PAST MASTERS 226

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and more

PAST MASTERS 226

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

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Sydney Horler

1888-1954

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THE best description I can give of Sebastian Quin is that he was an enthusiast of the bizarre, and an analyst of crime in its most weird and freakish manifestations. A man of comfortable means, he devoted his time to the dissecting of criminals' minds. His reputation was not merely European, but world-wide; men and women came to consult him from the ends of the earth. His friendship was the greatest honor that any man could have, and I counted myself singularly fortunate in being allowed to share his confidence.

On the night that this story may be said to have opened, Quin and I had been to a dinner of the Friday Club at Viviani's, that justly celebrated Regent Street restaurant. It had been a most mentally stimulating evening for me, one reason being that I had been seated next to a Professor Broomshaw, whose conversation had proved brilliant in the extreme.

Walking home I asked Sebastian Quin what he knew about this man. The reply was short.

"A fellow of wonderful attainments, I understand."

"I should imagine so— he was the most fascinating conversationalist I think I have ever met," I replied.

By this time we had reached one of those quiet streets lying at the back of the Albert Hall. Outside a house Quin stopped.

"Since you evidently have a liking for men who can talk so well," observed my companion, somewhat i sardonically it struck me at the I time, "I want to introduce you to another member of the Friday Club. Sir Oliver Dilke wasn't at the dinner tonight on account of a bad cold, but as he is always a lateish bird I do not think he will have gone to bed. We'll go in."

Then a startling thing occurred. From the door outside which we were standing a servant came rushing like a man whom fear had driven mad.

Quin seized his arm.

"Matthews!" he said peremptorily. "What is the matter?"

The butler stared uncomprehend-ingly for a moment. Then he ap-peared to recognise my companion.

"Matter, Mr. Quin," he stammered, "matter enough. Heaven knows! Sir Oliver—" he choked. "Sir Oliver's dead!" he said.

The slight figure of Quin stiffened. "Dead?" he exclaimed. "When?"

"Just now, sir. I went into the library to wish Sir Oliver goodnight, and to say that I had locked up-that was my rule, Mr. Quin— and when I got into the room—" He stopped for a moment to get a fresh control over himself.

"Steady yourself, man," said my companion sternly.

"It wasn't a horrible death, Mr. Quin. It was just as though he had passed away while he was reading. But there was a startled look on his face—"

"Why are you rushing out of the house like this?" Quin snapped the question. By his expression I knew that he was deeply stirred. A man who had died quietly in his chair, and yet had a startled look on his face...

"I was going to fetch a doctor— and the police. Mr. Quin. We aren't on the telephone— you know how old-fashioned Sir Oliver was in some of his ideas."

"Yes, that's true. Well, go for the police and the nearest doctor. You haven't touched the body?"

"No-no, sir," replied the shuddering butler; "I ran straight out, sir, after I found-him dead."

"That was very sensible of you." Sebastian Quin's humor could be grim on occasion. "You had better come with me, Huish," he said to me. "I may just have time to look round before some blundering constable arrives."

Quin evidently knew his way about the house, for he walked straight towards the room in which the dead man had been found. A cheerful fire was still burning in the grate; there was a cosy atmosphere; but lolling back in a study chair which had been drawn up to the library table was a dead man.

"Shut the door, Huish," said Quin, "and keep guard over it until I have a look round."

Quin moved about, disturbing nothing but seeing everything, I knew. I noticed him linger over three articles which were on the table besides the book. These three articles were respectively:

A wineglass that had evidently been drunk out of, since there was still a little red wine left at the bottom of the glass.

A clean wineglass.

A large and exquisite mounted butterfly, its wings black, and with beautifully traced white borders.

Whilst Quin was examining this fine specimen through a magnifying glass, there came a sudden knock on the door.

Obviously put out, he signalled me to open the door.

A police-constable, closely followed by a man carrying a small black bag. burst into the room.

The doctor went straight to the dead man. The constable looked inquiringly at my companion.

"My name's Quin," explained the latter; "your superiors will know ilt. I was an intimate friend of the dead man, and I happened to be passing when

Matthews, the butler, rushed out in a panic. I advised him to fetch the police and a doctor at once. This is my assistant, Mr. Martin Huish. Nothing has been touched."

The suspicious look on the constable's face lessened, but he said brusquely:

"I must ask you both to stay here, sir, until the Inspector arrives."

"Certainly," replied Quin, "I intended to do that in any case."

By this time the doctor had completed his examination.

"Heart failure, undoubtedly," he said, coming towards us.

"You will have an autopsy, doctor?" queried Sebastian Quin.

"The police-surgeon may decide to hold one— that will be his affair— but if he listens to me he won't waste time. Sir Oliver Dilke undoubtedly died suddenly of heart failure." The reply was brusque.

Then the room suddenly filled. To the foremost figure, a heavily-built man with a pugnacious jaw and a bowler hat which he had not troubled to remove. Sebastian Quin gave greeting.

"Hello, Fordyce."

The Scotland Yard man stared. "You here, Mr. Quin?"

"As you can see, Inspector. Sir Oliver was my friend, and, moreover, I happened to be calling when the butler ran out to fetch the police after making his discovery."

The Scotland Yard officer seemed to harbor some resentment at the presence of Quin, which clearly had been unexpected, but he merely nodded at my companion's reply.

He strode to the table.

"What about these wineglasses. Matthews?"

The butler's face became haggard.

A look of horror showed in his eyes. I felt Quin by my side start.

"Don't ask me!" the butler answered, panic-stricken.

"I suppose Sir Oliver must have taken a glass of wine— yes, I knew he did. I brought it in to him— them," he corrected hastily.

The ponderous figure of the inspector planted itself squarely on the hearthrug.

"Before we go any further, Matthews," he said, "I must advise you in your own interest not to keep back anything which has happened to-night. Now, then, whom do you mean by 'them'?"

Matthews gulped.

"Sir Oliver and his nephew Mr. Hilary Croft," he replied slowly. "I brought wine in to them at ten o'clock to-night."

It was three o'clock in the morning, but I could not think of going to bed. So I sat and smoked Sebastian Quin's super-excellent tobacco and listened fascinatedly to what he was saying.

"This is a highly curious affair, Huish," he summed up, pressing the tobacco down into the bowl of his pipe. "Let me for the sake of clarity— always an important matter in a case of murder— summarise what we already know.

"At ten-thirty to-night Sir Oliver Dilke, one of the most prominent scientists in the country and a highly-respected gentleman, is found dead in his study chair. Before him ls an open book-Bauer's 'Butterflies' -and the presumption is that while perusing this worl he sustained a sudden heart attack which prevented him from calling out for help and which mercifully did not last long. (You will remember we have that consequential doctor's word for it that my old friend died practically painlessly.)

"Before him on the table, besides the book, are three objects— two wineglasses, one clean, the other dirty, and a mounted butterfly, a very fine specimen. After the two doctors, the civilian and the police, have agreed that the cause of death was heart failure, the inspector from Scotland Yard rightly— he would have been a fool if he had not done so— makes some inquiries about the two wineglasses. For, you see, there was something very peculiar about the two wineglasses— one was clean and the other was dirty. Had they both been dirty— that is to say, used— considerable significance would still have rightly been attached to them by the inspector, but as one was clean

"Recall the evidence of the butler. Huish. What was it Matthews said? He said that he brought the wine into the library, and that Hilary Croft, the nephew of the dead man, poured out two glassfuls. Two, not one, remember. The presumption is, of course, that they both drank a glassful of wine. But after the dead body of Sir Oliver is discovered one glass is found to be clean.

"Inspector Fordyce was quick to jump to a conclusion, you will remember. After hearing that Sir Oliver and his nephew had been at enmity for some time, he smiled. I could read that smile— at least, I fancied I could. You must not be surprised, Huish, if you hear that Hilary Croft is arrested quite soon."

"But both doctors said that an inquest would not be necessary— that death was due to heart failure," I put in "There's no mystery, surely?"

"On the contrary," repliea Sebastian Quin, "the death of my old friend Sir Oliver Dilke presents a very intriguing mystery. Remember the clean wineglass, Huish."

"The suggestion is, I suppose, that Hilary Croft put poison into the glass of wine which his uncle drank? After Sir Oliver's death, fearing to leave a trace of his guilt, he washed the glass at the tap in the library and then put lt back on the table?"

"Quite sound reasoning, Huish! Although, of course, he did not say so, I am convinced that was the conclusion at which Inspector Fordyce arrived. As I have told you, I expect to hear in the morning that Hilary Croft has been arrested "

When at four o'clock the following afternoon I bought the paper, almost the first headlines I saw were:

SCIENTIST'S NEPHEW ARRESTED
CHARGED WITH MURDER
HOW DID SIR OLIVER DILKE DIE?

I took a taxi at once to Sebastian Quin's house. The baffling nature of this crime into which I had been dragged had kept me awake the previous night. I looked at the photograph of Hilary Croft which the paper published, and decided that this was not the face of a murderer.

Arriving at Quin's chambers, his man told me he was engaged, but that if I called I was to go into his study at once. Entering the room, after knocking, I found my-self being Introduced to a remark-ably attractive girl, whose beauty was now ravaged, however, by an overwhelming grief.

"This ls Miss Ethel Laurie, Huish. Mr. Huish is my confidential friend," said Quin.

After I had seated myself Quin continued:

"Miss Laurie has come to me hoping that I can help Mr. Hilary Croft, to whom she ls engaged to be married—"

"Oh, if you will!" pleaded the girl, clasping her hands.

"I will do my best, Miss Laurie, you can rest assured of that," replied my friend. "Personally, I do not believe he is guilty."

"That gives me hope," said the girl. "I feel now that there is still a chance for him."

Quin nodded.

"You can speak quite frankly before Mr. Huish, who is, in a way, my assistant," he said to the girl.

"I am an actress," said Miss Laurie. "I suppose that is the reason why Sir Oliver objected so strongly to my knowing Hilary. In any case, he always refused to meet me. Hilary is an artist, you know, with a studio in Chelsea. After his quarrel with his uncle over me he left Bulton Street and lived at this studio. But yesterday afternoon when he met me he said that he had made it up with his uncle, that he was going to see Sir Oliver that night at Bulton Street— his uncle had invited him."

"You are sure of that fact, Miss Laurie?"

"Quite sure, Mr. Quin. That was the only reason Hilary went to see his uncle last night. And yet they say that he committed murder— it's abominable! Hilary would not hurt a fly. And although they had quarrelled, he really loved his uncle and admired him tremendously. He often said to me that he considered Sir Oliver was one of the greatest men of his day."

"So he was," confirmed Sebastian Quin. "I may as well tell you, Miss Laurie," he broke off in the manner he had, "that the view of the police is that Mr. Croft went to Bulton Street with the determination to murder his uncle, that he suggested Sir Oliver should drink a glass of wine with him in celebration of the reconciliation, that he poisoned the wine which his uncle drank, and that in order to destroy any trace of his crime he washed the wine-glass his uncle used."

"You do not believe that. Mr. Quin?" The lovely face was distraught.

The crime Investigator took the hands which were outstretched to him, and gently squeezed them.

"Try not to worry too much, my dear," he said reassuringly.

After the girl had gone, I turned quickly to Quin.

"So they found poison?"

He nodded.

"Yes-at the autopsy. Stupidly enough, the official authorities re-gard me as something of an inter-fering busybody-except in those cases where they come for my help— and up to the present I do not know what kind of poison was found."

"Do you regard that as important? Isn't the fact that some poison was found sufficient?"

"Not when a man I believe to be innocent is faced with the gallows, Huish! But I am expecting a telephone message. Ah!" as the bell rang.

Thirty seconds later he turned to me.

"Cyanide of potassium," he said briefly. "And now, Huish, I must ask you to be good enough to leave me. I have some work to do, and I must do it alone."

THE FIRST thing I saw when I reached out for the paper the next morning was the staring headline:

PROFESSOR BROOMSHAW FOUND SHOT

PROFESSOR I. B. BROOMSHAW, the well-known lecturer of St. Crispin's Hospital, was found shot in his rooms at Welbeck Street last night. Revolver with one chamber discharged was lying by the side of the dead man. An inquest will be held."

Broomshaw! That was the wonderful conversationalist I had met it the Friday Club only two nights before! And now he was dead— had committed suicide, apparently! A nan of brilliant attainments, according to Sebastian Quin, who knew everybody. What despair could have driven him to take his life?

At ten o'clock I took a taxi to Sebastian Quin's rooms. I found him sitting alone before an untasted breakfast.

"I feared this, Huish," he said when I entered, pointing to the news-paper he was reading.

"Do you mean Professor Broomshaw's death?" I asked. I had seen the headline over his shoulder.

"Yes. But it was either that, flight or exposure. He denied it last night, but I could see that he was guilty, although my proofs were slender. Like his own, mine was a shot in the dark. But it was successful."

"What on earth are you talking about, Quin?" I demanded somewhat irritably.

"What should I be talking about," replied Quin, putting down the news-paper, "but the Dilke murder mystery?"

I became more bewildered.

"What had Professor Broomshaw to do with the death of Sir Oliver Dilke?"

"He was the murderer-that's all,' answered Sebastian Quin, and per-mitted himself a smile at my expense.

"You're mad!" I cried, forgetting myself in the perplexity of the moment. "Broomshaw wasn't even in the house last night."

Quin pushed me back into my chair.

"Only the early hour is a sufficient excuse for such rudeness," he said, "but I am glad you have dropped in, because I've just solved the Dilke mystery."

Too amazed to make any immediate comment, I watched the crime investigator place on the table first a book, and then a large and exquisite mounted butterfly, its wings black and with beautifully traced white borders.

"Why, that was on the table in Sir Oliver's study!" I exclaimed.

"Quite so. Also the book. And because I felt at the time that both had some connection with the mystery of the death, I took the liberty of confiscating them. It was very fortunate I did so. But if you will be quiet for a few minutes, I hope to explain everything to your satisfaction," he added.

"This is quite one of the most interesting cases I have handled for some time," resumed Quin, filling his pipe. "I must reiterate the facts. Sir Oliver Dilke, a prominent scientist, and a much-beloved man, is found dead in his library one night. An open book is before him. It was a case of heart failure, the doctors said. But the autopsy proved that Sir Oliver's heart, as well as the other organs, was sound. His death was not due to natural causes, but how he was killed appeared at first a mystery. There was no wound; not even a scratch on the body. There had been no struggle. As he had sat in his chair reading, so apparently he had died.

"Yet, as I have said, the autopsy revealed that death had not been due to natural causes; it was due to poison-cyanide of potassium, one of the most deadly agents known.

"The clean wineglass seemed a valuable clue. It became known that Hilary Croft, the scientist's nephew and heir, had been on terms of enmity with Sir Oliver because he had become engaged to an actress. Here was a possible motive— with Sir Oliver dead, Croft would inherit his fortune and also be free to marry the girl to whom his uncle objected.

"But there is such a thing as a clue being too obvious. My experience has been that the fact which stares you in the face is never of much use in crime; it is not to be relied upon. Look at it this wayif Hilary Croft had really intended to poison his uncle he would not have done it in the clumsy fashion which the police allege. He would not have allowed the butler to be practically a witness to the crimeand the theory of the washed wine-glass, although interesting, never appealed strongly to me. Any fool— and Hilary Croft is no fool— would have put fresh wine into the glass to divert suspicion."

"You laid stress upon the clean wineglass at the time, I remember," I said.

Quin smiled that tolerant smile which I occasionally found so irritating.

"I was exhausting the obvious before I tackled the ingenious," he said, "and after examining this"— he pointed to the exquisite mounted butterfly— "I knew that this murder had been most ingeniously planned."

"Why?"

"You must allow me to tell my story in my own way, Huish. The fact that the butterfly was on the table was conclusive evidence that Sir Oliver had recently been exam-ining it. Now, valuable butterfly specimens, I «happen to know, are sometimes given an application of cyanide to preserve them. I could not tell without analysis, but I felt at the time that it was pretty certain that this butterfly, being valuable, had been sprayed with cyanide.

"Inquiries I made from Matthews disclosed the interesting fact that a small parcel had come from Vivash's, the specimen people, by the last post on the day of the tragedy. Inquiry at Vivash's disclosed the even more interesting fact that Professor Broomshaw had called at the shop that morning and had looked out some specimens.

"He was shown this rare butterfly which had recently arrived from one of Vivash's agents in Mexico— a wonderful place for butterflies, Mexico—and was about to touch it when Vivash warned him.

" 'It's treated with cyanide— don't put your fingers to your mouth, professor,' he said.

"According to Vivash's statement to me, Broomshaw smiled at this warning. But Vivash didn't smile. He noticed that Broomshaw in handling the butterfly had caused one of the wings to droop.

"He called his visitor's attention to this, but again Broomshaw smiled.

" 'Sir Oliver Dilke will be able to put that right. He is a great entomologist, you know, and I am going to send him this anonymously. He will be delighted'— you follow me so far, Huish?"

"I am afraid I don't," I replied, for indeed I was completely baffled.

"This gift was intended as an instrument of death, a weapon of murder," resumed Quin solemnly, "Through being a member of the Friday Club I know that Professor Broomshaw had become very jealous of Sir Oliver Dilke through the latter's success in the same field of scientific research as himself. So much had this affected him that for some time I had considered the man a trifle insane— remember his amazingly brilliant conversation at the dinner last Friday, Huish.

"An insane criminal is a very dangerous person to deal with. Let me further construct the crime: Broomshaw wished Sir Oliver's death for the reason I have stated. But he was clever enough not to allow any suspicion to fall on himself. A fellow entomologist with Dilke, he self-sacrificingly sends the latter a specimen which he would have been pleased to have in his own collection. A man who wished to do this kindly act by stealth (his enmity was not generally known, I should have explained), he sent the gift anonymously.

"But he knew that Slr Oliver would recognise the prize at once and would gloat over it. He knew also that Sir Oliver would be bound to touch the damaged wing...

"Broomshaw arranged for the butterfly to arrive by the last post. Yes-for he had a reason. He knew that Dilke would not be going out to dinner at the Friday Club that night, and that he was a great reader. What more likely than that Sir Oliver should get down the greatest living authority on butterflies from his bookshelf to verify the specimen; that in his excitement he should forget an elementary caution and absent-mindedly wet his finger to turn the leaves of the book after the repairing of the damaged wing? As a matter of fact, the page of the book he had just turned showed faint traces upon test of the poison."

"Good Heavens!" I cried, seeing the whole vilely ingenious plot.

"As I have said, a shot in the dark-but you know now why Broomshaw was talking so brilliantly to you at the Friday Club dinner— his deranged brain was excited about whether his gamble had come off."

"Two questions. Quin."

"Certainly."

"Why was Matthews, the butler, so terrified when questioned about the wine glasses?"

"Because he was afraid that Hilan Croft really had poisoned his uncle."

"And who washed the clean wine-glass?"

"Sir Oliver himself, no doubt. He rarely drank anything but water. He yielded to his nephew's wish to pledge their reconciliation in wine but afterwards washed the taste away with a glass of water...

"And now, I think, we will enable Hilary Croft to become a free man once more."

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2: The Dark Horse

Sydney Horler

The 20-Story Magazine, Nov 1924;
Western Mail (Perth) 29 Aug 1929

STRIPPED OF the vernacular— which is rather too robustly picturesque for sober print— this is the yarn Tug Wilson, that experienced saga-spinner of pugilism, told me after the Tunney-Heeney upset.

"Women in the fight game?" mused Tug, pulling at the inevitable cigar. "Well, I've known one or two have a considerable say in scraps that I've seen put before the public. There was the Buck Burris— Kid O'Kane bout, for instance."

THE KID'S REAL NAME was Riley— George Riley— and a nicer, better-conducted lad never stepped on rosin. That was why directly Rosie Clancy listened to what he had to say she reached out two hands and held the maulers that were destined to make history tight. They were a pair well matched.

In the beginning, I believe, the Kid was a motor mechanic. But after he had put to sleep a noisy individual at the local Working Men's Club, who had presumed upon civility to such an extent that he had drunk a glass of beer which the Kid had just ordered, he decided to change his occupation.

It happened that the middleweight champion, Buck Burris, was in training in the neighbourhood, at the "White Hart" Hotel, to be exact. Buck was running short of sparring partners; three had thrown the job down cold, and another was still in the nearest hospital— and the rumour had got about that any likely lad who wasn't afraid to take a hiding could get a show at the "White Hart" gymnasium.

Such was Burris's known brutality, however, that no one had rushed to keep the appointment. Why the Kid himself went he did not quite understand until he stood face to face with Burris— and then the Irish blood in him made him stay. He didn't like Burris's face. That was good enough excuse for him.

"Want anythin'?" growled the mighty man.

It pleased the kid's sense of humour to be very humble.

"I only want a chance," he pleaded, "if I'm no good you can chuck me 'out."

"I'm training at two o'clock this afternoon— you'd better show up then," said the champion graciously.

That arrangement suited the applicant first-rate, and when some faded and stained boxing clothes were thrown at him by Burris's manager, he showed such eagerness to get into them that the champion burst into a loud guffaw. Fancy the poor simp being so anxious to get half-killed.

