and slipped out.

King was left alone in the room with the two Manchus.

Their narrow slanted eyes never left his face. They lifted their heavy broadswords high above their heads, and came around the desk, skirting the dead body of On Long Sin.

King stood still, apparently loose-limbed and relaxed. But one could not fail to see the hot glint of his eyes.

The two swordsmen came at him from the right and from the left. One of them barked a singsong word to the other, and they charged in. The great broadswords cut down at King's head in deadly power-strokes.

King did not jump backward, as they had expected. He was thoroughly familiar with the science of broadsword dueling. The expert swordsman swings down at his opponent, knowing that the inexpert opponent will surely leap back in a desperate effort to avoid the cutting edge of the blade. The swordsman then takes a quick step forward even as he slashes, so that the keen blade overtakes the victim, cleaving his skull in two.

But, instead of retreating, King crouched low and leaped forward.

He came in under the two blows, and the heavy blades missed him and bit into the floor.

Simultaneously, King's glittering rapier slithered out of the scabbard as he drew it with his left hand. He pivoted on his left heel and lunged. The point of the rapier plunged into the body of the Manchu on King's left. It went in just above the heart.

The Manchu's white tights became suddenly spattered with blood.

King withdrew the rapier just in time, as the man choked and fell forward on his face— the great broadsword clattering to the floor.

King swiveled around to face the attack of the second Manchu. This time the yellow man did not raise his broadsword in the air. He kept it waist-high, slashing sideways with it in a blow which could easily cut a man's body in half. There was no escaping that slashing broadsword. In the split second before it struck, there was no time to leap back beyond the reach of the six-foot blade. Neither could King bend low enough to duck. Instead, King met that blow, parrying it with his thin blade of Damascus steel.

It seemed impossible that the frail rapier could arrest the terrific weight of that broadsword. Already there was a vindictive smile of triumph upon the Manchu's face.

The thin, pliable blade of Damascus steel met the great broadsword in midair. Sparks flashed as the two weapons grated. The rapier bent far back under the impetus of the broadsword. But King's iron wrist held it firm.

The edge of the broadsword slid up along the side of the rapier until it struck the guard just below the silver knob. As it struck, King flipped his wrist up expertly, and the great sword went slashing past King's scalp, not touching him.

The Manchu yelled with rage, and reversed the edge, bringing the weapon back for another slashing blow.

King did not attempt to parry this time. He lunged! His rapier caught the Manchu under the chin, and the thrust sent the point up through the top of his skull.

The great broadsword fell from the man's hand. He was dead before King got the rapier out again.

King's face was inscrutable as he wiped the rapier and slid it back into the scabbard. His eyes were stormy as he looked at the bodies of the two dead Manchus, and at that of On Long Sin.

It is written that many shall die tonight!

Pu Yee's prophecy was being amply fulfilled.

He picked up the hatbox containing the Manchu skull, and slowly walked out of the room.

Downstairs, he saw Fung Tze suavely welcoming a new party of guests, as if nothing were happening up above.

Fung Tze turned and saw him.

The fat Chinaman seemed to congeal within himself. For a moment, his eyes betrayed him, reflecting stark unbelief that King could still be alive. Then he swiftly regained command of himself. He bowed from the waist.

"You are a man of many surprises, King san!" he murmured. "Have you killed my two Manchus?"

King studied him a moment. "I could kill you now, Fung Tze. I could draw my sword and run you through!"

Fung Tze smiled at him as if he were merely carrying on a casual conversation with a guest. No one in the restaurant could suspect, to look at them, that these two were discussing life and death.

"Undoubtedly you could kill me, King san. But you will not do it. In the first place, you are not one to kill an unarmed man. In the second place, there are many witnesses. It would be murder under the white man's law."

King smiled grimly. "All right, Fung Tze. I suppose you know I'm going to notify the police?"

Fung Tze turned and spoke swiftly to a passing Chinese waiter. The man stopped short for an instant, as if he had been shot. Then he nodded and hurried away, calling to several other waiters who left their trays and hurried out after him.

Fung Tze's thick lips became wreathed in a smile. "You will only be laughed at if you call the police, King san. By the time you return, there will be no bodies upstairs. The rugs and the furniture will be changed. There will be no sign of bodies or of a fight. The police will think that you are mad."

For the first time, Fung Tze's eyes dropped to the hatbox in King's left hand. He stiffened visibly, and his face congealed into a yellow mass.

"The Manchu skull— you are taking it away!"

King nodded grimly. "It goes to the museum. I will pay the value of this skull to the family of On Long Sin."

Fung Tze's eyes blazed suddenly. "You are a daring and a foolish man, King san. Believe me, you will soon join your ancestors!"

King shrugged. He turned and walked out of the Far Long Sin Restaurant.

### *3. Trapped!*

OUTSIDE, something had happened to the bright neon sign in front of the building. It had gone out, as had the street lamp directly opposite. This portion of the block was now in almost total darkness.

King discerned the skulking shadows of the two Sung Tong hatchet men, down near the mouth of the alley.

He transferred the sword-cane to his left hand and the hatbox to his right. Then he started to walk slowly toward the corner. The two tong men came after him, not trying to catch up, but keeping him in sight.

At first, King was puzzled by this. For if they intended to attack, there was no better place than right here.

A moment later, he understood the strategy. He caught sight of several other shapes, waiting ahead. There were men at either end of the block, so that no matter which direction he had taken from the Far Long Sin building, they could intercept him.

There was another thing which puzzled him, too. He couldn't decide whether Fung Tze had acted independently in setting the two broad-swordsmen upon him, or whether he was in league with the Sung Tong. Also, he could not bring himself to believe that the girl with the dark hair had cut On Long Sin's throat.

In any event, he understood clearly that the Sung Tong did not intend to allow him to leave Chinatown alive. They must know that he had the hundred thousand dollars in his pocket, for they had known of his appointment. They must also know what he was carrying in the hatbox. The Manchu skull was worth a small fortune— far more than the hundred and seven Sung Dynasty rubies. The Sung Tong was not going to let him take it away.

He saw those shadows ahead of him converge toward a spot about a hundred feet ahead, to cut him off! There were two men on the sidewalk, and two more were crossing the street.

He did not slacken his pace. But as he walked he twisted the knob of his cane, so that a single flip of the wrist would send the scabbard slithering away, leaving the naked blade in his hand.

At the same time he did not allow those converging shadows to monopolize his attention. He was aware that these hatchet men of the Sung Tong knew his reputation. In the past, many men here in Chinatown had tried, for one reason or another, to kill the Left— handed Swordsman. None of those were alive today!

These hatchet men might be trying a trick. They might be hoping to attract his attention, while one of their number ambushed him with a thrown knife from one of the dark doorways or alleys along the route. So King kept his eyes on the buildings he passed, watching for any sign of stealthy movement.

Now, only twenty feet separated him from the hatchet men ahead, while those behind were hurrying a little so as to come up with him. They meant to overwhelm him by the very weight of their numbers.

King gripped the knob of his sword-cane tightly. He wondered if this was to be his last adventure. He stopped walking, and put the hatbox down at his feet. He drew the sword out of its scabbard.

The hatchet men crowded in toward him. Knives appeared in their hands. They held them by the tips. They were going to throw. They knew very well that King never carried a gun, relying always upon his sword-cane. So they had the advantage of him.

King started to leap back toward a doorway.

And, suddenly, a long black coupe, which had been parked down near the corner, came roaring down the street with its horn screaming.

King's eyes glittered. He couldn't be mistaken. That was the coupe of the black-haired girl.

The hatchet men turned, startled at the sudden clamor of sound in the street which had, until a moment ago, been deathly quiet. And then their voices rose in screams of terror. For the coupe jumped the curb and headed directly for them.

She slowed down and came to a stop. Then she turned and looked at him questioningly.

King twisted around and glanced through the rear window. There was no sign of pursuit. He fixed his eyes on the girl.

"Why did you come back?" he asked.

The great black coils of hair which crowned her head were disarranged. There was a long rip in her black silk evening gown. Her eyes, black enough to match her hair, were wide open, flashing with excitement.

King decided that she was much younger than he had thought she was. Also that she was certainly no harpy of evil, as old Pu Yee had hinted.

"Why did you come back?" he repeated, a little more gently. "You got away safely."

"I hated myself!" she said quickly. "I hated myself for running away and leaving you like that. I came back to see what had happened to you." She hesitated an instant, then: "I heard what those knife men called you. You are King, the Left-handed Swordsman."

"You've heard of me?"

"Indeed, yes. I've lived in China for five years. I'm Roxanna Moore. I traveled up and down the Yangtze with my father, who was a missionary. Your name is a byword throughout Shansi and Hopei Provinces. They still talk of the time when you rescued Chiang Kai-Chek from the bandits in the hills behind Tientsin— with only a sword-cane for a weapon."

"Thank you," King said coldly. "But let's talk about something more important. A man was murdered tonight in the Far Long Sin Restaurant. That man was supposed to sell me something. You climbed out of the window of the restaurant. Fung Tze says it was you who cut the throat of On Long Sin."

Roxanna Moore's eyes grew even wider. "No, no! On Long Sin was alive when I came into that room. Then the lights went out, and someone came in

and grappled with me. There was more than one man, for someone was fighting with On Long Sin. On Long Sin cried out something, but it was in a dialect I didn't understand. Then the attackers ran from the room. I groped my way into the hall and saw the window; so I climbed out. Those knife men were waiting in the alley. They attacked me, and you came."

"What were you doing in the office of On Long Sin?" King asked.