Fired with an idea, the Kid went for his man directly they started sparring. Burris was so surprised that it was not until he had sustained a painful jab on the

nose that he woke up to the real state of affairs. Directly he did, however, he brought his justly famous right across with such force that the Kid jumped into the air before landing heavily on his back.

"You've killed the fool!" growled the champ's trainer, but the corpse, leaping to its feet, made another rush at the champion.

What followed was painful, but, in Burris's opinion, necessary. The recruit had to be taught the rules of the trade.

In the circumstances the Kid could have been excused if he had washed his face and then left the premises. But the more he saw of Buck Burris the less he liked him— and the memory of those knock-downs he had, had hurt his pride as well as his skin.

"I'm sorry," he said, with false humility, "I didn't know. You see, this is the first sparring job I've taken on. I'm sorry that I don't suit."

Here Burris's manager poked his face in.

"You'll suit, all right if you remember in future what Buck 'as just told you— and if a pound a week and your keep is any use to you."

Pluck has its effect upon the most hostile nature, and the way the Kid had bounced up time after time only to be immediately stretched low again had impressed Dave Taylor.

"I shall be glad to stay," mumbled the Kid. But neither Dave Taylor nor the champion himself realised what was beneath the words.

Nursing an ambition, and strictly repressing himself, the Kid became the perfect sparring partner.

He became so good that the champion found it increasingly difficult to hit him with the same force that he had used before, I mean. He did hit him, because Riley, realising the part that had been assigned to him, had played it to perfection. The champion's pride was assuaged by always getting the better of his sparring partner. Burris, being not overloaded with brains, did not appreciate the fact that the Kid at the same time was learning every move he. had.

Get that— the Kid was learning!

Learning another subject besides boxing, too. Old Bob Clancy, who kept the "White Hart," had a daughter-Rosie— and she was as pretty as a picture.

Rosie Clancy just took the two hands of the £1 a week sparring partner, and said that she'd be willing to come to him directly he was ready.

The day of the Burris *vs*"Smasher" Smith fight drew near. Reporters-came to watch the champion in his final try-out. They watched him drive his chief sparring partner— the Kid had been promoted to his position because all the others had thrown in their hands— all over the ring, and predicted that no man in the country at his weight could stand up against him. At the same time, another bunch of writers were saying exactly the same thing about "Smasher" Smith.

The Kid saw the man who had pummelled him so fiercely during the past fortnight beat "Smasher" Smith in the seventh round. One minute after the bell had gone, Burris's haymaker had come across, and Smith sank violently into oblivion.

Just about this time rumour began to get busy with the name of a newcomer in the fistic arena. The name was Kid O'Kane, which conveyed nothing to Burris, because he had only known his former sparring partner by the more prosaic cognomen of George Riley.

Well, to cut it short, this new boy, Kid O'Kane, wandered here, there and everywhere, fighting for his supper, as the saying is. And one day he came to the town where the champion lived. The two met in a public bar.

"How goes it. champ?" inquired the Kid. He was holding a pint of beer in his hand, from which he proceeded to drink somewhat noisily. The great man stared.

"Hello, Riley," he replied, "still lookin' for a job?"

The other smiled.

"No. Got one. In business on my own now."

"What's the big idea?" growled Burris. Someone listening had laughed, and he suspected a joke of some sort.

"I'm Kid O'Kane now," proffered the other.

"Kid O'Kane! And who might be he?" scoffed the champion, knowing part of the truth, but having to pose before the crowded bar.

George Riley smiled modestly.

"It's not for me to say, perhaps, but I've been winning a few good fights lately. Of course, I owe it all to you— what you taught me, you know, champ, when I was your sparring partner."

Burris was good enough to unbend.

"Oh, I get you," he said with ponderous, humour, "you're a fighter yourself now! Well, well, well! What do you think of that, boys?"

The crowded bar thought it was very good indeed-and filled up once more at the champion's expense.

"And I suppose you'll be challenging me next?" offered Burris.

The visitor shuffled his feet. "I know you'll think it's a joke, but there's a fellow up north who'll put up a thousand quid for a fight between us, he said. "The winner to take all— it ought to be worth your while, champ. For myself, I shall be quite satisfied with beer money, as you may say." He took another pull at his tankard.

"So that's the stuff you train on, eh?" inquired the champion, jerking an elbow in the direction of the tankard, which the other had now laid down.

"Yes— it seems to do me good," was the naive response.

Now. you mustn't think that Buck Burris was the sort of man to let a thousand pounds go begging. Times were hard with Buck at the moment, because no one could be found to go into the ring with him. A thousand pounds looked good to him; as for his loss of dignity in fighting such a dud, he promised himself be wouldn't lose any sleep on that account. The only question was whether Kid O'Kane had been trying to make a fool of him before all those fellows. If he had…

"I'll box the fool!" said Burris to his manager.

The Kid, once the match was safely made, didn't seem to take any further interest. Whilst Burris, at the urgent pleading of his manager, performed perfunctorily a certain routine of training every day, Kid O'Kane could be seen loafing about the city. He was even said to be drinking beer...

All the chances were that only a handful of spectators -would turn up at the local Palladium on the night of the fight— one blow from the champion and it would all be over, said the critics, but in some mysterious way a rumour got round, and by the day of the fight every ticket available was sold out. At seven o'clock, when the doors opened, there was such a rush that it seemed half the town was present.

Hearing the stampede, Buck Burris turned snarlingly to his faithful manager. "What's the not about? Do these fools think that the Kid has any chance?"

His manager laughed derisively at the preposterous idea. "One flick, and he'll be down for keeps, Buck!" he said; "the reason half the town has turned up is because they ain't seen a fight for the last three years. If you take my tip, Buck, you won't make it too raw— let the poor fool go a few rounds."

A roar like that of some mighty beast waiting impatiently to devour some prey it had been promised greeted the champion as he climbed nonchalantly through the ropes.

The roar was like a blow in the face, it was not so much a greeting; it was a challenge. This crowd had been tuned up to a great occasion. This was the kind of uproar a fight crowd made when thrones were tottering and when proud champions bit the dust.

The roar which had greeted the champion was dwarfed by the tumult that shivered the rafters when Kid O'Kane entered smiling. The man who hadn't a chance was enveloped in a huge dressing-gown, which he kept wrapped tightly about him.

The champion swung on his stool. Loud enough for the reporters to hear, he blared: "What's the matter with you, you lump of dough? Do you think this kid has got any chance at all? Ain't he been loafin' round the pubs?"

One of the pressmen laughed— but so quietly that the champion did not hear. Further speech on his part was stopped by, the referee calling the principals together

"Why don't he take that dressing-gown off?" queried the champion of his manager.

Dave Taylor coughed.

"Seems to me to be ashamed to show what shape he's in," he said, and knew he was lying before. Allowing his seconds to unwrap him, Kid O'Kane stood up in his fighting kit.

The champion took one glance, and realised that the vague fears which had been oppressing him ever since he had entered the ring had been founded upon substance. He had had too many fights not to know that his opponent, who had been loafing round the town ever since the articles for the fight had been signed, was in perfect physical condition. Why, there wasn't an ounce of superfluous flesh on him. He was taut and trim— a model of a boy taking the ring. His skin looked hard and firm. "D'ye see, Dave?" he stammered— and then went the bell.

The fact that chiefly worried Buck Burris as he slouched into his fighting stride was not that he might lose his crown as middleweight champion, but that all the stake money was to go to the winner.

The realisation came that his greed had made him incautious; he had allowed himself to be beaten in a battle of wits. Buck was no coward— he hadn't a spot of yellow in him— but the thought of possibly losing all that money was devastating. It made him stand dazed for a couple of seconds.

Those two seconds were sufficient time for O'Kane to get busy. Leaping in, he drove a straight left to the stomach, and when the champion's guard dropped, a right that seemed to have a ton-weight attached to it came sweeping across to make Burris reel as it landed on the side of his head. Acting on instinct, the champion sprawled into a clinch.

"What's the game?" he whispered, hoarsely, "do you want me to kill you?"

"Try it on," came the reply. "It may not be so easy as you think. Before we've finished I'm going to take you to pieces to see what makes you go, mister Champion!"

"Break there!" called the referee!"

O'Kane obeyed the order at once. His quickness enabled him to whip a snaky left clean on the champion's nose.

This organ, narrow-bridge and sensitive in consequence, had always been Buck Burris's weak spot. O'Kane had absorbed this useful knowledge during the times he had acted as Burris's sparring partner. Once then he had hit the champion on the nose and had caused the great man to become infuriated.

"It did not take the crowd long to realise that they were fortunate enough to be present on a great occasion. "A championship was in the passing that, night, they would be able to see one monarch dethroned and another king installed in his place.

The result was inevitable. Burris was soon panting. Sweat poured from him. Bellows were to mend. He had not trained for this fight, and he now cursed his neglect. But even though he knew that his stock of endurance would soon be exhausted, he continued his whirlwind tactics and furious assaults. .He had just sufficient sense left to know that he would be bound to lose if the bout went the distance. His only chance was to get a knock-out-soon.

But he might have been fighting a shadow. O'Kane was as elusive as a moon-beam. Every twist of his body mocked the infuriated champion.

"I can finish you now any time I like— you know that," said the Kid, "But before I put you out, you big tramp, I'm going to tell you something. I shall be middleweight champion in a few minutes— and it's you who's got me there. If you hadn't made yourself a nuisance to Rosie Clancy I might never have bothered about you, not yet, anyway." '

"Br-reak, there!" yelled the referee.

As they came apart, Kid O'Kane, feinting coolly with his left, brought his right crashing to the point, and the middleweight champion retained his crown just so long as it took the referee to count to ten.

I went into the dressing-room to congratulate the victor and found the reporters already there.

"But how did you get into such a condition, Kid," asked one who wasn't in the secret. "Here you were loafing about the town all day, and saying you didn't worry about the fight. You ought to have gone into the ring, anyhow, but instead of that you scarcely perspired a drop. How did you manage it?"

"Boys," said Kid O'Kane, pointing to a photo, "that young lady is my mascot. Also, she's my future wife. I met her first when I was sparring partner to Buck Burris, the fellow I've just rolled in the mud. It was she who gave me the idea."

He smiled happily.

"What idea?" demanded the reporter.

"The idea that won me this fight," smiled back the champion. "I trained at night."

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3: Adventure of the Rubber Pipe

Anonymous

Telegraph (Brisbane) 27 Sep 1913

Oh dear! An adventure of Shiloh Coombes and Dr Thatson.

THE SUN was well up towards the meridian when I awoke after our arduous exertions of the previous night and early morning, ending satisfactorily with the capture of the notorious forger Evans. But the terrible strain on his mental faculties and the exhausting pertinacity with which he clung to his clue and finally developed it into something tangible enough for the official police to handle, had in no way prostrated Shiloh Coombes, for the dreary, groaning and wheezy modulations of a bassoon from our mutual parlour told me how, true to his custom and natural instincts, the great detective had entirely subordinated the professional man to the hobby-hunter.

Coombes believed there was a great future for the bassoon as a concert instrument, and every moment of relaxation between the many cases which filled his portfolio was spent in an endeavour to prove that the weirdness of Wagner could he presented properly in solo from only on the instrument of his choice.

He had just finished a particularly trying chromatic run, and laid down the instrument, as I entered. My eyes, I noticed, as I looked in my dressing glass, were none too bright, and bore that tired appearance which is the aftermath for those of us who reverse nature and devote the sleeping hours to work or pleasure, but Coombes was as fresh as though, he had passed a normal night; nor was I surprised to hear that he had been up since 6 o'clock putting some finishing touches to his brochure on "The Possibilities of the Bassoon.

"Good morning, Thatson," he exclaimed "I am glad you have come in. There will be a client in a few moments."

Used as. I was to his powers of deduction and unerring divination, I expressed no surprise and only directed at him a questioning raising of my eyebrows.

"Young lady over the way," he replied. "I have, been watching her for a quarter of an hour. She has something on her mind, but she isn't certain whether her suspicions are sufficiently convincing to make her consult me. But she will come. Her desire, for help to ease her fears will triumph. Just as I said," he concluded, and I saw the lady walk across the street. A minute later she was announced.

A lithe figure plainly and neatly clad in black, a girl in years, but a woman in experience, and one who had evidently passed many hours in suffering and

grief. Her agitation was great, and had it not been for the impetuosity which had nerved her to the ordeal she would have collapsed.

"Mr. Coombes!" she exclaimed, "something dreadful has happened morning. My father, the best and truest friend. I had in the world, has, been found dead in his bed. I don't, know what to think. It is so dreadful and so strange."

The calm, impassive face of my friend created feelings of assurance to her, as it has often done in many other poor distracted beings, and she became quieter.

"Tell me the whole story You may speak before my friend, Dr. Thatson. He assists me greatly in these investigations. Am I right in supposing that you have not been long in England, and are living away out on the other side of London?"

The look of anguish quickly fled before one of surprise and interrogation.

"We have never met before, so, how do you know? But it is quite true; we came from Paris to Bromley about two months ago. A man named Brenson came with us, and though he has been very kind and thoughtful, I have never really liked him.

"My father seemed in good health, but this morning when I went to call him as usual at 6 o'clock, I could get no answer, and Mr Brenson came to my help and burst open the door; and then we found my poor father lying dead in bed, but just as though he were asleep. He was quite cold, and had evidently been dead some hours. The doctor we called in declared heart failure to he the cause of death. But I wish you would come and see the room, for I fear I do not know what.".

Coombes promised to go, and made an appointment for 6 o'clock that evening, taking a careful note of the address.

"What will be your fee?" she asked, falteringly.

"To a lady in distress, who I can see has to earn her living as a shorthand typist, and has to snatch a brief hour from her employment in the city, my services are free;" and with a bow he showed her out, her face being full of blank wonder at his close description.

"Really!" I cried, "why go at all to the house? If you can tell so much about her, why stir away at all?"

"Your caustic wit is in the ascendant this morning," he replied. "But really, it is very simple. Her shoes were pronouncedly Parisian, and as they had not been half-soled, evidently she had not worn them long. No snob ever puts on half a sole without showing where he cuts across the narrow of the foot. Had she not lived in an entirely opposite direction to us, she would have called here on her way to business, and she is in the city because in her fingers she twisted a two-penny omnibus ticket. As to her profession, typists use a deep violet carbon tissue for duplicating purposes, and her fingers were discoloured with it. She

would not be a typist without being a stenographer. There you have the whole story. I wonder what her story is!"

A CHURCH CLOCK somewhere was striking six as we drove up to the door of 46 Northumbrian road, Bromley, and the door was opened by Miss Wryde herself, who forthwith led us to the suite of four rooms on the ground floor which was tenanted by herself, the deceased Mr. Wryde, and Mr. Brenson. The doors of the men's rooms were close together in one angle of the landing, the lady's apartment was a little distance off, and the living-room occupied the front of the house. Opening the door of the room in which the dead parent lay, Coombes strode in, and I could see by the rapid glances which he shot hither and thither along the walls, then across the ceiling and over the floor, that he had summed up a quantity of details. It was a small room 12 feet by 12 feet, and the window was nailed up so that it was impossible to open it.

Bit by bit, Miss Wryde was led on by Coombes to tell her story.

It was at Brenson's suggestion that her father used that small chamber, because he thought it would be cosier for an old man than a large one; and, by his kindly forethought the window was fastened up securely so that the wind should not rattle the frame in the night, and prevent sleep. Not a thing was disturbed in the room it was just as she found it that fatal morning.

"You noticed no smell, and the air did not seem misty?" queried my friend.

"No," was the ready response.

"That broken pane?" he questioned, pointing to a square of glass in the window. "When was that done?"

"I found it. broken this morning, and a pebble and the damaged glass were on the table beneath. Some boy had doubtless thrown the stone at it. There are frequently a lot of wild and troublesome youngsters playing about in the road out there at the back!"

Going down on his knees Coombes carefully examined the skirting inch by inch, thence he proceeded to the door, and by inserting his finger under it, measured the space between it and the floor. Immediately afterwards he went to the door of Brenson's room and applied a similar scrutiny, and a second later his powerful magnifying lens was at his eye, and the floor between the doors was undergoing the closest observation.

Then, ascertaining that Brenson was not in his room, he opened the door, and spent a few moments in glancing around, opening a cupboard, and then carefully closing it just as he found it. From the mantel-shelf he picked up a few black grains, and the pocket microscope, without which he never stirred, was employed to examine them. Opening the window, he measured carefully the few feet it stood above the garden, then he passed through it, and made a detailed exploration of the soil, following an evident trail to the back wall, and

looked up at the broken window behind which lay the subject of the tragedy. By the side of his iect were a number of broken bottles, each of which he cautiously smelled, and, at some length, took notes of what he read on the labels.

"A simple case, Thatson," he said as he swung himself back into the room; "By to-morrow all London will be ringing with the news of a sensational tragedy. I will rejoin you later at our rooms; in the meantime, I must see the local police."

IT WAS VERY LATE when he came back to our lodgings.

"By this time, I anticipate, Mr. Brenson has parted with his liberty for some weeks to come, at any rate; perhaps for ever. It was a most ingenious scheme he worked out, and the police detectives would never have blundered upon it, even by chance. The coroner's officer has been working up details on his own account, and he had quite agreed to the idea that it was an instance of death from heart failure. Directly I saw the deceased I scouted that view. Such men as he, thin, wiry, and tough, have hearts that don't fail in a hurry, especially during sleep.

"I was struck at the very outset by the smallness of the room, the lack of a fireplace, and the nailed-up window, all factors in a case of poisoning by gas fumes, but there was no gas laid on, nor could I find any trace of a cut pipe near the skirting. The broken window, and the absence of any smell or coloured air, both combated the theory, until right in the corner beneath the door I saw in the dust signs of something like a rope having been dragged along. My magnifying glass failed to detect any shreds of hemp which would have frayed from a rope by the friction of dragging, but clearly before my eyes was testimony that something had been pushed or pulled beneath that door, and the trail also led under the door of Brenson's room.

"Once inside his room, I speedily found what I wanted to know, for hanging in a cupboard was a coil of rubber piping, of a size just sufficient to be passed easily under the doors, where, as no doubt you observed, there was a space half an inch wide. There was no gas bracket in the room to which the pipe could be attached, but on the mantelshelf I found a few grains of charcoal.

"Now, Thatson, a medical man like yourself knows, how deadly are the fumes of carbon dioxide, and how they have neither smell nor colour. There, was the key of the mystery. Evidently Brenson had been experimenting for some time with various chemical elements. The broken bottles in the garden told me that much, and as nearly every one bore a different chemist's name, he had been at great pains to baffle anyone who tried to trace his actions.

"By some means he obtained the loan of an apparatus for manufacturing this fiendish gas; it was passed by the pipe, into the dead man's room, and in a very short time his last sleep would have commenced. Medical testimony will come to our aid at the inquest, because the blood, when carbon-dioxide fumes

arc well absorbed, becomes of a very bright red colour, which it retains after death.

"After allowing time for the gas to do the fatal work Brenson withdrew the tube, and leaving his room by the window, as some new scratches upon it will attest, walked to the end wall, where he stopped and turned. Why? To pick up a little pebble and hurl it through the window of the gas-laden apartment, and by that method allow the fumes to escape into the night air. He evidently made off with his plant through the garden, and over the wall adjoining Long Barnes lane. He must have met with an accident to his parcel, for I picked up a fragment of an induction tube, and I have satisfied myself that its discoloration was caused by carbon dioxide. The police have all this in hand, and will bring the whole story to light, taking, of course, the full credit to themselves."

"But the motive, Coombes?"

"Ah! that the police must find out."

About a fortnight later he showed me a newspaper cutting.

"With respect to the trial of the man Brenson for the wilful murder of Mr. Wryde, at Bromley, the police have discovered that both men were members of an anarchist party.. To Wryde was allotted the task of an attack on a crowned head in Europe, but at the last minute he washed his hands of the affair, though he promised full penalty to breaking his oath, and Brenson was delegated to execute what the society termed justice upon him."

Taking no notice of my comments on this tragic news item, Coombes paced the floor with slow stops, an expression of abstraction on his face. Stopping suddenly, he darted to the corner where his bassoon leaned against the wall, and removed his favourite instrument from its case. Then seating himself, he looked at me as one inspired.

"This is an improvisation," he said, dreamily. "I should value your opinion of it, Thatson."

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4: Obsessed

Richard Dehan

Clotilde Graves, 1863-1932

In: *The Cost of Wings and Other Stories*, 1914

ANDREW FENN is known to the world as an art critic and essayist of unerring instinct and exquisite refinement, a writer of charming *vers de société*, and teller of tales supposedly designed for children, but in reality more appreciated by children of a larger growth. He is much sought after, but little to be found, unless one has the *entrée* to his pleasant, roomy old house in Church Street, Chelsea, where he lives in the midst of his library— the whole house is a library— his etchings and Japanese curios. He is less of a traveler than he used to be; getting old, he says, and lazy, content with old friends, soothed by old pipes, fortified by old wine— he has a supreme *goût* in wines— and nourished by excellent cookery.