She studied his face for a long minute, as if wondering how far she could trust him. Then she seemed to make up her mind. "I've got to trust someone tonight. I... I brought the Manchu skull to On Long Sin. It was in this hatbox."

"I... I smuggled it in when I came back from China."

King's eyes narrowed. "You smuggled it? For Heaven's sake— why?"

She gulped. Her lower lip began to tremble just a little. "The Sung Tong made me do it. My brother, Dan, has been living here in New York. He worked for an importing house, and he got to know On Long Sin and Fung Tze. He played fan-tan upstairs in the gaming rooms, and he lost heavily. He forged a check and gave it to On Long Sin, and they found him out. The Sung Tong kidnaped him, and they sent word to me that if I wanted ever to see Dan alive again, I must smuggle in the Manchu skull. They arranged everything, and all I had to do was to carry the hatbox off the boat. I had the skull covered with an ordinary hat, but it wasn't necessary. The customs officer didn't even open the hatbox. I brought it directly to On Long Sin."

King stared at her almost suspiciously. "Do you mean to say that the Sung Tong is holding your brother a prisoner— here in New York?"

"I don't know where, but I know he's a prisoner. They brought me a letter from him to prove it."

"All right," said King. "Go on! What happened when you brought the hatbox to On Long Sin's office?"

"I've told you."

He smiled faintly and shook his head. "You haven't told me everything. You haven't told me about the rubies."

Roxanna Moore looked utterly blank. "What rubies?"

Silently he took the pigeon-blood ruby from his pocket and held it up. "Haven't you seen this before? With a hundred and six like it?"

She shook her head. "It's beautiful. But this is the first time I've seen it."

King sighed. "Those rubies were hidden in the Manchu skull. There is a cunning receptacle in it. The rubies came in the skull."

She stared at him, aghast. "You... you think I'm lying to you?"

"I don't know what to think," he said wearily. "But if your story is true, I'll help you. Come with me."

He helped her out of the car, and picked up the hatbox. Then he guided her to a doorway a few feet back.

"This is my office," he told her. "It's the only place in New York where you'll be safe tonight. The Sung Tong is after your life."

King's office was a small street-front store. The glass window and the glass panel of the door were protected by heavy steel-wire grating. The glass itself was bullet proof. On the window there appeared Chinese lettering, and alongside it, the same words in English:

CHRISTOPHER KING
Resident Buyer Of Oriental Antiques

King opened the door and led her inside. He went to the back of the office and placed the hatbox with the Manchu skull in the wall safe.

He saw Roxanna watching him.

"What are you going to do?" she asked in a small voice.

"I'm going to check on your story," he informed her. "If it's true that your brother is a prisoner of the Sung Tong, I'll find him for you. And incidentally, I intend to find the murderer of On Long Sin!"'

He swung the safe door closed and twirled the dial.

"Stay right here," he told Roxanna. "You'll be as safe here as in a fortress. Open for no one— no one at all. Understand?"

She nodded. "But why should you do all this for me? I'm a stranger to you. Because of me, you've made enemies of the powerful Sung Tong. They'll kill you on sight— "

He smiled. "I was in a pretty tight place when you appeared with your coupe. I'm grateful for that."

Suddenly there were tears in the eyes of Roxanna Moore. "I'm afraid for you. A Mongolian fortune-teller read my palm in Shanghai just before I embarked. He said that I would bring death wherever I went. I laughed at him then. But so many men have died tonight. And now you're going— "

He stroked her hair. "Don't worry. The Left-handed Swordsman is pretty hard to kill. I think you've told me the truth, Roxanna. I'll find your brother for you."

He pulled down the Venetian blinds over the window, so that no one could look in. Then he left her and went out, setting the double locks on the door so that they clicked shut behind him.

He got into Roxanna's coupe and drove it around the block. It was a rented Drive-Yourself car. But the hatchet men of the Sung Tong would recognize it, and he didn't want it in front of his office as a signpost for them.

He left the car and walked slowly back to Pell Street.

### *4. The Venerable Leader*

PELL STREET was still ominously quiet. The neon sign in front of the Far Long Sin Restaurant was once more alight, but the street lamp opposite had not been repaired. Also, there were lights in the Sung Tong building.

King twirled his cane as he approached the Sung Tong headquarters. His muscles were taut and ready. He saw a small group of the big, raw-boned hatchet men in front of the building entrance. They spotted him at the same time.

Their hands slid into their sleeves, where they kept the long, hungry knives.

King came to a stop, facing them.

"I wish to speak with the Venerable Leader of the Sung Tong," he said in Cantonese. "I have the Manchu skull. If you kill me now, the skull will be lost to you forever."

The hatchet men shuffled uncertainly. They glanced at each other.

At last one of them said: "Wait here! Do not go away, King san."

He turned and disappeared into the building. The others watched King impassively, beady eyes fastened upon him, hands still hidden in their sleeves.

The man was not gone more than two minutes. He appeared in the doorway and said: "Enter, King san. But the Venerable Leader instructs me to say that you enter without the protection of the Sung Tong's hospitality. You may not enjoy the privileges of an invited guest."

King smiled tightly. "I understand. If I were to have the privileges of an invited guest, the tong would be obligated to see that I departed in safety."

"You know our customs as well as we ourselves, King san!" the Chinese murmured. "We honor you for a brave man. And we are sorry that you are coming to your death! But first, since you ask it, you shall be allowed to speak with the Venerable Leader."

King shrugged. He twirled the cane, and mounted the steps. He passed between the tense and silent hatchet men, and stepped into the hallway of the Sung Tong building.

At once the hatchet men came in behind him. The door closed.

King followed his guide down a carpeted hallway. He was conscious of the hatchet men close behind him.

At the end of the hallway, the guide pulled aside a rich Bokhara tapestry which covered a doorway. He stepped aside and motioned with his hand.

King stepped past him into the audience room of the Sung Tong.

His feet sank deep into the thick-napped Afghanistan rug which covered the entire floor. His nostrils dilated with the odor of incense from two braziers on either side of a high ceremonial chair in the center of the room, where sat the Venerable Leader of the Sung Tong, clad in a long silken gown of purest white, and a black skullcap.

King stopped stock-still just within the room, staring with narrowed eyes at this powerful chief of the Sung Tong.

"Pu Yee!" he exclaimed.

The venerable old curio importer was hardly recognizable now, attired in the rich ceremonial vestments.

"My heart is very heavy, King san," he said in Cantonese, "that you come now as an enemy of the Sung Tong. I cherished you always as a friend. I tried to warn you, hoping that you would go back, and not mix yourself with the affairs of the tong."

King came forward slowly, until he was less than ten feet from Pu Yee. The hatchet men moved up quickly, and ranged themselves on either side of him, as if to prevent him from doing harm to their leader. Their slant eyes were fixed upon the sword-cane in King's hand. They knew how swiftly it could flick out of the scabbard and strike. Their hands came out of their sleeves with knives. They would make sure that no harm came to their chief.

But Pu Yee smiled sadly and motioned to them to do nothing.

"It is written that you must die, King san. You have killed men of the Sung Tong. The honor of the society demands your life. But out of friendship, I will hear what you wish to say."

"Thank you," said King. He stood stiff as a ramrod before the old man, his eyes cold and hard. "Since it is to be war, Pu Yee, I will state my message quickly. I have the Mahchu skull in my possession. You are holding here as a hostage, a boy— Daniel Moore. I will give you the Manchu skull in return for his life and for a promise that you will molest neither him nor his sister."

A queer light flickered in Pu Yee's eyes. "And for yourself? You ask nothing for yourself?"

King smiled crookedly. "I will take care of myself."

"I would rather," said Pu Yee, "that it was your own life, King san, for which you bargained."

"I do not bargain for that which is my own," King told him coldly. "If I die, then I do not deserve to live."

Pu Yee regarded him thoughtfully. "You are a very brave man, King san. You are the very model of what our sacred Kung-Fu-Tze would have called a superior man. I will be grieved when you are dead. Believe me, I shall be very sad."

King shifted impatiently. "What is your answer to my proposition? I offer you the Manchu skull for the lives of Roxanna Moore and her brother."

"The girl must also give us the Sung Dynasty rubies. That is part of the price for her life. She has brought much grief to the Sung Tong, and she must pay a high price. It is true that we compelled her to smuggle the Manchu skull. But she took advantage of that to bring the rubies through the customs, hidden in the

skull. Those rubies were stolen from an honorable mandarin family who are Sung Tong brothers. She must return them or pay for them."

"Roxanna Moore hasn't got the rubies," King said levelly. "She didn't know they were in the skull. It was On Long Sin who did that, on his own hook. He must have had a confederate in Shanghai, who put the rubies in the skull. When Roxanna brought the skull to On Long Sin, someone else put out the lights, killed On Long Sin and took the rubies. The murderer dropped one of them out in the alley, so that suspicion would fall on Roxanna. She— "

He was interrupted by a voice from the doorway.

"He speaks the truth, Venerable Leader!"

King turned, and saw the fat Fung Tze standing in the doorway.

Fung Tze was sweating just a little as he came into the room. He had a leather-covered book in his hand. The edges of the pages were gilt.

"When we moved the furniture from the room where On Long Sin was killed, I found his diary in the desk."

He opened the book, revealing thick Chinese heiroglyphics covering the pages.

"On Long Sin writes here that the girl knew nothing of the rubies. He says that he did not plan to smuggle them in the skull, but that he received word from Shanghai that they would be in the receptacle. I read no further, but came here quickly— "

Pu Yee snatched the book from him. "It is impossible. No one else could have killed On Long Sin but the girl. Unless— " His eyes rested on Fung Tze, but he did not finish the sentence.

Fung Tze drew himself up proudly. "I have always served the Sung Tong loyally!"

"It is written that you must die, King san," Pu Yee said. "The honor of the society demands your life."

Pu Yee read hastily in the book. His face showed nothing. In a moment he looked up, and sighed.

"I am sorry, King san, but this changes nothing. We must be paid for those rubies— or the girl and her brother will die."

"In that case," said King, "there's no use wasting time!"

He slashed down with his cane at the nearest hatchet man, crashing the ferrule against the fellow's skull. Then he leaped forward before the others could bring their knives into play, and seized old Pu Yee by the arm. He yanked the old man from the chair, twisted his arm behind him, then swiveled around, facing Fung Tze and the hatchet men. Pu Yee's body was now a shield for King against thrown knives.

King did not exert pressure against Pu Yee's arm. He merely held him motionless. With his left hand, he flipped the cane so that the scabbard fell

away, leaving the blade naked and ready. He placed the point of the rapier against Pu Yee's side.

"Now we can bargain again," he said calmly. "Your life, Pu Yee, for the life of Daniel Moore. Order him released at once."

The hatchet men were crouching, with knives gripped by the blades, ready to throw if they got a chance. Fung Tze's hand stole into his pocket and came out with a gun. But he did not raise it, for it would have been impossible to hit King without striking Pu Yee.

Pu Yee stood calmly with King's blade at his side. "It seems," he said sadly, "that superior force must have its way. The young man shall be released— "

His quiet tone was so deceptive that King was almost lulled into a false sense of security. He was almost unprepared for the swift and deadly jujitsu trick which the old man attempted.

Pu Yee twisted like a contortionist, throwing the weight of his body away from the arm lock, at the same time bringing his free hand around in a savage blow aimed at the side of King's neck.

That blow, with the edge of the hand, has been known to kill a man. King had seen it done. One who was not familiar with that trick might not have understood the danger. But King knew.

He bent his head down, burying his neck, so that the edge of Pu Yee's stiff hand struck the top of his head instead. He dared not let go of Pu Yee, for that would mean an avalanche of knives from the hatchet men. So he kept his grip on the old man's arm, and dropped to the floor, dragging Pu Yee with him. He wound his arm around Pu Yee's waist and lifted him over his shoulder, keeping the bulk of his body between himself and the knife men.

Pu Yee squirmed and clawed, struggling madly.

King saw the knife men spreading out in a circle to come at him from all sides. He held the clawing, scratching old man on his shoulder, and began to back swiftly toward the door behind the chair. He did not know where it would lead, but he had no choice.

"Kill him!" screamed Pu Yee. "Do not let him escape— "

And then something happened— something which brought a sudden hush as of death upon the room.

A cascade of lustrous, pigeon-blood rubies began to pour down upon the thick-napped Afghanistan rug.

They were falling from somewhere beneath the ceremonial robe of Pu Yee!

The tong knife men stopped still in their stride. Fung Tze uttered a low gasp. The eyes of all the yellow men became suddenly veiled and ominous.

King breathed a little sigh. Slowly, he allowed the suddenly quiet Pu Yee to slide down from his shoulder. Then he went across the room, past the frozen tong men, and picked up the scabbard from the floor. No one stopped him. No

one looked at him. All eyes were focused in silent and dreadful condemnation upon the Venerable Leader of the Sung Tong.

It was Fung Tze who spoke first.

"King san, the Sung Tong owes you apology and reparation. We never thought that our own Venerable Leader had the rubies which we demanded of you. We never thought— that Pu Yee would be a traitor to the tong!"

King sheathed his sword. He smiled grimly. He looked at old Pu Yee, who stood silent and motionless, with the resigned, fatalistic look of the Orient upon his parchment-like face.

"It was Pu Yee," said King, "who engineered the smuggling of the rubies in the Manchu skull. It was he who entered the office and killed On Long Sin. When he left the restaurant, he saw me coming up Pell Street and attempted to turn me back, knowing that I would complicate things."

Pu Yee bowed his head. "It is all true. I saw a vision of wealth and power. With the Sung Dynasty rubies, I could have gone to another land and set myself up as a prosperous mandarin. I could have lived a life of ease."

Fung Tze motioned to two of the hatchet men. They stepped forward and ranged themselves on either side of Pu Yee. The old man raised his head.

"I am ready!"

Slowly, with the two executioners at his side, he marched out of the room.

"What are you going to do with him?" King asked Fung Tze.

The fat Chinaman looked away. "Do not ask, King san. The Sung Tong has its own mode of punishment for traitors. It were better that you did not know. I shall order that the boy, Daniel Moore, be freed. These rubies— they are yours for the price which On Long Sin set: one hundred thousand dollars."

King nodded. He took the money out of his wallet and handed it over. The hatchet men, at a nod from Fung Tze, began to pick up the scattered rubies.

"Get them ready," said King. "I'll be back to pick them up in twenty minutes— and to get Daniel Moore. I'll have the Manchu skull with me. It's yours."

He started for the door.

"Where do you go, King san?" Fung Tze inquired.

At the door, King turned and grinned slowly. "There's a black-haired girl in my office who thinks she's a jinx. I'm on my way to tell her different!"

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## 21: The House in the Forest

***Katharine Tynan***

1859-1931

*The Queenslander*, 8 May 1920

FROM THE HIGH, BARRED WINDOW of a house in the Forest of Arles, a pair of brown eyes looked down pitifully into Pat Tyrrell's very blue eyes. He was quite sure the eyes were brown, though the girl stood at a considerable height above him. The window was in the gable end of a house, which else was hidden from the grassy forest road by high walls. The place looked like a convent or a prison.

Pat Tyrrell, who was a romantic young man, felt as though drawn upward by the spell of those brown eyes. He stood staring up, his straw hat in his hands, his curly fair hair shining in the sun. The girl in the window had a curious idea that he looked as though he wore a halo. At Harrow they had given Pat Tyrrell the nickname of the Seraph. He had certainly a shining look; such a clear bright look that he always stood out in any assemblage of young men.

He was a soldier though he was in mufti. His height and bearing, and the flame of his hair reminded the girl in the window of a St. Michael of Giorgione which she and her father had seen— was it last year, or the year before, or a hundred years ago?— in a dim Roman Church?

While Pat Tyrrell looked up at the brown eyes the girl's head was suddenly turned away from him. Her attitude was one of quick alarm. Plainly she listened. Then the window space was empty of her and Pat Tyrrell was left standing alone, looking up at the blank space from which she had flown.

He had promised himself to reach Noyeau that evening and to sleep in a big, rambling Lion d'Or where he would find a comfortable bed, good cookery, and a warm welcome. Suddenly he knew that he was not going to the Lion d'Or at Noyeau. He was going to see the end of the adventure.

He drew back within the shade of the trees that overhung the grassy road. Not a moment too soon. Someone came to the window from which Brown Eyes had vanished. Pat Tyrrell stood very still. He could see through the branches that moved in the summer wind, dappling his brown homespuns with light and shade.

"What a villainous face!" he said to himself.

The woman's face looking out was indeed sinister. It was a dark and heavy face, with a moustache. The eyes roved over his hiding place as though they would pierce the secret.

He retired a little way into the woods, and waited. As he had expected, the green gate in the high wall opened, and the woman came out and stood looking up and down the road. She was a grenadier, quite 6ft in height, and burly. He hated her from afar off. She was so swarthy so hard, and vindictive-looking.

He went back to the little inn he had passed earlier in the afternoon, "Aux Trois Poilus." and over an omelette and slices of pink ham, washed down with white wine, and fruit, and a cup of coffee to follow, Madame told him what she knew of the prison-house.

"It is but a madhouse," she said. "Not so understood— what you call a rest cure. It is no one's business."

She shrugged her comfortable shoulders. "Now and again there comes a doctor from Amiens. The owner (Mlle. Dubois) she puts an advertisement in the journals for patients. To my mind, she would frighten any one to madness. But there is nothing against her or her establishment. I let my tongue run too fast."

She went off, and there came into the veranda of the inn, blinking from the hot sun, an honest-looking middle-aged woman, obviously English. She sat down at one of the little tables and asked for a cup of tea, a request which Pat Tyrrell translated for Madame. The woman looked at him eagerly, a light of hope breaking over her face.

"You are English, sir?" she said.

"Yes." He was Irish, but he did not trouble to make the distinction. "Can I be of any service to you."

"I've had a long and weary journey," she said. "I was never out of England before; but the Lord sent people to help me on my way. I don't tell my business to everybody, but one and another helped me along. Could you tell me, sir, whether in this forest there's likely to be a place where they'd keep a young lady against her will?"

Her eyes searched his face with a painful eagerness.

"Tell me about the young lady," he said quietly. "There, don't hurry. Finish your tea. I can see you want it. You'd better have something more substantial. Some ham, an omelette; they are excellent. You can have a lodging for the night here."

"I haven't slept in a bed since I left England," she said, wearily. "And I've had an anxious time. You are very kind, sir. Maybe you would help me to find my young lady?"

"I shall try," he said, quite oblivious of the party of five good comrades who were to join him at the Lion d'Or for the walk into Italy.

Before she spoke he knew that she was in search of Brown Eyes.