His household staff consists but of an elderly valet and butler, and a housekeeper-cook. She has been in her master's service twenty years, and is beginning to grow handsome, Andrew is wont to say. Certainly, if her master speaks the truth, she must have been, when comparatively young, extraordinarily unlovely, this most excellent of women. Even now she infallibly reminds the casual beholder of an antique ecclesiastical gargoyle much worn by weather. Her name is Ladds. She has never been married, but respect for the position of authority she occupies in Andrew's household universally accords her brevet rank. She might have occupied another, and more important position, if—

"Yes," Andrew says, when he is disposed to tell the story— and he often does tell it to intimate friends, leaning back on the library divan, after a cosy dinner, holding his gray beard in one big fist, still brown with tropical sunshine— "Ladds is an excellent creature. She might have married me, might Ladds!"

We invariably chorus astonishment. Then some of Ladds' famous coffee comes in, and Andrew gets up to hunt for precious liquors, and, having found them, continues:

"I came *very* near marrying her— once."

Somebody growls: "Good job you pulled up in time!"

Andrew rounds on the somebody. "*I* didn't pull up. *She* did. Refused me!"

There is a general howl.

"I am telling you men the truth," Andrew says, pulling the gray beard. "Fifteen years ago I was infatuated with that woman. She possessed my every thought; she dominated me, like—"

"Like a nightmare!"

"Apposite illustration," says Andrew, nodding. "*Like* a nightmare. It was just about the time I published my book, *Studies of the Human Grotesque in Art, Ancient and Modern*. You remember, some of you, I was keen on the subject—had been for years. And I was a traveler and collector in those days: I'd got together a wonderful show of illustrative subjects. You won't see many of 'em now. I gave them to the Smoketown Mechanical Institute afterward."

He pulls at his long cherrystick, and blows a cloud of Latakia, and goes on:

"I'd the whole house full. Peruvian idols, Aztec picture writings, Polynesian and Maori war masks; Chinese and Japanese, Burmese and Abyssinian, Hindu and Persian monstrosities of every kind; Egyptian, Carthaginian, Babylonian, Druidical, Gothic— Well, well! I'm thoroughgoing, and when I do a thing I do it thoroughly. It's enough to say that every variety of libel upon the human face and form that human ingenuity or depravity has ever perpetrated, I'd carefully collected and brought together here."

He waves his hand, with a curious cabalistical ring upon it that once belonged, it is said, to Eliphas Lévi, who had it from Albertus Magnus. But this may be mere report.

"I worked hard, and drank a great deal of coffee," says Andrew, "so much that my old housekeeper began to be afraid something mysterious was the matter with me. She expostulated at last, and I explained. Then she got interested in the book; she was an intelligent woman, poor dear old soul, and she got specially interested in that section of the work which deals with the Grotesque in Nature. Everything in humanity that is purely grotesque— not deformed, unnatural, outrageous, but purely quaint and bizarre— I piled into those chapters. The work is illustrative, you know, as well as descriptive, and the queer photographs and engravings that scientific friends had contributed to this particular portion of it absolutely fascinated the dear old lady.

" 'To be sure, Master Andrew' (she had known me from my knickerbocker and peg-top days), 'but them are queer folk. And, my heart alive!'— she uttered a sharp scream— 'if that picture isn't the exact moral of Jane Ladds!'

"I glanced over her shoulder. It *was* a portrait of Jane, certainly— a rude little wood cut of the sixteenth century, purporting to be a portrait of a female jester, attached, in her diverting capacity, to the Court of Mary Tudor, during the latter part of her reign, and mentioned by name in some of the accounts of the Royal household as 'Jeanne la Folle.' Unless the long-dead delineator of her vanished charms has shamefully belied them, Jeanne must have been one of the most grotesquely hideous specimens of womanhood that ever existed. Judge, then, whether the exclamation of my housekeeper awakened my interest, excited my curiosity, or left me apathetic and unmoved!"

We are silent. Our interest, our curiosity, are urging us to hurry on the conclusion of Andrew's story.

"You may suppose that I bombarded my housekeeper with questions. What? Did a living counterpart of the sixteenth-century joculatrix exist in the nineteenth? What was her station in life? Where was she to be found? In reply, I elicited the fact that Jane Ladds was a countrywoman of my own, the daughter of a wheelwright living in the village of Wickham, in Dorsetshire, where I myself had first seen the light. Jane was some half dozen years my junior, it appeared. My mother had once taken her into her service as under-scullerymaid, but in a casual encounter with the last new baby (my brother Robert, now commanding his battery of the Royal Horse Artillery at Jelalabad), Jane's facial eccentricities had produced such a marked effect (resulting in convulsions) that the unfortunate *protégée* had been hastily dismissed. Since when she had kept house for her father, and was probably keeping it still; there not being, said my housekeeper, the slightest human probability that any potential husband would endeavor to interfere with the wheelwright's domestic arrangements." There comes a twinkle into Andrew's brown eyes.

" 'No man would be mad enough!' the old lady said. Judge of her surprise when I turned upon her and ordered her to write— write at once to Dorsetshire, ascertain whether Jane was still alive, still available, willing to take service, under an old acquaintance, in a bachelor's London establishment? Stunned as she was, my housekeeper obeyed. The wages I instructed her to offer were good. An answering letter arrived within the space of a week, announcing Jane Ladds' willingness to accept the offered situation. The letter was nicely written. I read and reread it with morbid excitement. I looked forward to the day of the writer's arrival with an excitement more morbid still. At last the day came, and the woman...."

We inspire deep breaths, and unanimously cry, "Go on!"

"My writing table was piled high with books— I couldn't see her until she came round the corner," says Andrew, "and stood by my chair. She wore her Sunday clothes— Wickham taste inclines to garments of many colors. In silence I contemplated one of the finest examples of the Animated Grotesque it had ever been my fortune to look upon. Her hair was then red— the brightest red. Her nose was not so much a nose as a pimple. Her mouth was the oddest of buttons. Her forehead a ponderous coffer of bone, overhanging and overshadowing the other features. She was lengthy of arm, short of leg, dumpy of figure. She did not walk— she waddled; she did not sit— she squatted. Her smile was a gash, her curtsy the bob of an elder-pith puppet. She was, as she is now, unique. You are all familiar with her appearance. Search your memories for the moment when that appearance dawned upon you first, intensify your surprise, quadruple your sensations of delight— add to these, imagine yourself dominated by a fascination, weird, strange— inexplicable. In a word—"

Andrew's pipe is out; he is gesticulating excitedly, and his eyes have an odd gleam under his shaggy brows.

"She took possession of me. I had her constantly about me. She brought me everything I wanted. I was never tired of gloating over my new-found treasure. Every accent of her voice, every odd contortion of her features, every awkward movement of her body was a fresh revelation to me. All this while I was working at my book. It was said afterward, in the newspapers, that the entire work, especially the closing chapters on the Human Grotesque, had been written in a fever of enthusiasm. The reviewer never knew how rightly he had guessed. Some of the theories I propounded and proved were curious. That Ugliness is in reality the highest form of Beauty— beauty in the abstract— was one of the mildest. I believed it when I wrote it; for I was madly, passionately infatuated with the ugliest woman I had ever seen— my parlor maid, Jane Ladds!"

We hang upon his words so that our pipes go out, and our whisky and sodas stand untasted at our elbows.

"Yes," says Andrew, drawing a long, hard breath, "she possessed my thoughts— dominated me— waking and sleeping. I had the queerest of dreams, in which, with a joy that was anguish, a rapture that was horror, I saw myself attending crowded assemblies with my wife, Jane Fenn, *née* Ladds, upon my arm. She wore my mother's diamonds, a *décolletée* gown from Worth's; and as we moved along together, sibilant whispers sounded in my ears, and astonished eyes said as plainly, '*What* an ugly woman!'

"Then would come other visions... Jane at the head of my table... Jane rocking the cradle of our eldest born— an infant who strongly resembled his mother... Jane here, Jane there— Jane everywhere!... My nerves, you will guess, must have been in a very queer state.

"All the time Jane Ladds would be deftly moving about me, dusting my books and curios, or going on with her sewing, or, to the utter stupefaction of my housekeeper, I had issued orders that she should sit in the window, where my glance might dwell upon her whenever I lifted my head from my work. Late, late into the small hours, when the sky began to gray toward the dawning, and the ink in my stand got low, she used to keep me company. Not the faintest shadow of impropriety could attach to the association in any sane mind. My housekeeper thought it queer, but nothing more.

"She had— she has— very large, very rough, very red hands. I used to imagine myself kissing one of those hands when I should ask her to be my wife, and conjure up the grotesque smile of shy delight with which she would accept the unheard-of honor. The temptation to snatch and kiss that awful hand became so powerful that it cost me more effort than I can explain to resist its ceaseless promptings. And I would chuckle as I looked at it, and at the bizarre countenance that bent over the stocking that was in process of being darned—

Jane's peculiar, shuffling gait seemed to have a peculiarly wearing effect on stockings— and wonder, *if she knew*, how she would look, what she would say? Then she would thread her needle, or bite the end of her worsted.... That hand! that hand! The struggle between the masterful impulse to seize and kiss it, and the shuddering desire not to do anything of the kind, would, upon these occasions, be perfectly indescribable. And— one day— the very day that saw the completion of my book— I yielded!"

"Yes?" we cry, interrogatively. All our eyes are rounded, all our mouths wide open.

"She saw some of my papers flutter to the carpet as I pushed back my chair," Andrew continues, "and obligingly crossed the room, stooped and gathered them up. A kind of mist came over my eyes, and when it cleared away, she was there— by my side— holding the written sheets out to me. That hand! I must— I must! Before the poor creature could hazard a guess at my intentions, I seized it— I kissed it— with a resounding smack. I cried deliriously, 'Jane, will you be my wife? I adore you, Jane!'"

"And what did she do? What did she say?..."

"I'm coming to that! She drew away from me, and turned very white, and her poor red hands trembled, and her little button features twitched absurdly with the effort she made to keep from crying. But, as I seized her hands, and went on with my wild asseverations and protestations— Heaven only knows what I said!— the absurdity of the whole thing came on her, and she burst out laughing wildly. Then I caught the infection, and followed suit. Once I began, I couldn't stop. I was shaken like a rag in the wind— torn, possessed by seven devils of risibility. But I went on raging, all through it, that she must marry me! At last she tore herself away, and ran out of the room, breathlessly to burst upon my housekeeper with the information that 'Master was mad, and wanted the doctor.' And she was not far wrong, for by the time he came I was fit for nothing but to be carried to bed. Twenty-four hours later I was raving in brain fever. Seven weeks that red-hot torture lasted, and then I came to myself, and found that through all the delirium and fever I had been patiently, uncomplainingly, tenderly nursed by poor Jane...."

Andrew's voice grows a little husky as he nears the finish.

"Well, when I was convalescent, and knew that I owed my life to her devotion, it seemed to me that only one reparation was possible for the wrong I had done Jane. It was a hard thing to do— the madness being over— the morbid impulse that had swayed me being no longer in the ascendant. But I did it! You may have noticed"— he clears his husky throat— "that is, those among you who have spoken to Ladds— *that she has a singularly sweet voice*— a voice curiously out of keeping with her personality. Well, when she thanked me for my 'kindness' and— refused me, I might, supposing my eyes had been shut, have

fancied that I was listening to a beautiful woman. She had been 'marked out by the Lord' to lead a lonely life, she said. When she was a young girl it used to make her cry when the lads went by *her*, 'wi' their vaices turned away,' and the girls laughed when she put on a ribbon or a flower. But she got used to it; and she quite understood that I was trying to make up— like a gentleman as I was;— (a mighty poor kind of gentleman, I felt)— 'for summat as I'd said when I didn't know what I was a-saying!' Crazy people had queer ideas, and the village 'softy' had once taken it into his head that he was in love with Jane.... And she thanked me for sticking to my word now that I was well, and she'd be my faithful servant always and for ever, Amen! Years have passed since then.... Well, she has kept her word. I hope, when the end of everything comes for me, that honest, tender, devoted heart will be beating by my pillow. I hope—"

Andrew breaks off abruptly, and gets up and wishes us all good night.

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5: Grannie's Legs

"Weeroona"

Mary Simpson, 1884-1952

The Australian Woman's Mirror, 1 June 1926

Australian short story writer and dramatist

BREAKFAST WAS OVER. It had been eaten in the lean-to, where, indeed, all the meals were taken since the school teacher's departure. While he had been boarding with them, as in Grannie's time, the big room had been used for meals. But the boarder had taken the extension table with him, it being his own property, as were the lounge and the armchair. Knowing from experience how short of comforts was Buckogong and similar settlement homes, he, strange young man, carried his furnishings with him.

Before his time Grannie's things had been used in the big room; but when she died her belongings had been divided, as keepsakes, among her many descendants.

Tom and Annie, with whom she had mainly lived, had, in addition to her clock, drawer-chest and settee, hoped to retain the square, cedar-legged table. It was theirs, they thought, by right of long usage. Besides, it kind of set-off the other things.

However, Joe, Tom's distant and almost forgotten brother, who "never did nothing for Gran'," had come with his wife Kate for his share. He promptly laid claim to the table— violent claim as it turned out, for, after refusal (Tom considering it little short of sacrilege to let the table go "God knew where"), high words had followed. Blows even had been struck, women had shrieked and their children hidden themselves behind the woodheap.

Neither claimant giving way, the table had been finally struck apart with a hammer and Joe had departed, a half-victor, bearing the shiny top away with him in his dray.

The four cedar legs Tom had stowed away in the feed shed, out of sight. Here they lay until there came a time when then owner, being hard put to it for supports for a new home-made feed-bin, used them for that purpose.

Nobody was the wiser— Tom alone was the familiar of this place, so sweetly smelling of chaff and dimmed at all times by a cloud of floating pollard dust. Hidden by carelessly thrown bags, by-and-bye the cedar legs of Grannie's table were for gotten, time even blunting Tom's susceptibilities in the matter.

Breakfast over and the children packed off on the trudge to school, Annie was cutting a "crib" for her man; for Tom was due that day at the market eight miles off.

As Annie wrapped up the parcel of sandwiches she paused and looked at the advertising page of the *Settlers' Weekly* which lay beneath her hand. The page was devoted to the advertisements of a city furnishing firm which, with elegant suites and "period" furniture, made a violent appeal to the Outback matron, so often, alas, condemned to articles built from kerosene-boxes. To Annie, with an acute taste for grandeur and no means of satisfying it, these columns were a constant goad.

She gazed at the paper with gloomy and longing eyes. Tom, coming in for his lunch and the grocer's list, noted the look with dismay. Big, diffident and seemingly unobservant, he knew every expression of his wife's face, every longing of her heart and her yearning for a "good" dining room and a spare bedroom.

"Damn the ads.," he thought. Not that he begrudged the things. He would have good "sticks," too— if he could. But cows and poultry, in his experience, did not run to much more than bread and butter, take it all in all— what with the drought, falling prices and seven mouths to fill. Reaching for his lunch he laid a heavy hand upon the table at which his wife sat reading. Beneath his pressure it lurched to westward.

Annie, still deep in the advertisement, gave the table a push eastward and, as it creakingly regained its poise, remarked: "I see round tables are coming in again. Look —here, and here—"

She pointed out pictured specimens of perfect symmetry and meticulous polish, all at staggering prices.

Tom grunted.

"Seems as if the old styles are returning," she resumed; "mid-Victorian, they call it, I think— or is it Louis Quators?"

Then she added wistfully: "Don't forget the tin o' varnish, Tom; that dado wants doing awful bad."

Tom departed gloomily. There had been no farewell beyond a "Hooray" between them, and this had sounded so dejected as to make any full-blooded "Hurrah" blush for its name.

Annie turned to her work — hens, chickens, calves, beds, dishes. After that there would be bread to bake and strawberries to plant out. Always work to do and not enough to do it on.

She gave the yielding table an angry shove when, after washing up, she scrubbed its seamy surface. Odds and ends of wood, dark in color, which no labor of scrubbing would ever whiten, had gone to its making. Big cracks showed where the boards had warped and a knife was always necessary to dislodge the dirt that lodged in them.

"Crazy old thing," she thought with bitterness as, with the utmost complaisance, the table leaned this way and that under the ministrations of the

scrubbing-brush. "Always letting pins fall through you, you are; and pencils and pens roll into your cracks."

Her thoughts ran on. "It wants pulling to pieces and re-making, so it does.... But Tom says it wouldn't hold nails no more— it's that old. An' I dessay he's right. Besides, what'd we do while it was being re-built. Dashed if I know. Couldn't eat off the floor. Not 's if we haven't mended it, both of us. But the thing's that crazy" .

She gave it another angry knock. This time its four supports splayed out at the bottom. "There you go — looking like a new-born poddy calf trying to stand for the first time. Have some respect for yourself, do, an' stand square."

She almost groaned with the table. She was sore in the temper to-day and tired — tired. What sort of a life was this for a woman? Why, she hadn't had a new hat for years, and if she had one there was nowhere to go. A sun-bonnet did for everything... and always this old table to scrub and eat at. Why you couldn't lay a thimble on it but what it gave at the knees. And Tom, too, so glum now always. And no wonder — work, work, always work! She wished Tom would sell the place and move nearer the city. Better that than the everlasting grind. A new table would have to be got then....

The table and the meals in the hot lean to had worn Annie's nerves to such an extent that any medical man, knowing the circumstances, would have ordered the ancient thing's immediate execution. It was an irritant, a mischief-maker and "come between" betwixt husband and wife.

Not that they realised this, though. Neither Tom nor Annie studied psychology. All they knew was that furniture and tables were, owing to distance, freight and something but dimly understood as "over head charges," quite unprocurable. And the livestock on the place left no time for carpentering; for, when a man is the only money-earner he must conserve his time toward the necessaries. Besides, they wanted furniture good when they did have it.

Tom, reared among the solid stuff of bygone times, abhorred gimcrack things, while Annie had absorbed advertisements so long that she knew at a glance which was shoddy and which the "real Mackay." Yes, the groaning, warped old table in the lean-to had become an unrealised canker in their lives. Three times daily, seven days weekly, they gathered round it— nine of them, not to mention transients. No wonder the old table groaned and yielded. As a festive board it pleaded for annihilation.

In the township Tom, his work done, awaited the shoeing of a horse, and looked idly into the window of Jim Brady's store. Jim Brady stored all manner of things but few that were complete. Most articles lacked a part, or parts — nuts without bolts, braces without bits, chairs without seats, cups minus handles.

The proprietor eyed Tom cannily, seeing in him a possible buyer.

"Anything in your line, Boss?" he asked genially. "Tools an' cetterar, an' cetterar?"

He monotoned a catalogue of his wares, apparently to deaf ears. Tom heeded not the list of imperfections. But his gaze, bent indifferently into the dusty distances of the shop's interior, suddenly became rapt, as that of one who sees visions. Presently he was negotiating the avenue of broken goods within.

On his return home Tom drove straight to the shed.

Coming in to tea he was more taciturn and absent-minded than ever. Annie, longing for a bit of township gossip and not getting it, became taciturn, too.

"What was the use of it all— of any thing?" she thought as, folding some paper to make the lamp straight on the slant of the table, she gave the latter a peevish hoist toward uprightness.

A few days later a brown, shining, circular surface, carefully propelled, approached the house. Behind it was Tom. He had emerged with the shining brown thing from the feed-house, where, at intervals, he had been putting new legs to the bins— and, as it now transpired, old legs to the cedar table-top which had been bought from Jim Brady.

The result of his labor and secrecy Tom now, with infinite care, insinuated through the lean-to door and into the dining-room proper, and placed it in the centre of the sparsely-furnished room. There it stood, fitting follower of all tables that had reigned before, its four handsome carved legs re-polished and shod with new brass castors and supporting a circular top of richly-grained, gleaming cedar. It awaited her.

"Mum!" he called; and as Annie approached from sorting potatoes on the front verandah, he said; "Here's a bit of a table— might be better than this here," jerking his head with humility toward the crazy old thing at which they habitually ate.

Annie came in wearily through the lean-to, saying as she came: "Table? What table?"

She gave a great gasp of astonishment, then became absolutely still. She passed into a state of awe. She gazed as one might at a vision.

Slowly, without a smile, with all her senses, all her faculties strained upon it, she approached the table. She walked round it tested its firmness with her weight and ran her roughened hand across it's shiny surface. Dropping to her knees she examined the legs one by one, caressed each castor lovingly, rolling the table upon them to test its mobility. Rising, she bent over its polished top again, seeing in its surface her face dimly reflected. Then, not till then, did she look at Tom, sheepish in the doorway.

"It's the cliver chap ye are, Tam," she said solemnly, lapsing into her mother's tongue as she did when deeply moved, as Tom knew. "It seems t'me there ain't annythin' but phwat ye can turn yer han' to." She looked at him with

ineffable gentleness. "There's some as 'll be sayin' I was the lucky wan to have the likes o' ye."

She smiled tremulously. Tom kicked one foot with the other and gazed into the yard in happy embarrassment.

"As long as you're satisfied, Ann," he said awkwardly.

After profound thought Annie went to the chest and drew from its bottom drawer a gay centre-cloth of pink silk embroidered with blue flowerets. Then, dusting reverently the cedar table, she spread upon it with meticulous care the silken thing. After standing off to take in this effect she turned toward the mean array of tumblers upon the safe. Selecting the best of them, she went outside and returned with it filled with red geraniums and placed it in the exact centre of the cloth. With a sigh of content she said, as though to herself: "I meant that cloth for a wedding present for Eileen, but I dunno as how it'd look anny better on her table than on ours. What d'you think, Tom?"

"S'long's you're satisfied, Ann.... It looks great to my way o' thinkin'," he added after a pause.

They gazed ecstatically at the *tout ensemble*.

"To think you was that sly about it," murmured Annie. "Who'd ever 'a' thought of using Grannie's legs?"

They meditated blissfully a while, then, by a common impulse, turned and looked at the crazy old thing in the lean-to. It seemed to have taken a more crooked lurch than ever. For the first time they were able to see its comic side, and they laughed long and heartily without realising that the old table had, in becoming a joke, ceased to be a menace.

Tom then said; "The chap in the shop told me that if he had had the legs as well as the top the turnout would 'a' been worth pounds and pounds. Them round tops are all the go now."

"Oh they are —they are," she agreed. "An, that top is so good. It's like— it's like, she searched for a simile, "it's like brown satin. An' the way you've polished Grannie's legs"

Tom ventured another opinion. "Them tumblers don't do justice to that silk mat to my way of thinkin'. I— I'll get you a proper vase, per'aps, next time I'm in."

"It don't do the table justice," she corrected solemnly; "but it'll do. Who knows Tom, but what you might be able to make me a vase, when ye've got time," she added with tender humor, "a silver epergne, purraps— cut from a kerosene-tin. It's my belief there ain't nothin' ye can't put yer 'and to, me fine fellah."

Again Tom grinned in happy awkwardness. "An' it's yerself has got th' soft soap to yer tongue, I'm thinkin'," he said gallantly as, within the doorway,

shoulder to shoulder, they stood and absorbed their masterpiece— Grannie's legs supporting their lovely burden.

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6: The Owl

Jeffery Farnol

1878-1952

Collier's, 6 Feb 1932

British author of some 40 historical novels

YOUNG ROLAND gazed haggard-eyed upon the dawn, viewing everything with an almost fierce intensity since he felt very sure this was the last dawn he would ever live to see... vague trees rising from a pearly mist that brimmed every hollow, a somber sky lightening towards the east with promise of day; and from somewhere in this dimness, sudden and loud, an owl hooted dismally. Sir Roland shivered and, drawing the candles near, bent to finish the letter that had been worded with such painful care; he read it with haggard eyes, sighed, tore it up and, dipping quill, wrote again:

Dear Heart:

If I must go out into the unknown, I shall not fear because I know that the sweet spirit of your love will guide me through the dark to the light beyond, for thine own am I through death and the hereafter, ever and always,

Roland.

Having sanded and sealed this letter he turned back to the casement and saw the sky shot with glory where the sun was rising. Presently on the door was a soft knocking and Captain Standish entered:

"Hey— dooce take me! Up and dressed already, Roly?"

"I haven't been to bed, Tom."

"Not? Oh the deyvil... 'twill never do! Limp as a dem'd rag, Roly; hand shakes like cursed aspen and—er—so forth! Lie down, old f'low, compose, rest, breathe deep and— ah— so on—"

"No use, Tom, and no matter. There can be but one end; I know it and so do you. Darvell never misses and... well, I'm prepared. But why aren't you asleep?"

"Well, I was, y'know... at least very nearly but what with one dooced thing and another, I— oh dem!"

"I know, Tom, I know and thanks for your sympathy, it... it makes matters easier for me."

"And that dem'd owl! Hooting, y'know, like an accursed dem'd soul! What a plaguey, desolate, infernal gloomy hole this old house o' yours is, Roly!"

"Why, I seldom come near the place," sighed young Roland, "indeed all too seldom... and now—"

"Darvell couldn't sleep either, Roly. I heard him tramp, tramping... chamber next mine, y'know, and once he stuck head out o' lattice and cursed every owl that ever was hatched... that dem'd owl!"

"Yes, I heard it. But surely nothing could possibly shake Darvell's iron nerves, Tom."

"NO, he's precious cool... dem'd iceberg... shoot a man and smile... oh, curse! And yet, Roly," said the Captain, shaking comely head and seating himself on the unused bed, "I ain't so sure. Queer thing happened as we rode down here... narrow lane and we riding three abreast, Darvell, Ponsonby and self in the middle, when we met a gypsy hag, stalwart old soul, stout and tall as a grenadier, dem'd fine, buxom creeter once— well, she stands aside but not quick enough for Darvell. The dam' f'low swears and flicks her with his whip— and Roly, b'Gad... panthers, lions, tigers? Dooce take me but she's at him like 'em all in one, claws the whip from him, tosses it over hedge, and demme—out flies a monstrous white owl....

"'See you, ye gorgio dog!' she screams. 'An owl's your fate... a black and bloody fate! When ye see or hear an owl, tremble and— beware!' says she.... Well, I tossed her a crown and on we rode, making light on't, though Darvell showed mighty glum twixt whiles, and his hand so ripped and torn he lapped handkerchief round it to stay the bleeding.... And now, old f'low, lookee!" And the Captain laid a dueling pistol on the table. "How are you with the poppers?"

"Worse than bad, Tom," sighed Sir Roland, viewing the murderous thing askance.

"Oh demme!" wailed the Captain. "Then how shall you contrive?"

"Close my eyes probably and trust to fortune."

"But, Roly... strike me purple, 'twill be murder!"

"Most duels are."

"Look now, for the love o' Gad! You've taken your ground, facing your man 'cross your right shoulder— thus! Your pistol 'gainst your right leg— so! At the word 'one' you raise it slowly— so! At 'two' you bring it to a level— so! At 'three' you depress a bit, say to the third button on—"

"Thanks, Tom, but 'tis no good. I shall forget everything the moment we are placed. Let's talk o' something else."

"But, Roland... Roly, upon my perishing soul—" stammered the Captain aghast, "this... this is monstrous, absurd... too infernally preposterous!"

"It is!" nodded Roland drearily. "But then I struck the arrogant, foul-tongued beast and must abide the consequences."

"But to... to walk out and be shot like a... a poor, dem'd, defenseless lamb—"

"Nay, Tom, I shall shoot back."

"But have y'ever fired a pistol?"

"Once or twice. However, I've drawn my will, Tom, settled all my affairs—"

"Oh, rat me!" moaned the Captain. "This comes o' your Gentleman Jackson 'stead of Angelo—preferring fists to a gentleman's weapons—"

"YES," answered Roland, clenching his fist and sighing over it, "were it honest naked mauleys I could thrash the fellow very handsomely; as 'tis, Tom, he will probably... well, if I... should the expected happen, pray bear me this letter to my... to... Deborah."

"Lady Carstairs? I will... I will certainly. Trust me, Roly. To be sure. But... let's hope—! Ha, curse it, another two hours to wait... two mortal, dem'd hours!"

"Only two!" sighed young Roland. "They'll soon pass, Tom! Look at the morning; how glorious! Let's out and walk before breakfast."

And a fresh, sweet world they found it— radiant with sun that set a myriad dewy gems a-sparkle, and glad with the joyous clamor of new-waked birds... And to Roland as he gazed around with that same eager intensity, this familiar prospect took on new beauties he had never noticed until now; and since he was to lose all so dreadfully soon, he viewed all with a passionate yearning. The Captain, eying his friend's rapt features and sensing the reason, sank from gloom to a hopeless despondency; and thus they walked together in that silent communion only friendship may know.

"Aha, see yonder, Roly— trespassers, b'Gad!" Sir Roland started, glanced at the travel-worn van and dingy tent pitched in the little glade before them, and shook his head.

"No, Tom, gypsies," he sighed. "I let 'em camp hereabouts, like my father before me, and on the whole they behave surprisingly well, save for an occasional rabbit or—" he stopped suddenly, for the door of this van had opened and a tall old woman stood looking down on them— a handsome, stately creature despite her age, and crowned with a splendor of white hair and who, lifting hand in salutation, spoke soft-voiced:

"*Kosko divvus*, my gorgio rye! And God bless 'ee, young master, you as be's good to the Poor Folk. Shoot ye when the owl hooteth! But, oh mark ye this—let it be nigh unto th' old tithe-barn, for thy safety shall be hid there... th' old tithe-barn— remember!" Then she waved her hand again and vanished into the van.

"DOOCE take me!" exclaimed the Captain. "But 'twas she Darvell struck... and flew at him like a dem'd fury. A rare, handsome creeter once, Roly!"

"I wonder what she meant by the owl... and tithe-barn?"

"Dooce knows! But when you fight— demme if I don't place you as near the barn as possible, Roly."

"As well there as anywhere else, Tom. And now come in to breakfast." Approaching the house, they beheld two elegant creatures sunning themselves

on the terrace: one a tall, rosy, jovial personage, the other a smallish, slim gentleman, very languid yet extremely sinister. Perceiving them, these gentlemen paused to salute them, hats a-flourish.

"A delightful morning for our little affair, Sir Roland."

"Perfect, Mr. Darvell," answered the young baronet, contriving to meet the unwinking stare of the speaker's pale eyes. "You have breakfasted?"

"Thank you, yes. And, by the by, the... surgeon has arrived." Young Roland blenched and, aware of this, flushed, bowed and turned away and entered his house to greet the cheery doctor and thereafter to sit at table and make pretense of eating; hearing nothing, seeing nothing except the hands of the clock creeping remorselessly on and on to his death hour.... He started violently to feel the Captain's friendly hand on his shoulder.

"It's the damned suspense!" Roland whispered. "So come, let's be done, Tom; let's have it over— now!" Arm in arm they went forth into the sunshine, but a sun this with no power to warm him. He followed dumbly whither he was led. He saw the old barn... Surgeon Purdy laying out glittering instruments on a white cloth.... Then a pistol was thrust into his fingers, he saw Darvell take the other... Mr. Ponsonby was speaking loud and high:

"Gentlemen, the word will be: One! Two! Three! Fire! On the word 'Fire' I shall drop my handkerchief. Are you ready?"

Roland heard Darvell's languid "yes" and nodded dumbly.

"One!" cried Ponsonby. Roland lifted his weapon, and then the air thrilled to the sudden fierce hooting of an owl. Darvell spun round upon his heel to glare round about him, crying: "Damnation! What was that?"

"Sounded like a dem'd owl," answered the Captain, staring round about also.

"But true owls don't cry i' the sun!" snarled Darvell. "Count again, Ponsonby."

So once more Roland heard that high-pitched, fateful voice: "One... Two... Three... Fire—"

Even as Roland pulled trigger he was aware of something that wheeled heavily in the air above him, monstrous, silent, ghastly white... then Darvell's gasping, agonized voice:

" 'Twas the owl... the damned white owl... distracted my aim..." He saw Darvell writhing in the arms that supported him, glaring at the dripping, red ruin of what had been his deadly pistol hand... Like one a-dream he watched that twisted, pain-racked form carried away. Then, letting fall smoking pistol, young Roland drew a deep breath and glanced from earth to heaven like one awaking to a new and greater life.... A voice spoke softly behind him and, turning, he espied a white head nodding to him from the gloom of the old tithe-barn; the voice spoke again:

"The Hearns gives good for good!" Here she held up a large basket. "They likewise gives ill for ill!" Here she gestured fiercely towards where Darvell's blood spattered the grass. "And so, long life and happiness to 'ee, young master. *Kosko divvus*!"

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7: Pallinghurst Barrow

Grant Allen

1848-1899

The Illustrated London News, 28 Nov 1892

Collected in *Ivan Greet's Masterpiece*, 1893

RUDOLPH REEVE sat by himself on the Old Long Barrow on Pallinghurst Common. It was a September evening, and the sun was setting. The west was all aglow with a mysterious red light, very strange and lurid— a light that reflected itself in glowing purple on the dark brown heather and the dying bracken. Rudolph Reeve was a journalist and a man of science; but he had a poet's soul for all that, in spite of his avocations, neither of which is usually thought to tend towards the spontaneous development of a poetic temperament. He sat there long, watching the livid hues that incarnadined the sky— redder and fiercer than anything he ever remembered to have seen since the famous year of the Krakatoa sunsets— though he knew it was getting late, and he ought to have gone back long since to the manor-house to dress for dinner. Mrs. Bouverie-Barton, his hostess, the famous Woman's Rights woman, was always such a stickler for punctuality and dispatch, and all the other unfeminine virtues! But, in spite of Mrs. Bouverie-Barton, Rudolph Reeve sat on. There was something about that sunset and the lights on the bracken— something weird and unearthly— that positively fascinated him.

The view over the common, which stands high and exposed, a veritable waste of heath and gorse, is strikingly wide and expansive. Pallinghurst Ring, or the "Old Long Barrow," a well-known landmark, familiar by that name from time immemorial to all the country-side, crowns its actual summit, and commands from its top the surrounding hills far into the shadowy heart of Hampshire. On its terraced slope Rudolph sat and gazed out, with all the artistic pleasure of a poet or a painter (for he was a little of both) in the exquisite flush of the dying reflections from the dying sun upon the dying heather. He sat and wondered to himself why death is always so much more beautiful, so much more poetical, so much calmer than life— and why you invariably enjoy things so very much better when you know you ought to be dressing for dinner.

He was just going to rise, however, dreading the lasting wrath of Mrs. Bouverie-Barton, when of a sudden a very weird yet definite feeling caused him for one moment to pause and hesitate. Why he felt it he knew not; but even as he sat there on the grassy tumulus, covered close with short sward of subterranean clover, that curious, cunning plant that buries its own seeds by automatic action, he was aware, through no external sense, but by pure internal consciousness, of something or other living and moving within the barrow. He shut his eyes and listened. No; fancy, pure fancy! Not a sound broke the stillness

of early evening, save the drone of insects— those dying insects, now beginning to fail fast before the first chill breath of approaching autumn. Rudolph opened his eyes again and looked down on the ground. In the little boggy hollow by his feet innumerable plants of sundew spread their murderous rosettes of sticky red leaves, all bedewed with viscid gum, to catch and roll round the struggling flies that wrenched their tiny limbs in vain efforts to free themselves. But that was all. Nothing else was astir. In spite of sight and sound, however, he was still deeply thrilled by this strange consciousness as of something living and moving in the barrow underneath; something living and moving— or was it moving and dead? Something crawling and creeping, as the long arms of the sundews crawled and crept around the helpless flies, whose juices they sucked out. A weird and awful feeling, yet strangely fascinating! He hated the vulgar necessity for going back to dinner. Why do people dine at all? So material! so commonplace! And the universe all teeming with strange secrets to unfold! He knew not why, but a fierce desire possessed his soul to stop and give way to this overpowering sense of the mysterious and the marvellous in the dark depths of the barrow.

With an effort he roused himself, and put on his hat, which he had been holding in his hand, for his forehead was burning. The sun had now long set, and Mrs. Bouverie-Barton dined at 7.30 punctually. He must rise and go home. Something unknown pulled him down to detain him. Once more he paused and hesitated. He was not a superstitious man, yet it seemed to him as if many strange shapes stood by unseen, and watched with great eagerness to see whether he would rise and go away, or yield to the temptation of stopping and indulging his curious fancy. Strange!— he saw and heard absolutely nobody and nothing; yet he dimly realized that unseen figures were watching him close with bated breath, and anxiously observing his every movement, as if intent to know whether he would rise and move on, or remain to investigate this causeless sensation.

For a minute or two he stood irresolute; and all the time he so stood the unseen bystanders held their breath and looked on in an agony of expectation. He could feel their outstretched necks; he could picture their strained attention. At last he broke away. "This is nonsense," he said aloud to himself, and turned slowly homeward. As he did so, a deep sigh, as of suspense relieved, but relieved in the wrong direction, seemed to rise— unheard, impalpable, spiritual— from the invisible crowd that gathered around him immaterial. Clutched hands seemed to stretch after him and try to pull him back. An unreal throng of angry and disappointed creatures seemed to follow him over the moor, uttering speechless imprecations on his head, in some unknown tongue— ineffable, inaudible. This horrid sense of being followed by unearthly foes took absolute possession of Rudolph's mind. It might have been merely the lurid

redness of the afterglow, or the loneliness of the moor, or the necessity for being back not one minute late for Mrs. Bouverie-Barton's dinner-hour; but, at any rate, he lost all self-control for the moment, and ran— ran wildly, at the very top of his speed, all the way from the barrow to the door of the manor-house garden. There he stopped and looked round with a painful sense of his own stupid cowardice. This was positively childish: he had seen nothing, heard nothing, had nothing definite to frighten him; yet he had run from his own mental shadow, like the veriest schoolgirl, and was trembling still from the profundity of his sense that somebody unseen was pursuing and following him. "What a precious fool I am," he said to himself, half angrily, "to be so terrified at nothing! I'll go round there by-and-by, just to recover my self-respect, and to show, at least, I'm not really frightened."

And even as he said it he was internally aware that his baffled foes, standing grinning their disappointment with gnashed teeth at the garden gate, gave a chuckle of surprise, delight, and satisfaction at his altered intention.

ii

THERE'S NOTHING LIKE light for dispelling superstitious terrors. Pallinghurst Manor-house was fortunately supplied with electric light; for Mrs. Bouverie-Barton was nothing if not intensely modern. Long before Rudolph had finished dressing for dinner, he was smiling once more to himself at his foolish conduct. Never in his life before— at least, since he was twenty— had he done such a thing; and he knew why he'd done it now. It was a nervous breakdown. He had been overworking his brain in town with those elaborate calculations for his *Fortnightly* article on "The Present State of Chinese Finances"; and Sir Arthur Boyd, the famous specialist on diseases of the nervous system, had earned three honest guineas cheap by recommending him "a week or two's rest and change in the country." That was why he had accepted Mrs. Bouverie-Barton's invitation to form part of her brilliant autumn party at Pallinghurst Manor; and that was also doubtless why he had been so absurdly frightened at nothing at all just now on the common. Memorandum: Never to overwork his brain in future; it doesn't pay. And yet, in these days, how earn bread and cheese at literature without overworking it?

He went down to dinner, however, in very good spirits. His hostess was kind; she permitted him to take in that pretty American. Conversation with the soup turned at once on the sunset. Conversation with the soup is always on the lowest and most casual plane; it improves with the fish, and reaches its culmination with the sweets and the cheese; after which it declines again to the fruity level. "You were on the barrow about seven, Mr. Reeve," Mrs. Bouverie-Barton observed severely, when he spoke of the after-glow. "You watched that

sunset close. How fast you must have walked home! I was almost half afraid you were going to be late for dinner."

Rudolph coloured up slightly; 'twas a girlish trick, unworthy of a journalist; but still he had it. "Oh dear, no, Mrs. Bouverie-Barton," he answered gravely. "I may be foolish, but not, I hope, criminal. I know better than to do anything so weak and wicked as that at Pallinghurst Manor. I *do* walk rather fast, and the sunset— well, the sunset was just too lovely."

"Elegant," the pretty American interposed, in her language.

"It always is, this night every year," little Joyce said quietly, with the air of one who retails a well-known scientific fact. "It's the night, you know, when the light burns bright on the Old Long Barrow."

Joyce was Mrs. Bouverie-Barton's only child— a frail and pretty little creature, just twelve years old, very light and fairylike, but with a strange cowed look which, nevertheless, somehow curiously became her.

"What nonsense you talk, my child!" her mother exclaimed, darting a look at Joyce which made her relapse forthwith into instant silence. "I'm ashamed of her, Mr. Reeve; they pick up such nonsense as this from their nurses." For Mrs. Bouverie-Barton was modern, and disbelieved in everything. 'Tis a simple creed; one clause concludes it.

But the child's words, though lightly whispered, had caught the quick ear of Archie Cameron, the distinguished electrician. He made a spring upon them at once; for the merest suspicion of the supernatural was to Cameron irresistible. "What's that, Joyce?" he cried, leaning forward across the table. "No, Mrs. Bouverie-Barton, I really *must* hear it. What day is this to-day, and what's that you just said about the sunset and the light on the Old Long Barrow?"

Joyce glanced pleadingly at her mother, and then again at Cameron. A very faint nod gave her grudging leave to proceed with her tale, under maternal disapprobation; for Mrs. Bouverie-Barton didn't carry her belief in Woman's Rights quite so far as to apply them to the case of her own daughter. We *must* draw a line somewhere. Joyce hesitated and began. "Well, this is the night, you know," she said, "when the sun turns, or stands still, or crosses the tropic, or goes back again, or something."

Mrs. Bouverie-Barton gave a dry little cough. "The autumnal equinox," she interposed severely, "at which, of course, the sun does nothing of the sort you suppose. We shall have to have your astronomy looked after, Joyce; such ignorance is exhaustive. But go on with your myth, please, and get it over quickly."

"The autumnal equinox; that's just it," Joyce went on, unabashed. "I remember that's the word, for old Rachel, the gipsy, told me so. Well, on this day every year, a sort of glow comes up on the moor; oh! I know it does, mother, for I've seen it myself; and the rhyme about it goes—

'Every year on Michael's night
Pallinghurst Barrow burneth bright.'