"Poor lamb," she said. "I should never have left her, not if I was to be carried out screeching so I'd bring the police. That basilisk Mrs. Warburton, her stepmother, has put her away, giving out that she's lost her senses. Small wonder if she had, her dear papa dying suddenly, being found dead in his bed. Poisoned, I should think. And Mrs. Warburton all for her son by the first, Mr. Anthony Brooke. I don't know how she prevailed on the poor master to marry

her. Hard as nails she was, and I knew it the first day I laid eyes on her. But she took in the poor master; and now she's sent his darling child to the madhouse."

Pat Tyrrell listened eagerly. The rays of the afternoon sun were in his hair as he leant back in the long chair, smoking a cigarette, waiting for the woman to finish her meal.

He heard all the story bit by bit. The attached nurse, who had gone on to be her young lady's maid, had been dismissed after the death of George Warburton, the father of Brown Eyes, otherwise Nancy Warburton.

Pat nodded when he heard the name. He could have sworn the girl's name was Nancy. The nurse, Mrs. Bates, had retired, handsomely provided for, leaving her darling, most unwillingly, to be served by a smart French maid, whom she distrusted at sight. She had been uneasy at her sister's little cottage-farm in Norfolk, and she had come back to find Miss Nancy absent. The stepmother had explained to her that Miss Nancy was travelling with friends and had dismissed her. But as she left the room the French maid, who had evidently been listening at the keyhole, had beckoned her down a corridor to a little room where she sat sewing.

"That one there," she said, jerking her finger in the direction of the drawing-room Margaret Bates had just left, "I should like to— " she ground her teeth furiously— "wipe her out. She has me overworked; she insults me. That canaille there, asking if I have seen her ring. I go back to my own country, but first I tell you what I know. Your Mees Nancy, she is shut up, immured in a Maison de Sante in the Forest of Arles. I have discovered her secret. It is because Mees Nancy will not marry M. Antoin, that bete humaine, and give him her fortune. Madame has gone once, twice, to that house of terror. She has said: 'Will you marry my son?' and Mees Nancy has answered no. She will say yes, or she will go mad and die, and the money will be Madame's. So it was in the will of the unfortunate M. Warburton."

Finally she wrote down on a piece of paper the route which must be followed to come to the Forest of Arles. She had accompanied Nancy and her stepmother on that journey, which under the pretext of travel had ended in the prison-house of the Forest of Arles.

"I return to my own country to marry." she said, with a virtuous air. "I bring a dot to my man, but he would not like it if he knew about your Mees Nancy. So I have eased myself."

"Come with me!" said Pat Tyrrell to the nurse. They reached the ugly house in the midst of the beautiful forest as the sun was sinking behind the trees, turning all the forest to gold. Again there was the face at the window. It was turned away, with an air of flight as they first caught sight of it. Then the brown eyes looked down and suddenly the expression of the face changed. The girl did not yet see her faithful nurse; she was too busy looking into Pat Tyrrell's eyes.

Suddenly she snatched a rose from a bush that had somehow climbed the wall to peep in at the barbed window, and threw it down. It struck him in the face softly, like a caress. When he looked she was gone.

Margaret Bates was in tears. Her Miss Nancy had changed sadly for the worse. They were killing her child.

Pat Tyrrell comforted her as they walked back to the inn. They were going to rescue her young lady— but how?

Perhaps it would have been wisest to call in the law, but the law moves slowly. It was represented in the Forest of Arles by a solitary gendarme. It was a clumsy machinery to set in motion, and Pat Tyrrell was all aflame to rescue the imprisoned lady— the Barbara in her tower, as he called Nancy Warburton in his own mind.

There was left— to abduct her. It appealed much more to the romantic in Pat Tyrrell's nature than any staider method of procedure.

While they waited he had struck up a friendship with the wood-ranger in the employment of M. le Duc, who owned the Forest. The man was a Gascon, with a love for adventure equal to Pat's own. He had some evil tales to tell of the establishment of Mdme. Dubois— le Donjon, as he called it. Shrieks, groans, the rattling of chains, the sound of whips. Pat guessed that the Gascon invented a good deal. Impossible to say how much, but all the same his blood froze in his veins lest some of the tales should be true.

Gaston Galant, the wood-ranger, had a huge dog, very gentle with his master, but not safe with strangers. Pat thought Aristide might be useful to prevent pursuit. They had had communication with Nancy Warburton, and she was ready for anything. On the first moonless night she was to escape by the window, which was a staircase window. Gaston Galant had seen to it that the bars should move out of their places easily. They were, as a matter of fact, rusted through.

There was to be a motor in waiting, which would swiftly carry the rescued damsel, her rescuer, and the faithful nurse over the frontier, and speed them away to Paris and London.

The night came. All was ready; but when Pat Tyrrell ran the ladder to the window he found it heavily shuttered. Their plan must have been discovered.

He came back to earth raging, and then cold with sudden fear. Supposing they had taken away his Barbara out of his reach. The gaoler had looked capable of any villainy. She must have been well paid.

Margaret Bates wept quietly and wrung her hands. The dog, who had taken a fancy to her, pressed up against her, and there was the useless ladder standing by the wall, and, shining through the trees the two great eyes of the automobile that was to have carried them to safety and joy.

"But, m'sieu!" said Gaston. "The young lady is there. I have kept a watch on the house. It is but to scale the wall, demand admittance, and, if not given, smoke them out. Many a one may obtain deliverance besides Mademoiselle. It will be a scandal. In the light of the scandal the place cannot live. It will come to the ears of Monseigneur. Already the people are grumbling. We are so slow in the Forest of Arles."

Pat Tyrrel bade the nurse go to the motor and wait. They set the ladder against the wall. He and Gaston went up and drew the ladder after them, when Aristide had followed clumsily. They were in a dark garden full of gloomy trees.

Pat Tyrrel and Gaston stumbled towards the house. Turning the lantern they carried on to it, they saw stone areas running along the house, into which they might have fallen, and there would have been an end of them. In the middle a little flight of steps led to a nail-studded door, very strong, with a heavy knocker.

They knocked, and the sound echoed through the Forest. There was no answer. They knocked again, and again. There was no time to be lost. It was possible that while they wasted time here the girl might leave the house by the front entrance.

The terror of it made Pat Tyrrell agree to the 'smoking' out. A few armsful of twigs and leaves and dry grass against the heavy door, and in the areas made a prodigious crackling and smoke.

The fire had not gone far— Gaston was whispering that he could beat out the fire in two or three seconds— when the bolts of the door fell heavily, and Madame Dubois came out, looking more evil than ever in the smoke and flare.

She had not time to speak before Gaston Galant seized her, and placed her at the foot of the steps.

"Guard her, Aristide," he said, "Do not let her stir till I give thee leave."

He kicked away the thin fire from the door, and the wind blew it out. They rushed up through the house, opening doors as they went. Many a piteous voice called out to them for deliverance.

There was no time to wait. They answered that the doors were open. Any one who wished to go was free. At last Pat Tyrrell found his Barbara in a small room at the very top of the house, her delicate hands chained together, chains on her feet. She was fully dressed. He lifted her and carried her down the stairs. Heavens how light she was!

When he reached the central hall of the house he found that the front door was open. Gaston was standing by it, holding a lantern.

"The birds are free," he said. "There is not one mad among them. They will never come back again."

Pat Tyrrell set down the poor prisoner, and looked about for something with which to break the fetters. They were light enough he found on examination, to be broken by a strong hand, although they had held the girl so securely.

A little later and the automobile was speeding away northwards. Nancy Warburton and her nurse inside, Pat Tyrrell outside with the chauffeur. At Paris they waited an hour or two for food, and the purchase of some outdoor garments for Nancy, and then sped on again.

The girl lay hidden in a country village, of which Pat's great friend, Stephen Conyers was vicar, until one beautiful September morning they were married. Pat was not going to take any risks. As Nancy's husband he would be in the best position to defend her against all the world.

So it was as man and wife that the radiant young couple carried their amazing story to Mr. Butley, of Butley, Franks, and Solomans, Lincoln's Inn Fields, the distinguished firm of solicitors, who condescended to manage Pat Tyrrell's not very important affairs.

Mr. Butley, who had loved Pat's father, and was very fond of his son, lifted his hands in amazement over Pat's story. But, after all, Mrs. Tyrrell was charming, and he would be delighted to see them through.

The 'seeing them through' was exceedingly unpleasant for the second Mrs. Warburton and her son, and resulted in Mr. and Mrs. Pat Tyrrell being placed in possession of a beautiful house and a very comfortable fortune, while Mrs. Warburton thought well of taking what was hers, and going to live in another country. Mr. Butley's young friend had done extremely well for himself from a worldly point of view, but the impractical young man was rather annoyed than otherwise to find he had married a fortune.

SOME TIME LATER the married lovers revisited the Forest of Arles, where they had the warmest of welcomes from Gaston Galant, and from Madame of "Aux Trois Poilus." The house in the Forest stood empty. Dubois had disappeared after her flown birds.

"Look you, now, M'sieu," said Gaston Galant. "None of them will come back. They were no more mad than you or I. Some sheltered here in our cottage till their friends came and took them away, real friends, not such as had condemned them to a living death. There were some meetings! Ah! M'sieu, thou and I and Aristide, we did a good night's work when we broke that cage, and set the prisoners free."

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## 22: One Night in Somerset

***Edgar Wallace***

1875-1932

*Britannia and Eve*, July 1929

'BEGGARS,' said Audrey Bourne, 'can't be choosers.'

It is more than a little dangerous to base your life and future upon a platitude, even though that platitude has passed into proverb.