Only the gipsy told me it was Baal's night before it was St. Michael's; and it was somebody else's night, whose name I forget, before it was Baal's. And the somebody was a god to whom you must never sacrifice anything with iron, but always with flint or with a stone hatchet."

Cameron leaned back in his chair and surveyed the child critically. "Now, this is interesting," he said; "profoundly interesting. For here we get, what is always so much wanted, firsthand evidence. And you're quite sure, Joyce, you've really seen it?"

"Oh! Mr. Cameron, how can you?" Mrs. Bouverie-Barton cried, quite pettishly; for even advanced ladies are still feminine enough at times to be distinctly pettish. "I take the greatest trouble to keep all such rubbish out of Joyce's way; and then you men of science come down here and talk like this to her, and undo all the good I've taken months in doing."

"Well, whether Joyce has ever seen it not," Rudolph Reeve said gravely, "I can answer for it myself that I saw a very curious light on the Long Barrow to-night; and, furthermore, I felt a most peculiar sensation."

"What was that?" Cameron asked, bending over towards him eagerly. For all the world knows that Cameron, though a disbeliever in most things (except the Brush light), still retains a quaint tinge of Highland Scotch belief in a good ghost story.

"Why, as I was sitting on the barrow," Rudolph began, "just after sunset, I was dimly conscious of something stirring inside, not visible or audible, but—"

"Oh, I know, I know!" Joyce put in, leaning forward, with her eyes staring curiously; "a sort of a feeling that there was somebody somewhere, very faint and dim, though you couldn't see or hear them; they tried to pull you down, clutching at you like this: and when you ran away, frightened, they seemed to follow you and jeer at you. Great gibbering creatures! Oh, I know what all that is! I've been there, and felt it."

"Joyce!" Mrs. Bouverie-Barton put in, with a warning frown, "what nonsense you talk! You're really too ridiculous. How can you suppose Mr. Reeve ran away— a man of science like him— from an imaginary terror?"

"Well, I won't quite say I ran away," Rudolph answered, somewhat sheepishly. "We never do admit these things, I suppose, after twenty. But I certainly did hurry home at the very top of my speed— not to be late for dinner, you know, Mrs. Bouverie-Barton; and I *will* admit, Joyce, between you and me only, I was conscious by the way of something very much like your grinning followers behind me."

Mrs. Bouverie-Barton darted him another look of intense displeasure. "I think," she said, in that chilly voice that has iced whole committees, "at a table

like this, and with such thinkers around, we might surely find something rather better to discuss than such worn-out superstitions. Professor Spence, did you light upon any fresh palæoliths in the gravel-pit this morning?"

iii

IN THE DRAWING-ROOM, a little later, a small group collected by the corner bay, remotest from Mrs. Bouverie-Barton's own presidential chair, to hear Rudolph and Joyce compare experiences on the light above the barrow. When the two dreamers of dreams and seers of visions had finished, Mrs. Bruce, the esoteric Buddhist and hostess of Mahatmas (they often dropped in on her, it was said, quite informally, for afternoon tea), opened the flood-gates of her torrent speech with triumphant vehemence. "This is just what I should have expected," she said, looking round for a sceptic, that she might turn and rend him. "Novalis was right. Children are early men. They are freshest from the truth. They come straight to us from the Infinite. Little souls just let loose from the free expanse of God's sky see more than we adults do— at least, except a few of us. We ourselves, what are we but accumulated layers of phantasmata? Spirit-light rarely breaks in upon our grimed charnel of flesh. The dust of years overlies us. But the child, bursting new upon the dim world of Karma, trails clouds of glory from the beatific vision. So Wordsworth held; so the Masters of Tibet taught us, long ages before Wordsworth."

"It's curious," Professor Spence put in, with a scientific smile, restrained at the corners, "that all this should have happened to Joyce and to our friend Reeve at a long barrow. For you've seen MacRitchie's last work, I suppose? No? Well, he's shown conclusively that long barrows, which are the graves of the small, squat people who preceded the inroad of Aryan invaders, are the real originals of all the fairy hills and subterranean palaces of popular legend. You know the old story of how Childe Roland to the dark tower came, of course, Cameron? Well, that dark tower was nothing more or less than a long barrow; perhaps Pallinghurst Barrow itself, perhaps some other; and Childe Roland went into it to rescue his sister, Burd Ellen, who had been stolen by the fairy king, after the fashion of his kind, for a human sacrifice. The Picts, you recollect, were a deeply religious people, who believed in human sacrifice. They felt they derived from it high spiritual benefit. And the queerest part of it all is that in order to see the fairies you must go round the barrow *widershins*— that is to say, Miss Quackenboss, as Cameron will explain to you, the opposite way from the way of the sun— on this very night of all the year, Michaelmas Eve, which was the accepted old date of the autumnal equinox."

"All long barrows have a chamber of great stones in the centre, I believe," Cameron suggested tentatively.

"Yes, all or nearly all; megalithic, you know; unwrought; and that chamber's the subterranean palace, lit up with the fairy light that's so constantly found in old stories of the dead, and which Joyce and you, alone among moderns, have been permitted to see, Reeve."

"It's a very odd fact," Dr. Porter, the materialist, interposed musingly, "that the only ghosts people ever see are the ghosts of a generation very, very close to them. One hears of lots of ghosts in eighteenth-century costumes, because everybody has a clear idea of wigs and small-clothes from pictures and fancy dresses. One hears of far fewer in Elizabethan dress, because the class most given to beholding ghosts are seldom acquainted with ruffs and farthingales; and one meets with none at all in Anglo-Saxon or Ancient British or Roman costumes, because those are only known to a comparatively small class of learned people; and ghosts, as a rule, avoid the learned— except you, Mrs. Bruce— as they would avoid prussic acid. Millions of ghosts of remote antiquity must swarm about the world, though, after a hundred years or thereabouts, they retire into obscurity and cease to annoy people with their nasty cold shivers. But the queer thing about these long-barrow ghosts is that they must be the spirits of men and women who died thousands and thousands of years ago, which is exceptional longevity for a spiritual being; don't you think so, Cameron?"

"Europe must be chock-full of them!" the pretty American assented, smiling; "though Amurrica hasn't had time, so far, to collect any considerable population of spirits."

But Mrs. Bruce was up in arms at once against such covert levity, and took the field in full force for her beloved spectres. "No, no," she said, "Dr. Porter, there you mistake your subject. You should read what I have written in 'The Mirror of Trismegistus.' Man is the focus of the glass of his own senses. There are other landscapes in the fifth and sixth dimensions of space than the one presented to him. As Carlyle said truly, each eye sees in all things just what each eye brings with it the power of seeing. And this is true spiritually as well as physically. To Newton and Newton's dog Diamond what a different universe! One saw the great vision of universal gravitation, the other saw— a little mouse under a chair, as the wise old nursery rhyme so philosophically puts it. Nursery rhymes summarize for us the gain of centuries. Nothing was ever destroyed, nothing was ever changed, and nothing now is ever created. All the spirits of all that is, or was, or ever will be, people the universe everywhere, unseen, around us; and each of us sees of them those only he himself is adapted to seeing. The rustic or the clown meets no ghosts of any sort save the ghosts of the persons he knows about otherwise; if a man like yourself saw a ghost at all— which isn't likely— for you starve your spiritual side by blindly shutting your eyes to one

whole aspect of nature— you'd be just as likely to see the ghost of a Stone Age chief as the ghost of a Georgian or Elizabethan exquisite."

"Did I catch the word 'ghost'?" Mrs. Bouverie-Barton put in, coming up unexpectedly with her angry glower. "Joyce, my child, go to bed. This is no talk for you. And don't go chilling yourself by standing at the window in your nightdress, looking out on the common to search for the light on the Old Long Barrow, which is all pure moonshine. You nearly caught your death of cold last year with that nonsense. It's always so. These superstitions never do any good to any one."

And, indeed, Rudolph felt a faint glow of shame himself at having discussed such themes in the hearing of that nervous and high-strung little creature.

iv

IN THE COURSE of the evening, Rudolph's head began to ache, as, to say the truth, it often did; for was he not an author? and sufferance is the badge of all our tribe. His head generally ached: the intervals he employed upon magazine articles. He knew that headache well; it was the worst neuralgic kind— the wet-towel variety— the sort that keeps you tossing the whole night long without hope of respite. About eleven o'clock, when the men went into the smoking-room, the pain became unendurable. He called Dr. Porter aside. "Can't you give me anything to relieve it?" he asked piteously, after describing his symptoms.

"Oh, certainly," the doctor answered, with that brisk medical confidence we all know so well. "I'll bring you up a draught that will put that all right in less than half an hour. What Mrs. Bruce calls Soma— the fine old crusted remedy of our Aryan ancestor; there's nothing like it for cases of nervous inanition."

Rudolph went up to his room, and the doctor followed him a few minutes later with a very small phial of a very thick green viscid liquid. He poured ten drops carefully into a measured medicine-glass, and filled it up with water. It amalgamated badly. "Drink that off," he said, with the magisterial air of the cunning leech. And Rudolph drank it.

"I'll leave you the bottle," the doctor went on, laying it down on the dressing-table, "only use it with caution. Ten drops in two hours if the pain continues. Not more than ten, recollect. It's a powerful narcotic— I dare say you know its name: it's Cannabis Indica."

Rudolph thanked him inarticulately, and flung himself on the bed without undressing. He had brought up a book with him— that delicious volume, Joseph Jacobs's "English Fairy Tales"— and he tried in some vague way to read the story of Childe Roland, to which Professor Spence had directed his attention. But his head ached so much he could hardly read it; he only gathered with difficulty that Childe Roland had been instructed by witch or warlock to come to a green

hill surrounded with terrace-rings— like Pallinghurst Barrow— to walk round it thrice, widershins, saying each time—

"Open door! open door!
And let me come in,"

and when the door opened to enter unabashed the fairy king's palace. And the third time the door did open, and Childe Roland entered a court, all lighted with a fairy light or gloaming; and then he went through a long passage, till he came at last to two wide stone doors; and beyond them lay a hall— stately, glorious, magnificent— where Burd Ellen sat combing her golden hair with a comb of amber. And the moment she saw her brother, up she stood, and she said—

"Woe worth the day, ye luckless fool,
Or ever that ye were born;
For come the King of Elfland in
Your fortune is forlorn."

When Rudolph had read so far his head ached so much he could read no further; so he laid down the book, and reflected once more in some half-conscious mood on Mrs. Bruce's theory that each man could see only the ghosts he expected. That seemed reasonable enough, for according to our faith is it unto us always. If so, then these ancient and savage ghosts of the dim old Stone Age, before bronze or iron, must still haunt the grassy barrows under the waving pines, where legend declared they were long since buried; and the mystic light over Pallinghurst moor must be the local evidence and symbol of their presence.

How long he lay there he hardly quite knew; but the clock struck twice, and his head was aching so fiercely now that he helped himself plentifully to a second dose of the thick green mixture. His hand shook too much to be Puritanical to a drop or two. For a while it relieved him; then the pain grew worse again. Dreamily he moved over to the big north oriel to cool his brow with the fresh night air. The window stood open. As he gazed out a curious sight met his eye. At another oriel in the wing, which ran in an L-shaped bend from the part of the house where he had been put, he saw a child's white face gaze appealingly across to him. It was Joyce, in her white nightdress, peering with all her might, in spite of her mother's prohibition, on the mystic common. For a second she started. Her eyes met his. Slowly she raised one pale forefinger and pointed. Her lips opened to frame an inaudible word; but he read it by sight. "Look!" she said simply. Rudolph looked where she pointed.

A faint blue light hung lambent over the Old Long Barrow. It was ghostly and vague, like matches rubbed on the palm. It seemed to rouse and call him.

He glanced towards Joyce. She waved her hand to the barrow. Her lips said "Go." Rudolph was now in that strange semi-mesmeric state of self-induced hypnotism when a command, of whatever sort or by whomsoever given, seems to compel obedience. Trembling he rose, and taking his bedroom candle in his hand, descended the stair noiselessly. Then, walking on tiptoe across the tile-paved hall, he reached his hat from the rack, and opening the front door stole out into the garden.

The Soma had steadied his nerves and supplied him with false courage; but even in spite of it he felt a weird and creepy sense of mystery and the supernatural. Indeed, he would have turned back even now, had he not chanced to look up and see Joyce's pale face still pressed close against the window and Joyce's white hand still motioning him mutely onward. He looked once more in the direction where she pointed. The spectral light now burnt clearer and bluer, and more unearthly than ever, and the illimitable moor seemed haunted from end to end by innumerable invisible and uncanny creatures.

Rudolph groped his way on. His goal was the barrow. As he went, speechless voices seemed to whisper unknown tongues encouragingly in his ear; horrible shapes of elder creeds appeared to crowd round him and tempt him with beckoning fingers to follow them. Alone, erect, across the darkling waste, stumbling now and again over roots of gorse and heather, but steadied, as it seemed, by invisible hands, he staggered slowly forward, till at last, with aching head and trembling feet, he stood beside the immemorial grave of the savage chieftain. Away over in the east the white moon was just rising.

After a moment's pause, he began to walk round the tumulus. But something clogged and impeded him. His feet wouldn't obey his will; they seemed to move of themselves in the opposite direction. Then all at once he remembered he had been trying to go the way of the sun, instead of widershins. Steadying himself, and opening his eyes, he walked in the converse sense. All at once his feet moved easily, and the invisible attendants chuckled to themselves so loud that he could almost hear them. After the third round his lips parted, and he murmured the mystic words: "Open door! Open door! Let me come in." Then his head throbbed worse than ever with exertion and giddiness, and for two or three minutes more he was unconscious of anything.

When he opened his eyes again a very different sight displayed itself before him. Instantly he was aware that the age had gone back upon its steps ten thousand years, as the sun went back upon the dial of Ahaz; he stood face to face with a remote antiquity. Planes of existence faded; new sights floated over him; new worlds were penetrated; new ideas, yet very old, undulated centrically towards him from the universal flat of time and space and matter and motion. He was projected into another sphere and saw by fresh senses. Everything was changed, and he himself changed with it.

The blue light over the barrow now shone clear as day, though infinitely more mysterious. A passage lay open through the grassy slope into a rude stone corridor. Though his curiosity by this time was thoroughly aroused, Rudolph shrank with a terrible shrinking from his own impulse to enter this grim black hole, which led at once, by an oblique descent, into the bowels of the earth. But he couldn't help himself. For, O God! looking round him, he saw, to his infinite terror, alarm, and awe, a ghostly throng of naked and hideous savages. They were spirits, yet savages. Eagerly they jostled and hustled him, and crowded round him in wild groups, exactly as they had done to the spiritual sense a little earlier in the evening, when he couldn't see them. But now he saw them clearly with the outer eye; saw them as grinning and hateful barbarian shadows, neither black nor white, but tawny-skinned and low-browed; their tangled hair falling unkempt in matted locks about their receding foreheads; their jaws large and fierce; their eyebrows shaggy and protruding like a gorilla's; their loins just girt with a few scraps of torn skin; their whole mien inexpressibly repulsive and bloodthirsty.

They were savages, yet they were ghosts. The two most terrible and dreaded foes of civilized experience seemed combined at once in them. Rudolph Reeve crouched powerless in their intangible hands; for they seized him roughly with incorporeal fingers, and pushed him bodily into the presence of their sleeping chieftain. As they did so they raised loud peals of discordant laughter. It was hollow, but it was piercing. In that hateful sound the triumphant whoop of the Red Indian and the weird mockery of the ghost were strangely mingled into some appalling harmony.

Rudolph allowed them to push him in; they were too many to resist; and the Soma had sucked all strength out of his muscles. The women were the worst: ghastly hags of eld, witches with pendent breasts and bloodshot eyes, they whirled round him in triumph, and shouted aloud in a tongue he had never before heard, though he understood it instinctively, "A victim! A victim! We hold him! We have him!"

Even in the agonized horror of that awful moment Rudolph knew why he understood those words, unheard till then. They were the first language of our race— the natural and instinctive mother-tongue of humanity.

They haled him forward by main force to the central chamber, with hands and arms and ghostly shreds of buffalo-hide. Their wrists compelled him as the magnet compels the iron bar. He entered the palace. A dim phosphorescent light, like the light of a churchyard or of decaying paganism, seemed to illumine it faintly. Things loomed dark before him; but his eyes almost instantly adapted themselves to the gloom, as the eyes of the dead on the first night in the grave adapt themselves by inner force to the strangeness of their surroundings. The royal hall was built up of cyclopean stones, each as big as the head of some

colossal Sesostris. They were of ice-worn granite and a dusky-grey sandstone, rudely piled on one another, and carved in relief with representations of serpents, concentric lines, interlacing zigzags, and the mystic swastika. But all these things Rudolph only saw vaguely, if he saw them at all; his attention was too much concentrated on devouring fear and the horror of his situation.

In the very centre a skeleton sat crouching on the floor in some loose, huddled fashion. Its legs were doubled up, its hands clasped round its knees, its grinning teeth had long been blackened by time or by the indurated blood of human victims. The ghosts approached it with strange reverence, in impish postures.

"See! We bring you a slave, great king!" they cried in the same barbaric tongue— all clicks and gutturals. "For this is the holy night of your father, the Sun, when he turns him about on his yearly course through the stars and goes south to leave us. We bring you a slave to renew your youth. Rise! Drink his hot blood! Rise! Kill and eat him!"

The grinning skeleton turned its head and regarded Rudolph from its eyeless orbs with a vacant glance of hungry satisfaction. The sight of human meat seemed to create a soul beneath the ribs of death in some incredible fashion. Even as Rudolph, held fast by the immaterial hands of his ghastly captors, looked and trembled for his fate, too terrified to cry out or even to move and struggle, he beheld the hideous thing rise and assume a shadowy shape, all pallid blue light, like the shapes of his jailers. Bit by bit, as he gazed, the skeleton seemed to disappear, or rather to fade into some unsubstantial form, which was nevertheless more human, more corporeal, more horrible than the dry bones it had come from. Naked and yellow like the rest, it wore round its dim waist just an apron of dry grass, or, what seemed to be such, while over its shoulders hung the ghost of a bearskin mantle. As it rose, the other spectres knocked their foreheads low on the ground before it, and grovelled with their long locks in the ageless dust, and uttered elfin cries of inarticulate homage.

The great chief turned, grinning, to one of his spectral henchmen. "Give a knife!" he said curtly, for all that these strange shades uttered was snapped out in short, sharp sentences, and in a monosyllabic tongue, like the bark of jackals or the laugh of the striped hyena among the graves at midnight.

The attendant, bowing low once more, handed his liege a flint flake, very keen-edged, but jagged, a rude and horrible instrument of barbaric manufacture. But what terrified Rudolph most was the fact that this flake was no ghostly weapon, no immaterial shred, but a fragment of real stone, capable of inflicting a deadly gash or long torn wound. Hundreds of such fragments, indeed, lay loose on the concreted floor of the chamber, some of them roughly chipped, others ground and polished. Rudolph had seen such things in museums many times before; with a sudden rush of horror, he recognized now for the first

time in his life with what object the savages of that far-off day had buried them with their dead in the chambered barrows.

With a violent effort he wetted his parched lips with his tongue, and cried out thrice in his agony the one word "Mercy!"

At that sound the savage king burst into a loud and fiendish laugh. It was a hideous laugh, halfway between a wild beast's and a murderous maniac's: it echoed through the long hall like the laughter of devils when they succeed in leading a fair woman's soul to eternal perdition. "What does he say?" the king cried, in the same transparently natural words, whose import Rudolph could understand at once. "How like birds they talk, these white-faced men, whom we get for our only victims since the years grew foolish! 'Mu-mu-mu-moo!' they say; 'Mu-mu-mu-moo!' more like frogs than men and women!"

Then it came over Rudolph instinctively, through the maze of his terror, that he could understand the lower tongue of these elfish visions because he and his ancestors had once passed through it; but they could not understand his, because it was too high and too deep for them.

He had little time for thought, however. Fear bounded his horizon. The ghosts crowded round him, gibbering louder than before. With wild cries and heathen screams they began to dance about their victim. Two advanced with measured steps and tied his hands and feet with a ghostly cord. It cut into the flesh like the stab of a great sorrow. They bound him to a stake which Rudolph felt conscious was no earthly and material wood, but a piece of intangible shadow; yet he could no more escape from it than from the iron chain of an earthly prison. On each side the stake two savage hags, long-haired, ill-favoured, inexpressibly cruel-looking, set two small plants of Enchanter's Nightshade. Then a fierce orgiastic shout went up to the low roof from all the assembled people. Rushing forward together, they covered his body with what seemed to be oil and butter; they hung grave-flowers round his neck; they quarrelled among themselves with clamorous cries for hairs and rags torn from his head and clothing. The women, in particular, whirled round him with frantic Bacchanalian gestures, crying aloud as they circled, "O great chief! O my king! we offer you this victim; we offer you new blood to prolong your life. Give us in return sound sleep, dry graves, sweet dreams, fair seasons!"

They cut themselves with flint knives. Ghostly ichor streamed copious.

The king meanwhile kept close guard over his victim, whom he watched with hungry eyes of hideous cannibal longing. Then, at a given signal, the crowd of ghosts stood suddenly still. There was an awesome pause. The men gathered outside, the women crouched low in a ring close up to him. Dimly at that moment Rudolph noticed almost without noticing it that each of them had a wound on the side of his own skull; and he understood why: they had themselves been sacrificed in the dim long ago to bear their king company to

the world of spirits. Even as he thought that thought, the men and women with a loud whoop raised hands aloft in unison. Each grasped a sharp flake, which he brandished savagely. The king gave the signal by rushing at him with a jagged and saw-like knife. It descended on Rudolph's head. At the same moment, the others rushed forward, crying aloud in their own tongue, "Carve the flesh from his bones! Slay him! hack him to pieces!"

Rudolph bent his head to avoid the blows. He cowered in abject terror. Oh! what fear would any Christian ghost have inspired by the side of these incorporeal pagan savages! Ah! mercy! mercy! They would tear him limb from limb! They would rend him in pieces!

At that instant he raised his eyes, and, as by a miracle of fate, saw another shadowy form floating vague before him. It was the form of a man in sixteenth-century costume, very dim and uncertain. It might have been a ghost— it might have been a vision— but it raised its shadowy hand and pointed towards the door. Rudolph saw it was unguarded. The savages were now upon him, their ghostly breath blew chill on his cheek. "Show them iron!" cried the shadow in an English voice. Rudolph struck out with both elbows and made a fierce effort for freedom. It was with difficulty he roused himself, but at last he succeeded. He drew his pocket-knife and opened it. At sight of the cold steel, which no ghost or troll or imp can endure to behold, the savages fell back, muttering. But 'twas only for a moment. Next instant, with a howl of vengeance even louder than before, they crowded round him and tried to intercept him. He shook them off with wild energy, though they jostled and hustled him, and struck him again and again with their sharp flint edges. Blood was flowing freely now from his hands and arms— red blood of this world; but still he fought his way out by main force with his sharp steel blade towards the door and the moonlight. The nearer he got to the exit, the thicker and closer the ghosts pressed around, as if conscious that their power was bounded by their own threshold. They avoided the knife, meanwhile, with superstitious terror. Rudolph elbowed them fiercely aside, and lunging at them now and again, made his way to the door. With one supreme effort he tore himself madly out, and stood once more on the open heath, shivering like a greyhound. The ghosts gathered grinning by the open vestibule, their fierce teeth, like a wild beast's, confessing their impotent anger. But Rudolph started to run, all wearied as he was, and ran a few hundred yards before he fell and fainted. He dropped on a clump of white heather by a sandy ridge, and lay there unconscious till well on into the morning.

v

WHEN THE PEOPLE from the Manor-house picked him up next day, he was hot and cold, terribly pale from fear, and mumbling incoherently. Dr. Porter had

him put to bed without a moment's delay. "Poor fellow!" he said, leaning over him, "he's had a very narrow escape indeed of a bad brain fever. I oughtn't to have exhibited Cannabis in his excited condition; or, at any rate, if I did, I ought, at least, to have watched its effect more closely. He must be kept very quiet now, and on no account whatever, Nurse, must either Mrs. Bruce or Mrs. Bouverie-Barton to allowed to come near him."

But late in the afternoon Rudolph sent for Joyce.

The child came creeping in with an ashen face. "Well?" she murmured, soft and low, taking her seat by the bedside; "so the King of the Barrow very nearly had you!"

"Yes," Rudolph answered, relieved to find there was somebody to whom he could talk freely of his terrible adventure. "He nearly had me. But how did you come to know it?"

"About two by the clock," the child replied, with white lips of terror, "I saw the fires on the moor burn brighter and bluer: and then I remembered the words of a terrible old rhyme the gipsy woman taught me—

"'Pallinghurst Barrow— Pallinghurst Barrow!
Every year one heart thou'lt harrow!
Pallinghurst Ring— Pallinghurst Ring!
A bloody man is thy ghostly king.
Men's bones he breaks, and sucks their marrow.
In Pallinghurst Ring on Pallinghurst Barrow;'

and just as I thought it, I saw the lights burn terribly bright and clear for a second, and I shuddered for horror. Then they died down low at once, and there was moaning on the moor, cries of despair, as from a great crowd cheated, and at that I knew that you were not to be the Ghost-king's victim."

8: The Case of Vincent Pyrwhit

Barry Pain

1864-1928

Black & White, 7 May 1898

Collected in: *Stories in the Dark*, 1901

THE DEATH of Vincent Pyrwhit, J. P., of Ellerdon House, Ellerdon, in the county of Buckingham, would in the ordinary way have received no more attention than the death of any other simple country gentleman. The circumstances of his death, however, though now long since forgotten, were sensational, and attracted some notice at the time. It was one of those cases which is easily forgotten within a year, except just in the locality where it occurred. The most sensational circumstances of the case never came before the public at all. I give them here simply and plainly. The psychical people may make what they like of them.

Pyrwhit himself was a very ordinary country gentleman, a good fellow, but in no way brilliant. He was devoted to his wife, who was some fifteen years younger than himself, and remarkably beautiful. She was quite a good woman, but she had her faults. She was fond of admiration, and she was an abominable flirt. She misled men very cleverly, and was then sincerely angry with them for having been misled. Her husband never troubled his head about these flirtations, being assured quite rightly that she was a good woman. He was not jealous; she, on the other hand, was possessed of a jealousy amounting almost to insanity. This might have caused trouble if he had ever provided her with the slightest basis on which her jealousy could work, but he never did. With the exception of his wife, women bored him. I believe she did once or twice try to make a scene for some preposterous reason which was no reason at all; but nothing serious came of it, and there was never a real quarrel between them.

On the death of his wife, after a prolonged illness, Pyrwhit wrote and asked me to come down to Ellerdon for the funeral, and to remain at least a few days with him. He would be quite alone, and I was his oldest friend. I hate attending funerals, but I *was* his oldest friend, and I was, moreover, a distant relation of his wife. I had no choice and I went down.

There were many visitors in the house for the funeral, which took place in the village churchyard, but they left immediately afterwards. The air of heavy gloom which had hung over the house seemed to lift a little. The servants (servants are always very emotional) continued to break down at intervals, noticeably Pyrwhit's man, Williams, but Pyrwhit himself was self-possessed. He spoke of his wife with great affection and regret, but still he could speak of her and not unsteadily. At dinner he also spoke of one or two other subjects, of

politics and of his duties as a magistrate, and of course he made the requisite fuss about his gratitude to me for coming down to Ellerdon at that time. After dinner we sat in the library, a room well and expensively furnished, but without the least attempt at taste. There were a few oil paintings on the walls, a presentation portrait of himself, and a landscape or two— all more or less bad, as far as I remember. He had eaten next to nothing at dinner, but he had drunk a good deal; the wine, however, did not seem to have the least effect upon him. I had got the conversation definitely off the subject of his wife when I made a blunder. I noticed an Erichsen's extension standing on his writing-table. I said:

'I didn't know that telephones had penetrated into the villages yet.'

'Yes,' he said, 'I believe they are common enough now. I had that one fitted up during my wife's illness to communicate with her bedroom on the floor above us on the other side of the house.'

At that moment the bell of the telephone rang sharply.

We both looked at each other. I said with the stupid affectation of calmness one always puts on when one is a little bit frightened:

'Probably a servant in that room wishes to speak to you.'

He got up, walked over to the machine, and swung the green cord towards me. The end of it was loose.

'I had it disconnected this morning,' he said; 'also the door of that room is locked, and no one can possibly be in it.'

He had turned the colour of gray blotting-paper; so probably had I. The bell rang again— a prolonged, rattling ring.

'Are you going to answer it?' I said.

'I am not,' he answered firmly.

'Then,' I said, 'I shall answer it myself. It is some stupid trick, a joke not in the best of taste, for which you will probably have to sack one or other of your domestics.'

'My servants,' he answered, 'would not have done that. Besides, don't you see it is impossible? The instrument is disconnected.'

'The bell rang all the same. I shall try it.'

I picked up the receiver.

'Are you there?' I called.

The voice which answered me was unmistakably the rather high staccato voice of Mrs. Pyrwhit.

'I want you,' it said, 'to tell my husband that he will be with me to-morrow.'

I still listened. Nothing more was said.

I repeated, 'Are you there?' and still there was no answer.

I turned to Pyrwhit.

'There is no one there,' I said. 'Possibly there is thunder in the air affecting the bell in some mysterious way. There must be some simple explanation, and I'll find it all out to-morrow.'

HE WENT TO BED early that night. All the following day I was with him. We rode together, and I expected an accident every minute, but none happened. All the evening I expected him to turn suddenly faint and ill, but that also did not happen. When at about ten o'clock he excused himself and said good-night I felt distinctly relieved. He went up to his room and rang for Williams.

The rest is, of course, well known. The servant's reason had broken down, possibly the immediate cause being the death of Mrs. Pyrwhit. On entering his master's room, without the least hesitation, he raised a loaded revolver which he carried in his hand, and shot Pyrwhit through the heart. I believe the case is mentioned in some of the text-books on homicidal mania.

9: An Amazing Materialisation

Silas Snell

Edward Dyson, 1865-1931

Punch (Melbourne) 2 July 1914

One of the comical misadventures of housemaid Minnie Trigg in the series "Miss Trigg, Domestic."

"WELL, I've struck the queerest bunch this trip," said Miss Minnie Trigg, sitting in the kitchen at "Chisselhurst," where her bosom friend, Miss 'Arriet Brown, attended to the wants of a large household for fifteen shillings a week.

"You do get some funny 'uns," Miss Brown admitted. "Wot's this lot?"

"Blest if I know; but thy ole girl looks like a king's aunt. She's big an' dark, an' her eyes glower an' glitter."

"Does she beat 'im?" asked 'Arriet innocently. "That sort generally does."

"Well, she don't exactly take the slipper to 'im, but she lets 'im fully, understand he ain't nothin' much, an' must take up his attitude an' lodgin's accordin' to what's comin' to nothin' much. So he dosses in the little back room over the stable, an' he potters' about the yard most of the time lookin' like a bloke what's paid a quid a week t' do it. That's Arthur Holmes. He's nothin' t' speak of. 'Owever, he seems quite content' t' stand out when madam's friends is on the job. Madame tells 'em Arthur's of a very retirin' an' studious nature. I 'eard her. So far I ain't seen Arthur studyin' anythin' but a 'arf-bottle iv beer, wonderin' how he was 'goin' t' get three glasses out of it."

"Does the missus call 'erself 'Madame'?" asked 'Arriet heavily. "I don't trust 'em when they calls themselves 'Madam,' especially when they spells it with a 'E'. on the end. They ain't up to no good when they does that."

Madame Holmes did spell it with an 'E' on the end"— witness the neat brass plate on Madame's gate. The plate read: "Madame Holmes, 11 a.m. to 5 p.m."

Madame's villa was called "Asphodel", possibly as a hint of Madame Holmes profession, which, way distinctly other-worldly. Madame had direct connection with the Ultimate dim Thule, and co-operated with shades floating across the meads of Asphodel.

In short, Madame was a spiritualistic medium. She called herself a "consulting medium," as some doctors call themselves consulting physicians, but of late Madame had been compelled to conduct consultations with great circumspection, because of the conduct of sceptical constables, and the stringency of laws against fortune telling on a strictly cash basis.

But Madame Holmes continued to thrive.

"There's all sorts a-droppin' in every day," Minnie complained to her sympathetic friend. "They fair keep me bobbin' up an' down tendin' rings. An'

you never saw sich a low iv figgers neither— queer ole girls with frightened eyes, an' a few blokes lookin' like sillies from the Asylum fer Soaks. I dunno what her game is, but she has 'em in what she calls her consultin' room, an' she must make 'em coff up, too, coz I've seem her bloomin' 'andba/g chock-full iv 'arf-crowns. I reckon she's a lady doctor, maybe."

Madame had an assistant, Miss Stella Dray, who came only on special occasions, and seemed, to share Madiame's confidence. (Miss Stella was. a frigid virgin of ajbout thirty, bony and business-like. Minnie saw little of her, and she was not introduced to Madame's clients; hut she seemed to play an important part in Madame's dealings, with the de-materialised.

Miss Bray had a large circle or spook acquaintances, and was hand-and-glove with scores of disembodied persons of importance, judging by her conversations with Madame. She spoke of this spirit and that with an airy familiarity that would have made Miss Minnie Trigg's flesh creep, had Miss Minnie's keyhole searches for enlightenment been as successful as she had hoped they might be.

One evening after Mijinie had been employed at "Asphodel" for close upon a fortnight she met 'Arriet on their mutual night off, with an astonishing lot of news.

"Know what the ole girl is— I mean Madame?" she gasped. "She's one iv them spiritists."

''A spiritist?! Wot, takes a drop, does she?"

"Nb-o-o ! She's a mejum!"

"What's them—sort o' Dagoes?"

"Not a bit like. A spiritist nu-iutn she is. Raises spirits from the dead, an' has talks with them 'bout what's 'appenin'. She can talk with the ghost iv yer gran'mother ez easy az you'd crack a boo with ole Tins the milky."

"Go orn, yer pullin' me leg!"

'Arriet's eyes were, full of apprehension. "That's somethin' orful. I wouldn't stay in no place iv that sort. Do the spirits make calls?"

"My word, do they! She has her day for them."

"Wot! Four o'clock tea an' all that?''

"Somethin' like. Anyway ghosts is reg'lar callers at the house, an' Madame interjuces 'em to her clients, an' they has long talks an' confabs, an' plays up a bit, I can tell you, in the big room she calls 'er consultin' room an' stewdio."

'Arriet shivered. "Hev yeh give notice?" she asked. "It mus' make yer bones creep havin' 'em round. What iv yer was t' meet one in the dark? S'pose one broke loose an' come t' yeh et night when you was sleepin'? Booh! it's wicked havin' spirit evenin's. It ortenter be allowed."

"It does give me the Joes a bit iv nights, but I lock me door secure an' stuff up the keyhole. Ghosts can't get in if yeh stuffs up the keyhole."

"How did yer find out all about 'er ?"

"I spied on .'em. A big push iv the ole sort, owl-fated men an' dingy women with dilly eyes, was rollin' in, an' showed into the consultin' room, where seats was arranged an' a sort iv curtain affair rung across one corner, like ez if one iv them blitherin' charade games what toffs sometimes plays at was on. Natural, me curiosity was roused, an' whan they're all in, an' the door's locked, I'm hoppin' round fer a crack in the circus.

"Would yeh b'lieve it, the mean cows 'ad plugged the keyhole? A dirty trick that. Things isv gom' on within and I'm clear out iv it, till I remembers another door at the far end iv the stewdio, leadin' to a small room et the back. Instant I does a scurry round, shifts a little table agin the door (which is locked, never been used), an' hikes up to the fanlight. The fanlight's dusty on the other side; but I'm all right for a pretty good view from the gallery.

"I can on'y see faint, coz the lights in the stewdio is dim; but the crowd's all sittin' in tows, lookin' white, their mouths open, an' their eyes gogglin'; an' there's Madame standin' et this end be the curtain in a long black robe, her face fair, white-washed with powder, her two 'ands up, her body stiff ez a block.

"Madame's talkin' jerky, 'Mrs. West's aunt,' she sez, like she was given an order.

" 'Oh, yes, yes, auntie dear— dear auntie,' sez a lean dame in the crowd.

"Then Madame goes on naggin', an' it's supposed that Mrs. West's aunt, what's bin dead these five years, an' orter know better, is talkin' t' Mrs. West, an' frim what I can make out is givin' her reg'lar rats. After that Mr. Orkney's dead wife has a go at Mr. Orkney, an' Mr. Orkney, a chewed-up little man in the corner, bursts into tears. Then Mrs. Gidley hears from her little boy iv nine, what passed hence last year, an' she burst into tears. Afore part one is over most everybody has burst into tears.

"Then they comes to another part, iv the programme. This is act two. 'We will have some apports,' Madame sez, whatever apports is. 'I'm to communicate: with Abrim Rashad to-night,' sez she. 'Please sit very still. I hope no sceptic among us will disturb, to-night's manifestations.'

"Madame goes off again in one iv her stiff fits, her 'ands up, an' sez she, cryin' loud: 'Abrim Rashad! Abrim Rashad!'

" 'Madame, I am 'ere,' sez a voice out iv nowhere.

"Struth, 'Arriet, you could 'ave knocked me down with a fender, I was that flabbergasted. The voice seemed right in my ear.

".'What 'ave you to give us to-night, Abrim Rashad?' cries Madame. 'Place your gifts upon the table, Abrim Rashad,' sez she.

"Well, you won't b'lieve it, but no sooner has she spoke than, biff! a little parcel from no one falls on the table out iv no place whatever.

" 'Any more gifts, Abrim Rashad?' sez Madame, an' the same tick a little bird is flutterin' round the room. She calls for more, an' coins an' rings fall on the table.

"Then sez Madame: 'Abrim Rashad, will you show yourself to us to-night?'

"She no sooner sez it than I sees him. The lights goes black out, but I sees hira, an' I get the blue shakes. I never saw a spirit afore, 'Arriet, an' I ain't accustomed to 'em. I was frightened near into fits. He was long an' thin an' spirally, twistin' up like a corkscrew,' that is, an' he was the colour iv light when the lights go out— a sort iv shadow iv a light, like that on chops in a cellar, or on a lobster in the dark whan he ain't too fresh."

'Arriet Brown nodded her head, and swallowed nothing with a convulsive movement of her throat. She was too awed to speak.

" 'I seen 'im on'y fer a moment, an' he was gone. He was on'y like the smoke of a man, an' I reckon you could 'ave blowed him out; but he had me beat. I was that scared I done a guy, an' plunged into my bed, rollin' meself up in a tight knot in the blankets, an' there Madame found me, 'arf dead with suffercation, when they'd all gone.

"I'm believin' in ghosts now," Minnie continued. "I used to laugh at 'em, but I wouldn't now. I ain't game, when yer livin' et a 'ouse where ghosts is reg'lar callers you get respectful. One might drop in any minute, an' I ain't takin' no chances."

" 'Sides," said 'Arriet almost in a whisper, "it's worth while bein' friends with 'em if they all gives presents like that Abrim Rashad done. All the same, I ain't sorrt there ain't no ghosts in our fam'ly. I'd give notice t'morrer if any of-our lot started bringin' spirits 'ome."

"P'raps one gets used to 'em, 'Arriet; an' they ain't no trouble. That's one thing I'll say fer a ghost—it ain't 'ard on servant girls. You 'aven't got to open doors for 'em, or get meals fer 'em, or clear their boots; an' they don't make washin' an' ironin.' So far ez I can gather, those smokey clothes they floats about in never goes to the wash.''

"That is a comfort, certingly," said 'Arriet. "All the same, I has me natural hinstincts, an' I wouldn't stay in no place where ghosts was on the visitin' list."

HOWEVER, Minnie's faith in the absolute legitimacy of Madame's spooks and spirits did not survive long. The climax is better told in Minnie's own expressive language. Minnie had been three months in the service of Madame Holmes, and had peeped at several seances, when the accident happened to Miss Stella Bray. Miss Bray had the misfortune to be mowed down by a motor car at a moment when her friends of the spirit world were otherwise engaged, and failed to warn her of her danger.

"It's like this, 'Arriet," said Minnie, who had a. nice appreciation of a dramatic climax. 'That Bray female was sort of hassistant to Madame, an' 'when she gets bowled out, it's necessary fer the dame t' ring in another. It so I 'app'ened that her 'usband, who was Stella's understudy ordin'ry, has been toyin' with a bottle iv whisky shook from the kitchen cupbbard, an' is shick an' helpless in the stable. There's a swagger seance arranged fer the evenin', an' Madame's in a tight fix.

"But, b'lieve me, 'Arriet, Madame ain't one of .the sort what's, easy put down an' out. She's goin' above the speed limit seekin' another hassistant right away, an' she gets her all right. A girl she, is, 'bout my age an' my size, an' she gets her with a promise of a sov'rin an' a silk dress what ain't too old t' make over.

"The new girl's sworn secret, an' told what she's got t' do. She has t' go up through a sort iv a man'ole in Madame s bedroom, crawl along between the ceilin' an' the roof, till she gets over the committee room. There there's a sort iv platform on the rafters, ah' there she lies low till she hears Madame say: 'Abrim Rashad, what have you to give us to-night?' when she puts her mouth to a liopenin' in the ceilin' hid be one of them flowerin', curly-whirly cement centre-pieces, an' hanswers. After that, when Madame gives the 'int, she has t' driop little articles she's took with her on to the table below."

"Well, I'm bloomin' blessed!" cried 'Arriet. "Then she's Abrim Rashad, the ghost?"

"She is in a manner iv speakin'. It was Stella Bray what went up th' flue an' worked the tricks before."

"They orter be pinched!"

"They might be— listen. The seance come off all right. The lights in the consultin' room was turned low ez could be, the shades on 'em left the top of the room in darkness, an' the Tom up aloft drops her parcels all right when she gets the word, lowers a lovely Horiental scarf, an' pushes two or three funny little birds into the room, an' all's lovely. The crowd is sayin' 'Wonderful! Wonderful!' The old girl's snivellin', an' the owl-eyed Johns is scared 'arf t' death.