She was not exactly a beggar, for she had a thousand a year of her own, and the choice was hardly hers. There were certain overpowering relatives of hers, the half-millionaire uncle being the most dominant, who thought it would be an amazingly fine stroke of business to make her the Countess of Tenford, and, since she was heart-free and had the spurious philosophy which twenty acquires so readily— the keystone of that philosophy being that one man is very much like another— she accepted her fate though she hated Tenford Court, which was Tudor and comfortless, though she loathed Tenford Park with its gloomy trees that shut out all view, and she disliked Lady Tenford, soon to be Agatha, Dowager Countess.

Few people liked Lady Tenford, who was tall, and thin, and acrid; a woman with a large nose and a short upper lip; who knew the history of every coat of arms that jostled one another in the mullion windows of the Great Hall. She had been a Tenford before she had married the late earl, and could trace her line back to pre-Plantagenet times. To her Tenfordism was a religion, the name more sacred than any she murmured so mechanically in the big family pew at Tenford Church.

Audrey came to hate the name and found a welcome relief in discussing, with bated breath, the murderous eccentricities of a hideous assassin who at that time was setting the nerves of Somerset on edge so that nobody walked out at night.

Cattle had been maimed, a farmer on his way home had been struck down and left for dead, a row of cottages at Senthford— which was once Seventhford— had been fired in the night and a poor woman had died of shock.

Her ladyship discovered her interest in these fearful happenings and had squashed her.

'I don't think it is wise, my dear Audrey, and I am sure Harry would not like it, to discuss these dreadful things with servants. You must not forget that one day you will be the Countess of Tenford and between you and them there is a gulf...'

She enlarged upon the exaltation which awaited the girl till Audrey was almost rude. And then, mercifully, Audrey was called to Berlin.

She had, strangely enough, an interest in the estate of a dead aunt who was indubitably German by marriage. The law courts of Berlin required her presence.

It was not a very trying ordeal. Her business was finished the day she arrived, and she had a week left for sight-seeing.

In the ordinary and normal circumstances Audrey Bourne would never have become acquainted with 'Scarface.' She thought of him by this ugly title before she knew his name. She was rather young and very modern and had the trick of flippancy. Not that it was an unpleasing scar, or very noticeable: it followed the line of the lower jaw and was not more than two inches long. Otherwise he was quite good looking. Her first impression was that he was an army man; she amended this and decided, on the evidence of his intellect, that he was a schoolmaster on a holiday. He spoke German perfectly and she spoke it as she had been taught at school. It was in a curio shop near the Kurfürstendamm that he came fluently to her rescue, helped her with her purchases, and eventually walked with her through the Tiergarten to the Pariserplatz.

Two days later she saw him lunching alone at the Adlon and had coffee with him in the lounge. She did not ask his name; the head-waiter could not tell her when she asked; she knew that he was staying at the Eden and no more.

The acquaintance and its conditions would have been impossible in England; abroad one does singularly unconventional and even vulgar things and is thought none the worse of.

Had she told him she was visiting Potsdam and was approaching the home of military glory by way of the great lake? She rather thought that she had when she found him on the terrace of the Haus am See, with a table reserved for luncheon. They went across the lake together in a hired motor boat, through the Venetian waterways, to Potsdam, where her car was waiting. In the course of the trip she learned his name and his perfectly dreadful profession. She was genuinely shocked, though he seemed quite oblivious to his social inferiority.

She sat on the edge of her bed that night frowning at her indiscretions.

Why on earth had she told him about her engagement, about Harry and Lady Tenford, and everything? And why had he gaped at her when she told him of her engagement? That was an impertinence. Here was an acquaintance to be dropped instantly.

She went to the writing table and scribbled a note. She would not be able to lunch with him as arranged— she was terribly sorry. She left the note sealed on the table and went to bed.

In the morning she forgot to send it and lunched with him to her regret; for he was insufferable, plied her with questions, became almost proprietorial. It was now for the first time, she learned that he was neither army nor scholastic— he was in Berlin on quite a different errand. She might have borne the shock of this if he had not displayed an indecent interest in her future.

'But why marry anybody if you don't love them?' he asked. 'I think it is a horrible idea! After all, there are more important things than money— '

'Shall we talk about something else, please?' she asked coldly.

She left Berlin a day sooner than she had told him she was leaving and was unreasonably hurt because he did not come to the Friedrichstrasse station to see her off.

'A horrible man,' she said, and wished she had never met him.

She wished this through a sleepless night and in the dreary day journey between Dieppe and Calais, and on the boat and in the Pullman.

Lady Tenford met her at the Halt a few days later and thought she looked peaked.

'You must get some colour in your cheeks before Harry comes back. He is in town, having treatment for his ankle— you know when he was in the army he was shot at by a wretched native.'

HARRY TENFORD'S military career was a short one. He had served for two years with a crack cavalry regiment, had gone to India as ADC to a provincial governor, and resigning his post, had returned to England to a life of complete idleness.

He came down on the day of Audrey's arrival— a rather shy and awkward young man, too full of this forbidden subject for Lady Tenford's peace of mind. He was, it appeared, an amateur detective, had joined one of the search parties which went out to seek the unknown destroyer of the countryside peace, had theories upon which he would have enlarged if his dominating mother had not vetoed the discussion.

'They say he is a man from London ... The police found a footprint near the cottages ... Hobnail boots and that sort of thing ... Naturally they think he is a farm labourer. I pointed out to the inspector that that was probably a blind. Can't town people wear hobnail boots? They say they are bringing the best fellow down from Scotland Yard. It's going to be great fun— '

'It doesn't amuse me,' said her ladyship coldly. 'I would much rather you left this subject for the servants' hall to discuss. Audrey is not interested, neither am I.'

Audrey was very much intrigued at something he had said, but she did not feel that was the moment to display her interest. She had set her teeth for a very dull week, and had an idea that grimmer weeks would follow the 17th July which saw her by courtesy the mistress of Tenford Court.

THERE was a label on the window of the compartment which announced that it was reserved. Harry Tenford's heavy-jowled servant, who was standing in the corridor looking out on the station platform as the train began to move, took a half-step to check the intruder, but he had already pulled aside the sliding

door and had one foot in the compartment. Harry looked up over the magazine and scowled at the newcomer.

'The compartment,' he began, 'is reserved.'

'I am terribly sorry, I didn't notice it.'

Harry liked people instantly or disliked them instantly, generally unreasonably in either case. He liked this brown-faced man with his ready smile.

'Don't go, sit down. The beastly train is bound to be crowded. I generally travel *de luxe*,' he said apologetically. Then, looking past his guest, he nodded. 'It's all right. Sool, I have asked this gentleman to share my carriage.'

The heavy-faced man withdrew reluctantly and closed the door. Harry Tenford's guest had the impression that he would have welcomed the order to eject without ceremony this invader of his master's privacy.

'My name is Tenford. I suppose you are going on to Bath?' But the other man said:

'No. I hear the train is stopping at Tenford Halt by great good luck. I am staying with some people in the neighbourhood. You are not Lord Tenford?'

Harry grinned and nodded. He was a big, florid young man with thin fair hair and a bald forehead.

'Yes, that is my name. Who are you staying with? They must be neighbours of mine. You are in luck; this train doesn't usually stop at Tenford Halt, no trains do except by request. Do you know Somerset, Mr— ?'

The visitor took a card from his pocket and passed it across to his host.

'John Carberry,' read the other. 'I knew some Carberrys in India. A chap on the Viceroy's staff. You don't happen to be— ?'

'I have never been in India,' said John Carberry. 'I believe I have some relations in the Army, but I don't know them.'

Lord Tenford picked up his magazine again and turned the pages slowly. Presently he put the book down again.

'Are you staying over the week-end?'

'I hope I am staying a week,' said Carberry with a laugh. 'I have an invitation to come down to Braime. Lord Perley— '

'Perley? Good lord! He went abroad yesterday. I believe the house is shut up.'

Carberry looked at him with an expression of blank astonishment.

'That's bad news,' he said. 'It looks as if I had my journey for nothing. I was hoping to get some fishing, too. If I hadn't been a fool I should have telegraphed from Paris to tell him I was coming.'

Harry Tenford looked at him thoughtfully.

'You are not a doctor, are you?' he asked.

'No,' said the other, evidently surprised at the question.

'I only asked you,' Tenford explained hastily, 'because my mother dislikes doctors. She is one of these what-do-you-all-ums?'

'Christian Scientists?'

'In a way— yes. I mean, she goes to church, but she loathes doctors, my dear fellow. It's queer, isn't it? How can people get so prejudiced?'

He didn't explain why he had asked the question till the train was within ten minutes from the Halt.

'I wonder if you would like us to put you up for the week-end?' he asked abruptly. 'There's no inn where you can stay and the nearest town is twelve miles away, and you probably wouldn't be able to hire a car.'

He was amused at the effect of his gloomy prediction. John Carberry's face fell.

When the Halt was reached and they were on the little wooden platform he offered the promise of a solution to John Carberry's problems.

'If you wouldn't mind waiting here till I come back, I will be able to fix you up. The truth is, my mother is rather weird about— strange people. Particularly since this ghastly business in the neighbourhood.'

He did not particularise what the ghastly business was, nor did Carberry express any curiosity.

'If you can get me a car, I will be terribly obliged to you,' he said. He was more than amused at the young man's frankness.

T won't be gone more than half-an-hour. Perhaps Tillett will give you a cup of tea.'

Tillett proved to be the signalman and station master. Perhaps signalman was too dignified a title. He occupied a small cottage near the level crossing, the opening and closing of which was shared between himself and a spinster sister.

The stranded passenger watched Lord Tenford's Rolls sweep out of sight and surrendered his ticket to the querulous station chief.