"But that ain't all. Madame's counted on workin' a new spoof. The girl in the ceilin' has t' strike a sort iv quiet match in little haffair like a small firework, an' hold it down through the openin' in the ceilin.' Well, she ain't feelin' too good up there in the dark', that new girl ain't. She's a bit shaky at this spook business, an' wishes she was 'ome with her ma most iv the time. What 'appens'! She strikes the match too soon, an' she can't get the firework down through the openin' afore it begins, t' gee.

"It's a silent firework that, but it's creepy, an' it goes off like a still devil up in the dark 'tween the roof an' the ceilin', where the girl is on her lonesome; an'

what does she see but a sort iv brimstone glow, an' a smoky figure like a man swellin' up an' stretching out his hands over her.

"That's enough fer 'er, thanks. She fetches a yell you could hear a mile, an' hits out. Natural, she forgets all warnin's, an' most important of these was cautionin' her not t' get off the platform, coz down 'tween the rafters was on'y thin lath an' plaster.

"What 'appens ? Oh, ma! she plunges ofl the platform when she yells, an', biff! one leg goes clean through the plaster, an' wags an' wags in the room below.

"Someone down there turns up the lights, just ez the girl gives another howl an' another plunge, and ploughs clean through the plaster, tearin' away the laths, an' plunks with no end 'v a solid bump on the table afore the 'ole gapin' crowd.

"Oh, there's no row, none at all. They don't start to give Madame nothing'. O' course not. Rut Madame's wily. Oh, she's a knowin' ole bird.

" 'A materialisation !' she sqiueals. 'A. materialisation!' And she points wild at the silly yob of a girl sittin' flat on the table, the white cement rainin' down about her.

"Then Madame outs the lights, grabs the girl, an' rushes her into a cupboard, an' presently lights is on agin, an' Madame Holmes is calmin' 'em with hexplanations.

" 'Twas a great manifestation,' she sez—'a most amazin' materialisation!' She quieted 'em all right, but I reckon it's all up with me."

" 'Ow's that?" asked 'Arriet. "Where did you come in?"

"Through the bloomin' roof," answered Minnie sadly. "I was the girl that fell in."

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10: The Sunburned Lady

Melville Davisson Post

1869-1930

The Strand Magazine Feb 1918

Australian Town and Country Journal (Sydney) 10 July 1918

"THE THING THAT COUNTS, Greymarsh," said the barrister, "Is the act. It is not the persuasive causes. You must grant a distinction to lie here. Deeds in themselves fine and noble may emerge from questionable stimuli."

It was a night of early autumn. There was a drift of yellow fog over London, pressed down as by an invisible hand into the nooks and corners of the city. It was not yet dense; the pressure of the hand was only beginning to be felt. The city was in a sort of saffron twilight, but it was a twilight that would presently deepen. The noises of the city were confused and softened as though it were a creature, covertly moving in some fear. London seemed overtaken by one of the mysterious visitations, out of a Hebrew myth.

In the yellow haze, two men were passing along Regent-street. The shutters of the shops were closed up, as though the city were abandoned. Few persons passed, and these were not clearly to be distinguished.

The two men in the circles where they moved were the most remarkable in the whole of London— Sir Rufus Simon and Mr. Greymarsh. Where the great currents of the world ran, Mr. Greymarsh was undistinguished. But on the frontiers of human knowledge, where the mind struggled for the truth, the chemist's name stood for high achievement. Perhaps his greatest fame was an unfailing accuracy. When one quoted Greymarsh in his book, there was an end in contention on the point.

The companion was Sir Rufus Simon, the barrister. It would be idle here to catalogue man. He possessed a reputation unequalled in the whole of England; he stood for the highest integrity and the nicest honor. He belonged to a profession given to extremes, great figures in advance of all human progress and the lowest trickster. And because, the ground-floor of his craft nested so much vermin it may have seemed to Sir Rufus Simon a pressing reason why those who occupied its top floor should maintain the very highest ideals by which a man could live.

The dialogue running between the two men was upon a point where each, in his sphere of influence, stood above suspicion. The chemist seemed to reflect on what the barrister had said, but he answered with decision.

"A lie is an error, Sir Rufus, and once you have admitted that there can no longer be an argument. One cannot compound his calculations with an error. To admit that a true resultant can be obtained by the introduction of an error is to

topple over all human knowledge. There can never be any gain from a lie, for the reason, Sir Rufus, that, there can never be any gain from an error."

The barrister put up his hand to his lean, bony face. He gathered his jaw for a moment into his fingers.

"I indict science," he said, "for a prime postulate essentially false to the facts. The accuracy which it assumes in Nature is imaginary. The universe presents nothing to equal the assumed exactness of your mathematical sciences. No track of a star is a perfect geometrical figure, nor does the earth turn on its axis to an unvaried schedule."

He put his hand out as with an unconscious gesture.

"Greymarsh," he said, "truth is something more than this preciseness. I think that it will be nearer the integrity of what is called a status in the law. Shall I dispossess a child of faith in the mobility of his parent for the merit to myself of a verbal accuracy? And shall I not help a crippled human creature to his feet with the device of a *suggestio falsi* if it is the only crutch that he can get his broken shoulder over?"

Again, for a dozen steps, the man was silent. Then he continued:

"After long reflection, " he said, "I insist upon the distinction which I have indicated. The morality lies with the effect; and not with the persuasive causes that precede it. I go farther, Greymarsh; I go even far enough to believe that the persuasive causes may be false and scandalous, and the result sound and moral."

He shifted his walking-stick into the free gesticulating hand.

"I have got that conclusion, Greymarsh, as you have got your synthetic formulas, by experiments in life. Human relations go on by virtue of a sort of compromise with the truth. In the chemistry of human affairs we do not discard the impurities in a salt; we sometimes assemble them and blend them when we would have a result of a greater virtue than refined (elements could give us….I cannot hope to make you see that. It would require the ex ample of a human clinic."

The chemist's face, lifted in the thin fog, was set in its expression and unmoving. This was palpable heresy to him. It was letting error in where the negation of error was the prime intent. If one admitted a lie could work out a material gain, one admitted that an error might sometimes in a calculation be depended on for a true result. To him the thing was inconceivable. And he dismissed it as one of those strange conceptions of morality which he had sometimes observed to lurk about the mental activities of men otherwise of unquestioned honor. The arguments lying to his hand seemed to the chemist endless and unanswerable, but he made no further effort to present them.

The two men in the conversation had traversed the great arc of Regent Circus, and had now come to a short street beyond it. It was a lane of sombre,

unpretentious houses; a residency given over to professionists. Great surgeons and practitioners were housed, along this street, but the famous name was not on the door of any one of them. They counted on reputations in advance of that. They assumed that one seeking the aid of the greatest authorities in London would not require the indications of a signboard. The two men stopped before the door of one of these undistinguished houses.

The chemist concluded his argument upon the point with a final sentence:

"I should require to be shown the result of your experiment, Sir Rufus." Then he turned to the usual conventionalities of discourse. '

"The Dutch explorer Maartins has just sent me some dried elephant flesh poisoned by the Batwa pygmies of the Congo. It is thought to contain an obscure element that the Amsterdam chemists ore not quite sure of. I shall probably have the formula in an hour. Come in as you return."

The barrister promised to come in. He went to explain the draft of a charter for an East India Trading Company. It was for Danvers Buller, an old client and an old friend. Sir Rufus would not have gone out in London, at this hour, on the affairs of any other living man. But Danvers Buller was now paralytic, and it was the call of friendship behind the business that took the barrister to his house.

The chemist let himself in. It was his custom when at work on some problem of peculiar interest to send away the servants to their quarters and to go about the house alone. He had given this order for to-night. He had dined at the club in St. James's Place, and going out had found Sir Rufus Simon. The barrister's way lay through Regent-street, and the two had come up together.

The house seemed severe and empty when one entered. It lacked the things that give harmony and blend to the human habitation. There was a gas-jet burning low, in the hall; on the right hand a drawing-room, and beyond that, for the door stood open, there was a room that the architect had designed for a library. It was now a sort of laboratory instead. The word in its popular conception is not accurate. It was a room into which the chemist carried only the last problem in his undertakings. There were technical books lying on a table. It was a long, heavy table running across the room before the door. Its surface was clean, but it was stained and finger-marked. There were some bottles under a green cloth. There was a chair or two, and there were some prints on the wall. But if one noticed these prints closely one observed that they had not been selected for their beauty, but on account of extreme accuracy in the drawing, as though the object of all art was to represent the varieties of Nature in precise detail.

Perhaps there was a little pretension, after all is said, in the aspect of this room. The larger pretension of a great authority who discards the ostentations of the men below him, like that which displayed no name on the row of

professional houses along the street; like the pretension of the expert at St. Andrews who would play the course with a mid-iron against the armful, of clubs crowded into the bag of the distinguished amateur.

And yet this conclusion may be set down in error.

Greymarsh was detached from the world. Where he touched it at his club, or with his friends, like Sir Rufus Simon, there was no actual contact. He looked out through the window. He spoke and listened and, had intercourse among his fellows, but he sat within, and, for the most part, the shutters of the window were closed up like a sleeping eye.

The chemist turned back to bolt to the door. The servants had gone, and when the man got into the profundities of science external noises did not always reach him. He was not certain that he would hear the bell, and he left the door so that Sir Rufus could enter when he came. It was a habit that the barrister was aware of, and, out of the wisdom of a larger experience of life, he had suggested the danger of leaving the door thus open to any hand. But the chemist felt that he had little that a robber could sell profitably in the market; and, besides, he possessed that disregard of human precautions, peculiar to those persons removed in their activities from the world of living men.

Mr. Greymarsh went from the hall into the drawing-room. This was now the library of the house. There were shelves of books and a *secretaire* of some inlaid wood. There was a clean blotter, a sheaf of pens, and a pot of ink, neatly arranged. But it was not a work-shop in which the man labored with his problems. He went on through (the open door into the room beyond. He switched on the light over his long table and sat down behind it, facing the door through which he had entered. He took up some sheets of paper written closely, in a fine, delicate hand, and began to make a calculation. The calculation was hieroglyphic to the common eye. It concluded some drawings as of outlandish geometric figures or the meanderings of a family tree.

As the man labored, he became oblivious to the world about him. His consciousness seemed to withdraw from the appreciation of external stimuli. To the world, Greymarsh in his labor was little better than a dead man. Some time passed. There was silence, except for the remote, muffled noises of the city. The chemist, concentrated on his formulas, was like the figure of a man in some thing inorganic, except for the slight moving of his hand that recorded his indicatory symbols.

Then somewhere in the deeps of the house a bell jangled. The chemist did not hear it. After a moment or two it broke out in a louder clatter. But its call was not regarded by the man. Then the door opened, someone entered, peered into the drawing-room, and finally advanced to the door, before which Mr. Greymarsh sat stooped over his table. The chemist was never able to say precisely what caused him to look up. Perhaps it was the cumulative pressure of

the noises, or the unusual interjection of a human voice. But when he did look, he got on his feet in some confusion.

There is a woman standing in the door, as though posed in the dark wood of a frame, She was in evening dress, with an opera coat of rich brocade covering her shoulders. The chemist stood like one not entirely awakened until the woman spoke. There was something foreign in the voice.

"Is it Mr. Greymarsh," she said, "that I have the honor to address?"

The chemist replied with the usual conventions, and came round the end of his table, as though he would show her to the drawing-room. But the woman entered, and sat down in a chair before his table, and he went back, uncertain and embarrassed.

Nor was Greymarsh's visitor entirely at her ease. She began an explanation, hurried, and not at all points connected up.

"I am Mrs. Danvers Buller," she said, "I have come to consult you on— on a professional matter." Then she broke the explanation with a comment on her ingress to the house.

"Your door was open," she said, "and I saw the light."

It was clear from this explanatory preface that the woman had come on no idle errand. There was the pressure of a determined intent behind this visit. The chemist was profoundly puzzled. The name of Danvers Buller awoke faint memories about the man.

There had been notoriety in his later life. He had married in advancing age some South Eastern beauty. The thing had been a day's sensation in the London Press, when he came up through Suez with his bride. There had been much comment on the beauty of Mrs. Buller, and silence on every other point.

Greymarsh realised in a sort of wonder that the published comments were not overdrawn. She had masses of dark hair banked around a face perfect in contour. One never could wish to change a line of it. Her eyes were large and violet, like a tropic flower, and he throat, her bare shoulders, and her arms; were, exquisite. But there was something behind these assembled allurements that held one back from admiration, as with the pressure of a hand. The woman had a disquieting smile, and in spite of perfection in every feature one felt a sense of vague deformity. The impression entangled itself in the confused sensations of Mr. Greymarsh. He caught himself searching the woman with some eagerness to find the malformation. But in all the aspect of her there was no defect that the human eye could see. She was absolutely perfect. One felt that every contour of her ran with a faultless symmetry. Her hair, the planes of her face, her eyebrows, the nose, the alluring mouth— with its teeth even and perfect— and the violet eyes, were all inconceivably faultless. And yet there was the haunting sense of something misshapen, that introduced itself, and prevailed over the admiration that sprang up in the beholder.

The chemist was about to suggest that she had perhaps confounded him with one of the eminent practitioners living in the street, but the woman was before him with her words.

"I came in to consult you, Mr. Greymarsh," she said. "I am told you are the greatest authority in London."

"I am distinguished by the compliment, madam," said the chemist, with some gravity in his words, "but I am not a practitioner in any professional sense."

"But you are the greatest authority in London," the woman repeated, "and the thing is important."

"The chemist felt that he ought to make the matter clear. "I think you have a mistaken impression, madam," he said. "I do not see persons in any professional capacity."

The woman presented to him a face disturbed with anxiety.

"But you will not refuse me your aid on that account?" she said. "I cannot go to one whose knowledge may be inadequate. I must have the opinion of the ablest authority in. London. I will pay you any fee you ask."

The chemist undertook to explain that his services were not of a professional order. But the woman was insistent. She wished only to ask a single question, and he found himself embarrassed to deny her who sat down before her at the table. He wondered what matter of vital interest could so concern this woman that she came thus alone at midnight and persistently forced her way into his house. But the explanation was a blow at this tragic inference. And it confirmed the chemist in his estimate of the utter frivolity of the fashionable London circle to which persons of this class belonged.

The woman carried a little bag attached by a ribbon to her elbow. She. now took out of it a cut-glass bottle containing some liquid and put it on the table.

"This summer," she said, "at Brighton, I was sunburned— horribly 'sunburned. You will notice how my throat and shoulders are discolored." She leaned over the table under the light which Mr. Greymarsh had switched on for his calculations. And again the chemist was disturbed. To his eye there was no trace of discoloration. The throat and shoulders were perfect. He could see nothing to justify the words, but he made no reply, and the woman went on.

"You see how bad it is," she said. "I have tried all sorts of things to get rid of it; harmless things such as one commonly uses. Finally my maid urged me to try this preparation; it is something she got from France. But I was afraid to use it until I asked somebody who knew— somebody I could trust to know. It might do the skin an injury."

She pushed the bottle across the table toward the chemist.

There was a moment when the man was about to get up in disgust. But his courtesy prevailed, and having gone thus far he concluded to continue on the

way. He poured a little of the contents of the bottle into a dish, observed it, and added a reagent. Then he spoke.

"This is a weak solution of arsenic," he said; "such solutions are sometimes given with the idea that they brighten the skin."

The woman clasped her hands, and put them out on the table with an impulsive gesture.

"Oh!" she said, "it has a poison in it?"

Mr. Greymarsh replied as one would answer a child.

"Yes," he said; "in a weak solution. Arsenic is a poison."

"And you knew that instantly," she said. "How wonderful!"

The naive ignorance of the woman impressed him.

"It is quite simple," he said. "We have accurate tests for arsenic."

"And can you tell any poison on the instant, like that?" the woman went on as from an impulsive curiosity.

"Not all, madam," replied the chemist. "For the mineral poisons, we have usually a conclusive test; but there are certain poisons the presence of which we are unable to determine. For example, one which , is made from the blood of an eel and the arrow poison of India. A great many experiments have been made on the bodies of persons destroyed by the arrow poison of India, but without any decisive result. If swallowed like the ordinary poisons, it is digested without injury, but if, applied to any abrasion on the body like the scratch of a needle or the prick of a thorn, it takes away the life of the victim without having any trace that modern science is able to discover."

The woman made an exclamation of surprise and wonder.

"How interesting!" she said. "How extraordinary! What color is it?"

The chemist went to the corner of his table, took up a tray of bottles covered with the green cloth, and set them down before her. He lifted the corner of the cloth and look out a little vial.

"I have here a sample of it," he said. "You will observe that it has no distinguishing color."

The woman took the bottle in her hand, looked at it a moment, and then put it back.

"It must be very fine," she said, "to know all these wonderful things. I am sure you must regard me as idle and frivolous to disturb you with a beauty, lotion, but you see the thing was immensely important to me. One never can tell what is in these preparations that one's maids hunt up as a final remedy. Lady Montague's face was horribly burned by a lotion the Institute de Beaute prescribed for her in Nice. I thought I would ask you about it, and so I came." She smiled with a touch of coquetry. "And now, Mr. Greymarsh, will you give me a pen and ink?"

The chemist did not understand why his visitor should require these things; but he went round the table and behind her into the library for them. He took up a pen and inkpot from his *secretaire*, and, as he turned about, he saw Sir Rufus Simon standing against the wall. He had come into the house unnoticed, and he stood in the shadow of the door.

Greymarsh was startled, and he was about to speak, when the barrister laid a finger on his lips, and indicated with a gesture the room from which the chemist had entered, as one would say: "Keep silent and go back."

The chemist in some bewilderment respected the indication, and returned with the ink and pen. He put them down on the table before his visitor. She took out a folded slip and began to write a cheque for twenty guineas. It was then the front door banged; there was the sound of someone entering, a voice that called out to Greymarsh, and Sir Rufus Simon came into the room.

The woman sprang up like tow touched with fire. There was terror in her, and for a moment It was uncertain how she would act. Then she recognised the barrister, and her whole aspect changed.

"Oh!" she said, jerking her hands up with the fingers interlaced, "how you alarmed me! It is Sir Rufus Simon!"

The barrister presented an apology for his intrusion; but his face, Mr. Greymarsh thought, was strange. In truth, in the aspect and gestures of his guests, the chemist was impressed with a tragic suppression. The sense of something deformed about the woman now presented itself with a renewed insistence, and he looked to see it appear. But there was no visible indication of it. He almost thought he had it when she sprang up before the barrister, but it ebbed out before the exquisite beauty of the woman— or at least so the thing seemed to Mr. Greymarsh— at finding an acquaintance and a person of discretion in the intruder.

She explained that a stranger might misunderstand, might incite a scandal at her presence in the house. But Mr. Greymarsh would explain her errand, and Sir Rufus, familiar with the vanities, of women would not measure her by masculine ideas of perspective. Besides, he was her husband's counsellor, and she had the right to depend upon that confidence. But it was the tragic suppression that impressed itself on Mr. Greymarsh. He thought the barrister had the appearance of one searching for a weapon, not with his hand in a material sense, but with the fingers of his mind, covertly and in an eager swiftness. It was a performance which held the chemist's attention, and presently, when the figure of the barrister lifted and his face changed, like one whose palm has finally closed on the handle on the thing he sought, Mr. Greymarsh felt a certain relaxation as of one escaping from a strained posture of suspense.

Sir Rufus Simon came a step farther into the room. His voice when he spoke was concerned and friendly.

"I am very glad of this chance, meeting, he said. "I have just, been to visit your husband and I have taken the opportunity of the visit, as I have taken the opportunity of every other, to urge him to make known to you the disposition of his affairs." He paused. "But the ill and aged are immovably secretive. And I have failed, to-night, as I have failed, at every other conference. And what is more, I am convinced that a further insistence is idle."

He looked with concern. into the woman's face.

"There seemed after that," he continued, "another course to be considered. Ought I not to put the matter before you? I came away from my old friend with that problem to be turned about." Again he paused. "And I have come to a conclusion. I think you ought to know about this matter. I think you have the right to know."

The expression in the woman's face gave way to a sort of bewildered curiosity, as of one drawing back a little from a secret door that mother is about to open. But now there was a soothing confidence in the manner of Sir Rufus Simon.

"It frequently happens," he said, "that men arrange their affairs to suit a condition of their life at a certain period, and permit that arrangement to continue out of negligence after the status of their affairs has taken on an entirely different aspect. Thus it happens that old wills come up to inflict injustice."

The woman was now facing Sir Rufus Simon with every feature in her face attentive.

"Some years ago," the barrister went on, "before your marriage, Danvers Buller, in no rugged health and with only his own life to consider, made a disposition of the major portion of his estate, it was permissible at the time for a man who wished to be rid of the pressure of affairs, and desired only an income for his life. But when my old friend recovered his vitalities, embarked again upon his commercial enterprises, and took a wife, this disposition lie had made of his affairs was. inconsistent. With almost the whole of his fortune he had purchased what are called annuities terminating at his death. After his marriage, I pointed out that this arrangement was unfair to you. It meant that Danvers Buller was receiving a large income each year during the period of his life, but that at his death this income would be cut off. His residence, as you know, he holds in lease from the Duke of Elden. The assets of his business, widely scattered, are, I fear, when assembled at his death, but little in excess of the liabilities."