'You are a friend of m'lord's, sir? Or maybe you are a lord yourself?'

'I am a plain mister myself,' smiled Carberry.

'Marvellous young gentleman: he has been in the army, been all over the world, India, everywhere. Staying at Tenford Court, sir?'

'No,' said the visitor.

'Ah, that's a pity: you'd like her ladyship. She is a bit severe, but a wonderful lady.'

Apparently Tillett's invitation to tea was an inevitable sequel. Tea was his one dissipation, and he offered the hospitality of that meal on the least excuse. Carberry followed him to the cottage.

'Lonely? I should think it was!'

Mr Tillett shivered. He was a thin man, and sandy as he was grey, but the type of man from whom one would expect emotional reaction.

'My sister has gone into Bath. She always goes in on Fridays, and I tell you I will be glad when she is back. Since this terrible business that's been going on— '

'What terrible business? His lordship was telling me something about it.'

Tillett looked right and left as though he feared an eavesdropper.

He told the story of the cattle maiming, of a devilish man who burned and hurt in sheer lust of cruelty.

'We found a dead tramp up there'— he pointed to the infinite— 'up in Crawley Woods. An old fellow; I saw the body after the police found him— '

'Scared, are you?'

Tillett shivered.

'Nobody is safe. I keep my door locked, and I wouldn't open it for all the money in the world. A fellow tried to get through with a car last night, but I told him to go up to the one on the Bath Road. I am not taking any risks.'

He lowered his voice.

'Mackintosh is coming down,' he said impressively.

'Who is Mackintosh?'

'Scotland Yard— one of the big men. He is expected at Bath by train, and he is coming out here this evening. One of the police sergeants told me— Sergeant Grear, a very nice man who lives down the village.'

'People are frightened down here, I suppose?'

'Frightened! It's not the word for it! You won't meet a soul on the road after dark. Most of the farmers who go out carry a gun, and I don't blame them, though the police think there will be a lot of accidents.'

He was the kind of man who could talk without the stimulant of interest. He was still talking when the Rolls came back with Tenford himself.

'My mother will be delighted if you come and spend the week-end with us,' he said. 'You will get all the fishing you want.'

The invitation was, not unexpected. John Carberry anticipated such an invitation after the mystery that accompanied his host's departure. He sat by his side on the drive back and ventured to raise a topic of conversation which he thought might be distasteful to his host.

'He is a marvellous fellow,' said Lord Tenford with enthusiasm. 'He has got everybody scared stiff— everybody except mother. The devil couldn't scare her! We are doing some patrolling to-night. The police has been reinforced and if you care to join our party— We are going to comb out Branson Wood.'

'Thank you,' said the other with a smile. 'That's not my idea of spending a perfect Saturday evening.'

Lady Tenford was waiting to meet them in the big hall. Her welcome was neither enthusiastic nor hearty. Mr Carberry thought that possibly her coldness was normal. Her scrutiny had a quality of suspicion and, remembering her dislike

of doctors, he wondered whether her son had convinced her that this was not his profession.

Her ladyship resented his presence— she hardly disguised the fact. The gesture which she made to the scared-looking servant had in it something of contempt. He examined her curiously: a close-lipped woman, thin and angular. Harry Tenford was nervous in her presence, grinned amiably, but was uncomfortable, like a wilful child who had had his way and was a little apprehensive as to the consequence.

In the background was the big heavy-jawed servant whom Tenford called 'Sool'. He had changed into a footman's livery, and looked a little awkward.

'The man will take your bag to your room, Mr— ah— Carberry. Sool, will you see to Mr Carberry?'

Sool took the suit-case from the maid and led the way up the broad staircase, to a small, plainly furnished bedroom. He put down the case, making no attempt to open it, turned towards the door and stopped.

'Staying here?'

His voice was harsh, his tone unfriendly.

'Till Monday— why?'

The man was taken aback by the brusqueness of the question.

'I just asked,' he said.

He opened the door, but the visitor called him back.

'You might say "sir" when you speak to me, will you?' said Carberry. He was smiling in the face of the discomfited Sool. 'Let me see— were you in the Army or the Navy?'

'Navy, sir.'

Carberry nodded.

'SBS of course.' He saw the man jump, and laughed. 'I shouldn't tell her ladyship if I were you,' he said. There was the hint of a threat in his words. 'By the way, when do you expect Miss Bourne?'

'She's here, sir,' said the man.

Carberry's eyebrows rose. Then she could not have had his letter— the letter that he had written and re-written with such care.

'She came down last week,' said Sool.

Carberry nodded slowly.

'Very well ... You'll remember not to speak a word to her ladyship about my question. It is going to be rather awkward for you anyway— don't make your position a dangerous one.'

He changed and strolled upstairs; he knew his way about the house— an illustrated weekly had once described and illustrated Tenford Court exhaustively, and he had taken the trouble to look up the files.

For John Carberry intended to spend Saturday to Monday at the Court, his arrival in Lord Tenford's reserved compartment had been most carefully timed: his intention to spend the week-end at Braime House entirely fictitious. Nobody knew better than he that Lord Perley of Braime was not in residence. He had banked upon the hospitality of Harry Tenford.

He strolled into the library, and its one inmate rose with flushed cheeks and amazement in her eyes at the sight of him.

'You? You're not Mr Carberry?' she gasped.

'I am Mr Carberry,' he smiled.

She stared at him.

'But that isn't your name. Why did you come here in a false name?'

'One does those things,' he said carelessly.

'Does Lady Tenford know?' She was a little breathless.

He shook his head.

'I'd rather she didn't,' he said. 'I'm terribly sorry if I've annoyed you. I quite realise that I'm not a welcome visitor— I seldom am.'

'Not a welcome visitor!' She could have fallen on his neck in sheer thankfulness. Two nights of horror she had spent at Tenford— the Tuesday and the Wednesday nights.

She had wakened one night to hear a low chuckle, and had seen a hand and an arm coming through the open window of her bedroom. Her screams brought the servant Sool and her ladyship's voice was shrill with anger at her 'nightmare' (as Lady Tenford most summarily dismissed the apparition).

On the Wednesday there was a terrific thunderstorm, and in the flicker of the lightning she had seen two shapes flying across the lawn— men, one in pursuit of another. She did not scream, but somebody else was screaming in the dark of the sombre woods.

'No... I sha'n't tell.'

Lady Tenford came in at that moment. She was almost amiable. 'You've met Miss Bourne? Darling, it is time for you to dress.' She pecked at the girl's pale cheek. Audrey was not sorry to go.

'You are a Somerset man, Mr Carberry? Then you know the family?'

'The Family' was the one subject that her ladyship would discuss with the humblest of her servitors. The Tenfords of Tenford Court, William of Tenford who held the West County for King John, Laurence of Tenford whose name is inscribed in the Doomsday Book. It was essential for the peace and happiness of the world that the Tenford line should continue unbroken.

John Carberry gathered that Audrey Bourne was not the medium her ladyship would have chosen to this end. The Bournes were not a really old family— they emerged from obscurity after the Restoration: but Audrey was a

'nice gel' and her archaeological shortcomings had been excused. Besides which it was high time that Harry was married.

At dinner the conversation became more human. Harry Tenford was full of the latest outrage— the tramp murder. It had happened on the night of the storm. He was forming one of a party that was to make a midnight search of the woods.

'You'll do nothing of the kind!' said her ladyship sharply. 'Leave these matters to the police.'

Harry sulked through the rest of the meal.

For Mr Carberry the dinner was interesting, if only because of the gaucheness of the footman. Undoubtedly Sool was the most left-handed servitor that had ever waited at table. The girl hardly spoke through the meal and did not address him directly until she said 'good night' before retiring.

'I'm not sorry you're here,' she said in so low a voice that none heard except the man with the scar.

She fell asleep almost as soon as she was in bed; she had an unaccountable sense of security. Her room was sanctuary at least against the clumsy love-making of Harry— he had kissed her before she came up to bed, and that was one of the things she wanted to forget.

She woke suddenly to hear the deep-toned clock in the hall chime two. It had not disturbed her before, but now she was wide awake— wondering, fearful. Why had the clock sounded so near and so loud. That could not have awakened her.

She sat up in bed, and her blood went cold as the explanation came to her. The door of her room was open. She had locked it and taken out the key. She listened.

It was not imagination; she could hear somebody breathing, and then a board creaked.

The scream died in her throat; she was paralysed by fear, incapable of movement or sound. Then she felt a hand touch the silken coverlet— she heard the soft swish of it moving.

In an instant she was out of bed, darting blindly toward the door.

And then a big hand gripped her arm— another closed about her throat.

She struggled in the madness of her panic.

She heard something snap, and the room was flooded with light.

In the doorway was the man who called himself Carberry, and behind him she saw the frightened face of Sool.

The hand about her throat relaxed, and Harry, Earl of Tenford, drew back, a grin on his foolish red face, and then Sool called him and he went obediently.

IN the library they drank coffee together— the scar-faced Inspector Mackintosh from Scotland Yard and the pallid girl.

'It was an odd coincidence meeting you in Berlin,' he said. 'I was over there collecting information about this case— I didn't tell you so, but that is a fact. Tenford nearly murdered a German professor who was in India, the guest of the Governor to whose staff Tenford was attached. He's mad— a pretty dangerous homicide, but it was hushed up because of the family, and he was placed in the care of a keeper. Sool was an SBS— Sick Bay Steward— at Haslar, that is the naval hospital, and was in charge of lunatics. As soon as these atrocities started Scotland Yard put the case in my hands, and I started hunting up Tenford's history.'

'Did Lady Tenford know?' she asked in a shocked whisper.

He nodded.

'She's probably the madder of the two: Tenford-mad! She would have sacrificed you or anybody else to carry on the line.'

There was a long silence.

'I'm taking you back to town tomorrow,' he said. 'I'm terribly sorry you've had this shock. I hope what I have to say to you when you're well enough to hear it will not be a greater one.'

She shook her head.

'The shock will be yours, I think,' she said quietly, 'for I shall say "Yes".'

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## 23: That Horse

***Sumner Locke***

1881-1917

*Weekly Times* 22 April 1911

OLD MILL, the horse of many tired years, was lying in the yard with the fowls wandering round and an empty bucket standing guard by her side, when Will drove into the place with a new horse and a girl.

Old Mill knew the bucket was empty, but she got a few drops of the water that was on the ground, and looked up for the last time. She saw another of her breed standing in the yard, and the old man walking round with a survey on him worthy of an inspector at show time. She could see in one look that the other horse had come a long way, and that she had had a solid feed not so long ago.

Old Mill had a way of discerning these things just as she had a way of finding out the old man when he used to disappear from the railway station, and come back when all the work was done. She also saw that the other horse was a brute of heavy make, and that it would take more than the Dawson family to break or kill anything of the fibre in that equine flesh, even if they succeeded in getting it home at twice the usual rate in a nasty, bad temper.

After this Old Mill breathed again, and shut up shop.

But though she could hear the voice of Mrs Dawson even after she had dragged her spirit away from the fowl yard and the dirty bucket of weedy water, she floated through the sun mist just as Mrs Dawson discovered that it was Will come home again.

" 'Ave you come 'ome?" she said, as if Will could answer that he hadn't, and that he was still five hundred miles away.

"Brought my girl," said Will as he helped a solid one hundredweight and a half of woman out of the vehicle.

Mrs Dawson stood square. She was measuring up the bulk in comparison to her own weight. She was not altogether pleased, and though the return of her eldest was a thing of great worth at this time of the year, she wanted to know right then how long Miss Beef was going to stay.

"Will tells me," said the heavy one, "that you is used to havin' one or more in the house. I thought I'd come along."

Mrs Dawson looked her right in the eye. She sized up the past, present, and future of that young lady as soon as she had stepped on to the old man's corns.

"Used to more!" said the mother of the driver. "Will was right. We was many more before he went away and had to be kept at home, an' before he got strayin' away from his own paddocks an goin' the Lord knows where an pickin' up with anybodies, an not lettin' us know what he was up to."

The fleshy lady couldn't understand all this, but she smiled at one of the children, which only irritated Mrs Dawson the more. She never liked people who smiled when they hadn't been in the place more than a few minutes.

Will came round from the wheel, and his mother wiped her mouth, and let him kiss her. He was looking at his girl when he did it, and nearly took off Mrs. Dawson's nose trying to be quick over it.

The old man was still taking points. He was mumbling and conning and putting; his head on one side, and when Will spoke to him he said absently, "Yes, that's it—medium draught— Eh? Oh, yes, I see her."

Will was certain that he didn't see her. He pulled the girl round to his father again. "Brought my girl," said Will, and Dawson, with one of the horse's feet in his hand, spoke from his cramped position. "—Good points all round—" he said, "—Feet all right, too."

Will took the girl away, and she went back to Mrs Dawson.

"You an' Will is married?" said the mother of the prodigal.

"Didn't Will tell you?" said the fleshy one, and Mrs Dawson repeated her remark: "You and Will is—married?"

Here Will caught her up. "Course we are— thought you'd er knowed that!"

Mrs Dawson raised her head. "What I'd er known if I hadn't asked you mightn't er been worse," she said. "I got three of the children with the fever, an' things is anyhow— it was time you come home, Will."

"Been in Brisbane," said Will. "Had a good time there, didn't we, Dolly?"

"Dolly?" Mrs Dawson stared. "Ain't you got no proper name? Who's got time to think about a name like that when you is past it by fifteen years?"

Will began to explain, as the old man came round to the horse's head again.

"What's that?" said Dawson, "Dolly? Well I never— I thought it might be Brownie or Beauty— but Dolly." He kept shaking his head and apostrophising the horse. He was certain it was no more Dolly than Mrs Dawson thought the odd twelve-stone lady ought to have been.

"She's on the heavy side—" he went on; "but she's a mover, I should say."

Will tried to distract him.

"I got my girl here, Dad."

"Where'd you get her? Brisbane way?"

Will was certain that at last he had taken in what he meant, and as Mrs Dawson and his woman moved off to the house he became more confidential.

"You see, Dad, it was this way: I was workin' up the old man's place— grocery, wine, and spirits— an' the old man he says to me he says— 'I like you— an' I mean to set you up in life,'— an' he give me—"

"The horse?" said Dawson, with joy in his set jaw.

"Well, not exactly," said Will; "but he says to me—'I'll make you part of the business if you'll take my girl and make her—' "

"What's her dam?" said Dawson, who had wandered off to the horse again. Will lost a place in the conversation and nearly gave up hope of ever making him see the truth at all.

"He says to me, 'you take my girl, and make her a good husband, and I'll not disremember you bime-by;' so I says to Dolly—"

"Dolly?" repeated the old man as if he had heard the entire thing, and appreciated it. "Dolly?" he said yet again, and stroked the horse as if he meant it.

"Yes," said Will; " 'Dolly— you marry Dolly, and I'll set you—' "

Here Will stopped. He had to stop because Dawson was standing staring at him for once instead of the horse. The old man was fixed into a smile and a frown, and wedged there, so that Will felt that he must put him right before he went any further.

"He says, 'you marry Dolly.' " The old man shook his head very slowly, and looked at his son; and then turned and looked at the other sun. He was beginning to think that Will had better share the head douche that they had been giving the old horse when the sun had got to it.

"Did he really expect you to do it?" he said, not too loudly, for fear of alarming Will.

"Well," said Will, "I done it."

"What!!!" The old man nearly jumped out of the yard. He went be-hind the cart, and looked over the horse at Will as if he thought he had better try and get Mrs Dawson out before Will could get over at him.

"Yes," said Will, "I done it, and if anybody 'as anything to say about it, they can do it right here."

The old man was quite sure about the condition of his son now, and yet he didn't want to act hurriedly.

"That horse—"

"That's awlright," he said, soothingly. "You just come in and tell your mother all about it— an' I'll stand near you (he was getting as far away as he possibly could), and— and—"

"Mum?" said Will. "She knows all about it. Dolly went into the house with her."

This was too much for Dawson. He shook his head and began to undo the traces. "Oh, well," he said, "you know best: but I suppose it won't last long— these fits never does."

Will shouted at this, "It's goin' to last just as long as I likes. I ain't come home to argue what, or what not, about my wife."

"Course not," said Dawson, looking over the animal, and keeping an eye on Will at the same time. He thought that Mrs Dawson might have come out again,

but he supposed she had seen how things were, or she wouldn't have gone off to the house in such a hurry.

When he got the horse out Will seemed more reasonable.

"We'll give the old girl a feed," he said. "I brought along the bag hearin' the place was pretty dry in the season."

Dawson kept patting the animal and took care to keep on the opposite side to Will as they walked to the shed. There they found old Mill still in peaceful death.

Dawson told Will all about the horse that had died, in hopes that if he broke it gently Will might not get excited when he saw it. Will was so quiet that the old man thought he would risk it and call his wife.

However, just then Will made a sensible suggestion. He told his father that they had better get the carcase away for the time being, and to-morrow they would get at the hide and stretch it in the sun in the cow yard.

Dawson got a rope and they tied old Mill's head to it, and then hitched the new horse (which went back four paces when it saw what was before it), to the old one, and smacked it on the flank until it dragged the carcase out of the way. This done, Will said he wanted a wash, and the old man thinking he had quite got over the fit, told him to go into the house and tell Mrs Dawson he wanted her.

Will went in quite calmly, but Mrs Dawson came out quite ruffled.

"Dawson," she said, and the old man who had begun another observation on the horse, forgot he had sent for her, and was planted next to the feed box trying to look at the horse's teeth.

"Dawson!" she shouted at his head, so that he heard and answered with a grunt of satisfaction, and didn't remember what it was he wanted her for.

"You think I am going to keep that lump in my house at this time of year!" she said.

The old man had got to the horse's teeth.

"About three years," he said.

"Not a week," said Mrs Dawson. "Do you think I can't see how things is? Ain't we got enough of that in the family now with Annie and Mary both married proper. And, what with the tanks down, an' no feed for the cows, an' the last couple goin' dry on us, an' the sick children— not a week, an' you can tell Will so."

The old man came round in the middle of this harangue. "Say, Anna, this is the merciful doin' of Providence— what with old Mill dyin' to-day, an' a new horse walkin' right into the yard, just as we was wonderin' how we was to get the milk to the station; well, I calls it a workin' miracle."

Mrs Dawson held her ground.

"I won't have her a week, I says."

"I want her for the milk, I tell you," said Dawson, beginning to get angry at last.

"She'll only eat up what's in the place," said his wife.

"She's useful to me," said Dawson.

This brought a scream from the woman.

"What are you goin' to do?" she said. "You tell me why you are so quick about havin' her in the place?"

"I'm goin' to work her in the plough, and get that old stuff burnt off first. I'm goin' to borrer Worster's disc drill, an hitch her into the work. I'm goin' to drive the milk with her; and I'm goin' to cart the water when the time comes for us to move the tank with her to drag it to the Ten-mile dam. I'm goin' to—"

Here Mrs Dawson stopped him with a look.

"Think I better call Will," she said, quite sure that Dawson was going to have another fit.

"Will?" said the old man, looking about as if he was afraid she meant it. He came a bit nearer and touched her on the arm. "Anna— don't shout till I tells you— you must watch Will!"

"Eh? What for?"

"He's off 'is 'ead, and thinks 'e's married a *horse*!" The last words of the old man were emphasised, and were so loud that Will and his wife, who had just come out into the yard, heard every word, and looked as if they had, too.

Will's next movement was to try a little explanation in his wife's ear, but she wouldn't listen, and started to go for the old man just as Mrs Dawson ran for the empty bucket and the water. She didn't know who wanted it the most, Dawson or Will, but she thought she had better get the old man right first of all.

While Will struggled with her and the bucket, the twelve-stone lady gave Dawson a bit of her tongue that was of equal weight to her body. She said a few things about horses and other cattle, and called him an ass when she was at it.

She bounced over to Will and told him what she thought of his people, and said she was going away then and there; and he was to put the horse in for her, and the next time he compared her to a horse she was goin' to take him to court.

The old man was standing dumb, as he had suddenly got the right bump of the truth. He couldn't speak, but he let Mrs Dawson do it for him.

She took to the lady, and the lady took to her, and they took turns together.

Will put in the horse and drove into the yard, as Mrs Dawson, senior, and Mrs Dawson, junior, got to their fourth round. Mrs Dawson the elder said the most, but Mrs Dawson, junior, looked the bigger. She ran her eyes round her mother-in-law that she didn't want, and sized her up with a curl of her lip.

The mother of the other one's husband let her tongue go, and it wiped the scorn out of Mrs Will, and left her in a flood of tears that reached the house and brought the family out.

The old man was standing as far off as he thought fit, and he shook his head again and again like a deserted ram in a drought. He didn't give a blade of corn what the women did, but he was concerned about that horse.

When Will had half carried his wife out of the yard into the cart, not waiting for her hat, and had driven right over the weakest part of the dog-leg fence, Mrs Dawson still went on with her opinion.

The old man interjected once, but no one heard him. He kept moving his head.

"Born an' bred for heavy work– good shape and solid in quarters— action–"

He was still talking about that horse.

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## 24: The Last Act

### *Ethel Martyr*

Grace Ethel Martyr, 1888-1934
*Weekly Times* (Melbourne) 12 Oct 1918

DENHAM was rushing distractedly about the stage, the call bell in his hand, shouting final instructions, after the manner of amateur stage managers.

"Now, are you all there? Mrs Reid, are you ready to go on? Miss Wilson? Where the deuce is she? Oh, there you are. Right-Oh! Up she goes."

He pressed his finger on the bell and the curtain rose slowly, while the audience stopped talking, and with a rustle of programmes, settled back comfortably into their seats.

Colin Reid looked on from the wings. His was a very minor part, and he did not come on until the final act. Though he had seen the opening act so many times, he could still watch his sister-in-law, who was playing the leading part, with interest and enjoyment. She was looking particularly well tonight. The make-up hid the little lines of anxiety that had come around her mouth of late, and her eyes were bright and sparkling between her darkened lashes. Reid listened to her well-modulated voice, and watched her expressive face with proprietary interest, and heard with brotherly pride the frequent bursts of applause.

His new sister-in-law was a slim young English girl who had been teaching on a Queensland station when his brother met her. After a brief courtship, they were married and came south. Six months after Harold Reid had sailed for the front, Marjorie had come, to live with Colin Reid and his -wife in, north-western Victoria. Their little boy, Teddy, was devoted to his aunt Marjorie, and was , watching her from the hall with delighted eyes, clasping a bunch of flowers for her in his hot little hands. Reid could just see him across the glare of the footlights sitting in the front row, with wide eyes fixed on the stage.

"The little beggar ought to be in bed long, ago," his father thought, as he turned away and walked for a little fresh air to the open exit door at the side of the stage. As he stepped out he almost collided with a man coming in.

"Good night, Mr Reid."

"Is that you, Thomas? I'm sorry, old man, I didn't see you. Are you coming in?"

"No. I came over to see you, really. A message came, through to the office just now for Mrs Reid, and as I knew you'd all be here I brought it over to you myself."

"For my wife, or Mrs Harold?"

"Mrs Harold, but I think you'd better take it for the present."

Reid took the envelope from him, looking very grave.

"Is it bad news? My brother—"

"I'm afraid so. I'm very sorry, Reid."

The two men shook hands in silence, and Thomas left the stage, while Reid turned back to the wings to find that the curtain was just coming down at the end of the act. It was run up again as Marjorie Reid went forward to acknowledge the applause. She bowed and smiled her thanks, and, with her arms full of flowers, came laughing towards the wings,

Reid pulled himself together and thrust the telegram hurriedly into his pocket.

"Look, Colin! Aren't they lovely? And didn't it go well? I knew at once that we could hold, the people. Isn't it funny that you can always tell? The place is just packed, too. Colin, are you all right? You don't look well."

'Yes; I'm quite all right, dear girl, went splendidly. Congratulations! What beautiful flowers! But you have not got Teddy's yet. He is going to hand them up to you himself, so look out for him," answered Reid, trying to speak naturally.

"Yes, of course, I will. Oh, Colin, it's so lovely to be someone else for a while," she said wistfully. "To forget all the troubles of real life. I wish it had been comedy all through, so that I could have gone on laughing to the end. But I have enjoyed myself," she went on, smiling again. "It's fun being a success even if it's only in theatricals in a country town. And I can act, can't I?"

"You can indeed. Here comes Denham to congratulate you, too. You'd better get rid of your flowers and be ready to go on again."

The girl spoke to the manager, and went on to dressing-room with her flowers, and Reid was left alone.

He took the envelope from his pocket, and, though was addressed to Marjorie, he opened it. It was brief, as messages are. It regretted to inform her that her husband, Private Harold Reid, had been killed in action about a fortnight before.

Reid folded it carefully and put it back in his pocket; and stood gazing out into the night. He did not notice Marjorie's approach till she spoke.

"Come on, Colin! The curtain is just going up. What— Colin! You are ill— your eyes look so strange. What Is it?"

"Nothing, Marjorie. You're imagining things tonight. What have you done with the floral tributes?"

"They're in water in the dressing room, and— oh, bother!— I've spilt it on my frock. Lend me your hankie, will you?"

As she spoke she put out her hand, and flicked it quickly from his pocket, and from its folds there fell the un mistakable envelope. Reid tried to catch it, but she was too quick for him.

"What is it? Oh, Colin, what Is it?" she asked, wild-eyed with fear.

"It's nothing, Marjorie. It's— it's mine. Give it to me, dear,'' he answered, trying to speak unconcernedly.

The girl looked down at the address. "It isn't yours. It's mine, and it's about Hal, I know. Oh, Colin, I'm afraid— afraid to look."

He took her hands and drew her behind the wings.

"Won't you give it back to me? Trust me with it, and read it afterwards," he said.

"I must know— I must!" she said, breathlessly, taking the telegram out with shaking fingers. "Oh, Colin, Colin!"

Reid put his arm round her, and she clung to him with sobbing breath.

"I can't bear it. I've got no one now— no one. But I'll go on and finish tonight. Tea, I will. I can bear it tonight, but afterwards— I can't face that. Oh, Colin, help me!''

He opened his lips to try to comfort her, as Denham came hurrying across the stage, calling for Mrs Reid.

"Wherever do you people get to? The curtain is going up in half a minute, and no one is ready. You don't enter from this side, Mrs Reid."

Then at sight of their faces, he stopped.

"Aren't you well. Is anything the matter?" he asked.

Marjorie shook her head, although Reid could see her trembling!

"No. I'm ready. You can ring," she said.

Denham looked from her to Reid uncertainly, then the bell rang and the play went on. To Reid it was like a horrible nightmare. He forgot the little that he had to say, but Marjorie spoke her lines unfalteringly, and but for the silent anguish of her eyes he would have scarcely noticed any difference in her.

At last it was over, and she turned blindly towards him as the curtain fell. Then, through the clapping and noise, they heard a child's voice calling, "Auntie Marjorie, Auntie Marjorie."

"It's Teddy. I must take his flowers," she said, and as the curtain rose, she went to the footlights and bent down towards the child.

"Thank you, Teddy darling," she whispered with quivering lips, looking at him through a blur of tears.

A sudden gust of wind swept in from the open door, and the light scarf she was wearing blew out over the uncovered jets of the footlights. In an instant it was alight. The flame ran swiftly to the ninon of her evening dress and leapt to her hair, and in a moment she was ablaze. She screamed and turned towards the stage. The audience rose to their feet, white-faced with horror. A chair fell crashing to the floor, and above the noise came the sound of a child's terrified screaming. Denham dragged desperately at a heavy curtain that hung over the entrance; the pole fell with a crash as he ran towards the girl and flung its folds around her.

The Doctor hurried up from the hall and knelt beside her. Then, one by one, the people went quietly out, leaving only a few friends of Mrs Reid's, who stood around her where she sat trying to quiet the sobbing child.

Presently her husband spoke to Denham, and the two men came down into the hall. Both of them were white to the lips.

"Will you let Mr Denham take you home?" he said. "I can't come— just yet."

Mrs Reid got up without a word and went out, holding the child's face against her dress so that he could not look at the stage. No sound came from there now; it was all very quiet.

At the door she glanced back fearfully, but the curtain had been gently lowered, and there was nothing to be seen in the glare of the footlights but a bunch of withering flowers.

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