The barrister paused again like one watching closely the effect of each uttered word.

"I continued to point out the injustice to you in this arrangement, and finally got a concession. The income from the annuities was to be assembled and invested for you. But the augmentation of the sum has depended year by year

upon your husband's tenure of life. Each year that he continued to live and draw the annuity added a considerable sum to your inheritance, and so," the barrister concluded, "for an additional reason, beyond my friendship, I have been glad that Danvers Buller has continued to live on with some prospect of an extended life, although paralytic and in no position to enjoy the tenure."

Mr. Greymarsh thought he looked on at a third act with the curtain coming down.

The woman's figure seemed to relax and stoop. She was wholly silent. The fog had deepened outside. The sounds of the city seemed far off, swaddled in a cloth. Presently, the woman moved to the door. She put her hand on the barrister's arm.

"Will you help me to my carriage?" she said. And she went out with no word of adieu or explanation.

When the door to the street opened a line of fog crept in, curled through the drawing-room, and extended itself to the table behind which the chemist stood. It was yellow-colored and portentous, like the toxic visitation in the Hebrew myth. A moment later the door closed, severing the sinister antennae, and the barrister came back into the room.

"Sir Rufus," cried Mr. Greymarsh, "what does this thing mean?"

The barrister extended his hand toward the table.

"My friend," he said, "I was a witness to this night's affair in the shadow of your door in yonder. I think you will find your vial of poison empty. But you are not to be alarmed. Its contents are spilled out of the glass bottle on your carpet."

And, putting out the ferrule of his walking-stick, he moved something beside the chair.

The chemist whipped the green cover from his cluster of bottles and held up to the light the vial that had contained the arrow poison of India. It was empty. For a while he stared into it, then he presented to the barrister a face distended with amazement.

"In the name of God, Sir Rufus," he repeated, "what does it mean?"

"It means, my friend," replied the barrister, "that I have given you the human experiment which you requested. It means that I have saved a woman from murder and a man from being an accessory before the fact— and I have done it with a lie!"

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11: The Ghost at Denclough

"W.W."

Mary Helena Fortune, 1833?–1911

Weekly Times (Melbourne) 1 Sep 1906

"W.W." and "Waif Wander" were Mary Fortune's best known pen-names.

MY NAME is John Parrot. At the time I had the strange experience I am about to relate I had been for some years articled to Messrs Tyne and Barrow, and had been studying hard to obtain my licence as a solicitor. Having succeeded, I was glad to accept the invitation of Max Chorley, a once fellow-student at college, to visit him at "Denclough," which had a few months previous passed into his ownership on the death of his father.

The house was situated on a long slope of the Gill Ranges, and was within an easy drive of the station. At the latter place I hired a vehicle, and was told by my voluble driver a good deal of the history relating to the house and estate of Denclough. The latter had been purchased from the Government in the very early days, and the house had been built with roughly-hewn stones from the Gill. There had been newer and better built additions during later years, but the old house was still the principal part of the dwelling.

"And," added my voluble informant, "I wouldn't live in it if they'd made me a present of the deeds. Why, sir? Because it's haunted!"

Not being a believer in ghosts, I only smiled at the information, but on being set down in front of my friend's home I could not help noting its weird appearance. The house was low, and so covered with a thick growth of old ivy that the small windows appeared deeply sunk in the walls, of which only a few rough blocks of stone were visible, where the ivy had not been allowed to encroach.

Max was a jolly fellow, who very seldom recognised the serious side of things, but never missed the ridiculous, if there was one. He soon made me feel at home.

The house was comfortable enough, though old-fashioned. The walls were wainscotted in oak, that showed its age in a rich darkness of hue, and "Aunt Emma," who kept house for Max, and had kept house for his father before him, I found to be the sweetest and kindest elderly lady I had ever met.

After dinner we walked out to smoke our pipes, and, talking of mutual friends, unconsciously, perhaps, Max led me round by the grassy path towards the offices.

Suddenly he pulled up, and laughed aloud, "We are on forbidden ground. Jack!" and he pointed with his pipe to a window deep in the darkening ivy. "That's the window of the haunted room."

"I heard of it from my driver, Max," I returned, with an incredulous smile. "But I have no faith in the supernatural. In what way is it said to be haunted?"
"Come inside; Aunt Emma will be expecting us for a cup of her favorite tea, and as Farrell will serve it, you will get the whole story, better than I can tell you, for I don't believe a word of the yarn myself."

"Who is Farrell?" I asked.

"Our only male house servant. He was here some months before my father's death, and is privileged. Here we are, Aunt Emma, and Jack wants to know all about the haunted room."

"Don't speak so slightly on the subject, my dear Max. Your mother died in that room, and on that account your father revered it. He would have died in it himself, too, only that Dr. Barret believed it was not airy enough. In the old days houses were not built to consider ventilation a chief question, as they are now. But, my dear, have you forgotten the experience of your friend, Mr North, in that chamber? There is certainly a something uncanny about it now."

Charley laughed heartily.

"Oh, Jack knows North and his peculiarities. He is always getting too much liquor (when he can get it for nothing). No one minds North's yarns. But here is Farrell. He can tell you more about the ghost in the haunted room than any of us."

Farrell shook his head sagely. He was a small, slightly-built, and dark-complexioned man of forty or so.

"I am sure, sir, that there is something strange in the room, sir, for I've seen strange things myself. I wouldn't like to pass a night there; but Mr North was certainly very tight the night he stayed there. It was as much as I could do to get him into bed, he was so helpless."

"Tell Mr Preston all about it, Farrell," said Max, as he threw himself back in his chair.

The man cleared his throat and began.

"There was something wrong with that room before the late master bought it, sir. Old Tom, the gardener, told me of it the first day I came to Denclough. He said an evil spirit in the shape of some animal crawled about the floor at certain times, and made a noise as if he was dragging a long tail like a sweeping brush after him. He had listened at the window and heard the queer noise himself. Well, sir, when, I got Mr North to bed that night the candle went suddenly out and I felt, a cold air blow in my face. I struck a match and lit the candle again, then it burned blue for a bit and went out. I got afraid, sir, and I'm not ashamed to own it Mr North was cursing me for a fool and calling for spirits, so I struck a match once more, and, saying I was going for some, bolted. I never went back, sir, but I told Mr Max, and he laughed at me."

"I should think I did," said Max, "but go on and tell Mr North's imaginary experiences of the night."

"Well, sir, when I went in with his coffee at eight o'clock next morning he was standing in the middle of the floor holding his pants in his hands. He was swearing, sir, like a trooper and searching the pockets over and over. His pocket-book was on the table open and empty, and he swore he had been robbed of twenty sovs. He was shaking like a leaf, but when I got him some spirits he declared that some beast had been crawling about the floor in the night dragging a long tail after him."

"How could he see it in the dark?" I asked.

"He said there was an unearthly light round the animal itself, sir."

"There, you have the story. Jack North had one of his old attacks! 'Tis a wonder the beast was not a green snake!' If North doesn't stop his drinking he'll pan out in D.T. one of these days."

Said I, when Farrell had left the room with the tea equipage, and Aunt Emma had followed to give some orders: "With your permission, Max, I will occupy that room to-night; I am interested in natural curiosity, and should much like to see that creeping beast with the long tail like a sweeping brush."

My friend laughed his merriest laugh.

"You are an unbeliever like me, Jack. All right. I'd have slept there myself long ago, only I hate to be gammoned."

"You think someone is doing a bit of trickery, then?"

"I have scarcely thought about it, Jack. You know what a lazy fellow I am. Most likely that very old gardener that set the story afloat wants to get the room pulled down to plant dahlias. He is continually complaining that he has no suitable plot in which to make a show of the finest dahlias this or any other garden ever produced."

"Well, Max, remember that I have actually ten sovereigns in my purse," and I opened it before him. "I shall mark them with a dint in her Majesty's throat, so. I have also the prettiest little toy revolver, that carries six of the tiniest little bullets imaginable."

"You are wasted in the law business, Jack. They should have made a detective of you," Max said, yawning; "and now for bed."

Farrell led me to the haunted room, candle in hand. It looked old-fashioned and comfortable, and the one candle did not sufficiently light it up. Farrell appeared nervous, and looked round the room hurriedly as he placed the candle on the toilet.

While I was undressing he went away, to return with a small waiter, on which was a steaming glass of toddy.

"Miss Chorley's compliments, sir, with your nightcap."

"Thank Miss Chorley, and say it is very welcome. I shall drink it presently. Good night, Farrell."

"Good night, sir. I'll just see if the window's bolted. It was open this evening to air the room."

A few minutes after I was alone. Having placed my attire on a chair visible from the bed, I snibbed the door, and then examined closely the candle that Farrell had left me, remembering it was to turn blue and go out when, or before, the queer ghost put in an appearance. It was a composite one, and had evidently received some damage, accidental or otherwise, a little way down from the burning wick. My suspicions were increased. Before getting into bed I drew back very carefully the thick curtains that draped the window. I could then see that the wide, low window opened in leaves, and that the bolt was unfastened. My next arrangement made the head of the bed where the foot had been, so that the whole room was within view. I then emptied the toddy into the glass belonging to the water-bottle, and placed it empty near the candle.

As I placed my watch on the toilet, I saw it was nearly midnight. I was so tired by my unaccustomed journey, and promptly fell asleep, knowing that the least sound always wakened me, I had my little weapon close to my hand, also a ready box of vestas.

A sound did awake me— the very least noise at the window. It was starlight only, but I could discern against the sky a stray branch of ivy. One side of the window slowly opened, and then the upper part of some animal came between me and the sky. Soon the creature was on the high sill, and began to descend into the room in a very peculiar way, viz., backward. First the coils of a long and thick tail dropped to the carpet, the buttocks followed, and last the short paws left the sill. Once on the floor, the animal paused, and the candle began to. burn blue! As it did so the creature advanced crawling, and with the queer brushing sound I had been told of, I confess that in spite of my belief that the whole thing was an imposture, I felt a creeping sensation at the roots of my hair.

The thing brawled towards the chair on which I had placed my garments, and before it reached them I discerned that the brushing sound was caused. by the movement of one paw. Then that paw was lifted to search my pockets the sound ceased, and the candle went out!

I grasped my revolver, and waited. There was now no light by which I could trace the creature's movements. I had to wait its reappearance between .me and the sky at the open window. Presently I saw it, and when the hind parts only remained inside on the broad sill I took steady aim and fired. It was not a growl that the beast emitted, but a smothered oath. There was a sudden wollop of the great tail, and the ghost had fled!

I got up and bolted the window, also letting the heavy curtains drop to their former position, lest my defeated enemy should try to take a revengeful pot-shot at me. Then I went back to bed and slept comfortably.

In the morning I found, as I had expected, that my marked sovereigns were gone. When Farrell knocked at my door with coffee and shaving water I rose and unfastened it. He looked pale and anxious, and when I told him I had actually seen and fired at the haunting beast, declared, solemnly, that the room ought to be pulled down.

Miss Chorley did not rise for breakfast, so I had the opportunity of telling the story of my night's experience in full to my friend and host— he was indignant.

"It must be that cursed old gardener," he said, "and he'll be in the hands of the police within a couple of hours."

Said I, "The old man had nothing to do with it. The impostor is nearer home."

Farrell entered with fresh toast at the moment. I rose, and locking the door, put the key in my pocket as I turned to the man, whose terrified gaze would now alone have convicted him.

"This is the villain who carries my bullet in his hind quarter," I said. "Don't you note that in spite of all his efforts he walks lame? Now, Mr Farrell, hand over the ten marked sovereigns you took from my purse last night."

"I must go to my room for them," he returned sullenly.

"And we will accompany you, you villain. Open the door, Jack, and we'll have a thorough search in his room. He shall turn out his make-up as a beast before we hand him over to the con stables."

The now completely cowed and dishonest servant showed up the skin he had hid under the floor. It was the skin of an "old man" kangaroo, added to and enlarged with 'possum skins. The man had worked on the lines of the story of a haunting animal told him by the old gardener. The tail of the kangaroo was enlarged and stuffed with lengths of flexible rope. The candle had been doctored as I had suspected, and the toddy drugged. Farrell having made full confession, pleaded for mercy, and offered to restore the twenty sovereigns he had really stolen from North. He declared that the wound he had received from my bullet would lame him for life, and it really did, and that he was truly repentent. My friend, Max, was always a soft fellow, and he let the fellow go when he had handed over the money— I wouldn't have done so. One good effect my visit to Max secured— there was no longer a haunted room at Denclough, and the old gardener had to be satisfied with another plot on which to grow his dahlias than that on which stood the old walls where the "old man" kangaroo used to brush his claws on the carpet.

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12: Sentimental Jerry

E. S. Sorenson

1869-1939

Weekly Times (Melbourne) 28 Sep 1929

A SHAKY buckboard rattled up to Boker's Hut, a road side residence on the outskirts of Sleepy Hollow, and from it alighted Old Bob Gunter, a bachelor selector who kept house for hime and his nephew, a few miles farther down the road. He shuffled towards the end of the building, where Abner Boker was trimming some rough bush timber with a rusty adze.

"Well, what do you think you're doin'?" was the visitor's greeting.

"Goin" to stick up a bit of a shed," said Abner. Old Bob took off his hat and mopped his face with a big red handkerchief. He was a tall man, with a billygoat beard and a bald head that shone like polished coral, fringed with a tuft of curls above each ear. His shirt was o pen at the neck, his vest was unbuttoned, and his coat was in the buck-board. In that way he usually trotted unconcernedly into "town."

"Seen that nephew of mine anywhere?" he asked.

"He was here not long ago," Abner informed him. "I think he's gone to see about a girl somewhere."

"Just like him," chuckled Old Bob. "Just like him."

He squatted against the wall and set his hat down carefully on the grass. After a while he said: "I don't know what's the matter with Jerry at all. I set out, you know, to marry him, so as to get him settled down. He's over 26 now, an' he started courtin' when he was 17."

"He was lucky to escape." said Abner, whose married life was not all he had expected. "In a day or two, after getting the cold shoulder from Amy Lapp, he was cultivatin' Marian Winks, the blacksmith's daughter. I got the first hint of that when Jerry took his horse down to get it shod twice in one week. He got the front shoes put on the first trip an' the hind shoes the next. Then he ran me up a bill of £9 for doin' up implements an' one thing an' another that he's damaged. If he went outside with the cart, the tyre wouid come off or a bolt would drop out, an' he'd have to take it to the blacksmith's. I wasn't very much gone on Marian myself. Her approaches were too expensive, so to speak. When I kicked up a fuss about the bill I got from her old man, Jerry went an' got a job with him as striker. That lasted some months, an' end ed in a bust-up between him an' Marian because she was delayin' the butcher too long every time he came round. She was a strong-headed girl who believed in having her fling while she was Miss. She married the postman.

"Not long after Jerry came back I noticed him accumulatin' an extraordinary collection of things from the store. He spent all his income, as it came in, buyin'

things he didn't want. His shoppin' fit knocked him clean out of himself, so to speak. By an' by I discovered that V.V., as he called Violet Vester, was behind the counter, an' Jerry was buyin' just to see her. He might have bought the store in time, but he wasn't toffy enough for V.V. She was a stylish little piece of goods, all beaming in the store, an' a frozen image that couldn't see you at ten paces outside.

"However, he didn't worry over Violet. He'd no sooner faded out there than he met Phyllis Green. Her father was timber-gettin' for the saw-mill. I sold him some good trees in my paddock, all while he was cuttin' there. Phyllis brought him his dinner on horse back. That's how Jerry came to notice that she had a sly twinkle in her eyes, a pretty dimple, an' a smile that was as sweet as honey. Perhaps that reminded him of bees' nests. A great longin' came on him for honeycomb. He used to go off about the dinner hour mooonin' round trees, instead of havin' his usual smoke-o on the verandah— an' always round where Green was workin. Used to shave himself at all times of the week, too, instead of only on Sunday mornin'. Couldn't go down the paddock for the old cart horse without shavin' himself first. An it was surprisin' what a lot o' things Green lost or mislaid in that paddock, includin' his pipe an pocket-knife, a two-foot rule, a bullock-whip, an some wedges. Jerry found 'em one at a time where he'd planted them an' took them over to Green's house when he wanted to see Phyllis. An' after all, she yoked up with a bullock-puncher who sometimes worked with her father. That was where he had the pull on Jerry. He was on the spot, where it wasn't necessary to look for sugar-bags or hide the bullock-whip.

"Then Jerry reckoned our cows were goin' off their milk in the paddock. He turned them into the bush in the morning; an' they certainly did improve— in consequence of Jerry milkin' 'em better. But he took a long time musterin' them in the afternoon. Often he came home with the horse in a lather of sweat. I found that Batter's cows were runnin' in the bush, too; an' Madge Batter used to go after them. Madge was real bush. She liked jumpin' logs; an' she an' Jerry used to have jumpin' contests an' races till Dad Batter caught them at it an' put a stopper on Madge's wild ridin' exercises.

"Jerry was mopey for a bit after that. Couldn't eat his porridge in the morning, an' took no interest in a rubber of dominoes we used to play in the evening. He'd been havin' such good times with Madge an' missed her.

"But he wasn't euchred alto gether. He took to goin' out at night to give the dogs a run after possums. There was always more fun, though, in chasin' possums near Batter's than anywhere else. They soon got as scarce as bunyips, an' then Jerry would shoot one near home, carry it 'up to Batter's an' fire his gun off under a tree near the house. When Dad Batter an' the boy an' Madge ran out to investigate, he'd pick up the possum he'd thrown down there as a guarantee of his bona-fides, so to speak. He repeated that about 14 times before Dad

Batter got suspicious an' laid for him. That night he couldn't find a possum handy, so he got the one he'd shot the night before, which the crows had been pickin at, an' gave it another funeral. That tickled Batter more than anything when he surprised Jerry by rushin' up unexpected from the woodheap. The dead finish was that a strange young man came out from the house to join in the laugh, an' he had his arm round Madge's waist.

"Jerry felt a bit humiliated over that. It was nearly a month before he started to sing again or to admire the beautiful sunset from the back door. He'd got acquainted by that time with Agnes Finn. We called at Finns one afternoon while ridin' through that way, an' stayed for tea. ln the dusk Agnes went out to catch some chickens that had taken to roostin' in the cart shed; an' Jerry went with her to hold the light. I engineered him into that because I rather liked Agnes. She was a great little housekeeper. But pokin' about with a pretty girl in the starry night and the perfumed air was too rapturous for Jerry. He caught hold of her an' kissed her; an' she retaliated like a snake that's been trodden on. Smacked him across the mouth. it was such a mighty swipe that she was inside some minutes before he'd found his hat; an' when he came in he was red an' bashful-Iookin'. Agnes must have told her mother, an she must 'ave passed it on to Finn, for he became a bit offish, too, without explainin' himself. So we didn't stay long.

"We started visitin' the Cowderys about that time, an' Jerry an' Mrs Cowdery got to be great friends. Her daughter, Pauline, was nice an' sociable, too, and it looked like a steady progress to weddin' bells. I tried to improve Jerry's at tractions by casually mentionin some property I intended to leave him. But that smack from Agnes Finn had knocked all the initiative out of Jerry's courtin'.

"What sent him adrift was the funniest thing that ever skittled his intentions. so to speak. The lady in the case was a gay little butterfly who called herself Pearl Brune. A fluffy-headed girl with plenty of sparkle an' substance in her. She was masqueradin' as nurse-girl an' drill-sergeant of table manners, or something like that, in a newly-rich family of the Woop Voop class. She took a likin' to Jerry straight away, an' gave him the time of his life.

"They rode to all the local sights an' shows together, an' sat on all the logs around at night time. They walked out, too, Jerry carryin' the baby or shovin' the pram. As she could play an' sing very nicely, an' he felt uncomfortably useless at indoor sociables, he touched me for a raise that he hadn't earned, an' started takin music lessons. He did learn to play a bit, but got a grouch on mo at times because I wouldn't buy a piano to make our old caboose more homely. I told hint that in stead of trainin' up to her, he ought to teach her Back CreeK ways an how to make pancakes. Not that I cared what sort of partner he took, so long as she was respectable; but more harmony can be got out of cooking utensils than out of pianos.

"Pearl Brune was new to country life, but she was enthusiastic an' wanted to learn all about the bush. Nothing pleased her better, when she had a day off once a week, than to visit bush camps an have dinner on bark tables in the open with the men. Of course Jerry took the day off whether we were busy or not. Her wants were more important than mine.

"However, the next development blew up the prospectus, so speak. I picked up a note book under a shady tree, where she a been sittin' alone; and, inquirm into it, found some notes an' records of special interest to my amorous nephew. I knew it belonged to Pearl Brune. She jotted down an honest description of Terry and his mannerisms, what he had said to her at different times, an' how he had told her his undyin love. Very embarrassing particulars they were; but she had similar records of the trustin' young men that her winnin' ways had captivated.

"Miss Pearl Brune was a lady writer, of rich but honorable parents, who lived in a grand house somewhere down below— a house that it took half-a-dozen servants to look after, includin' the groom an' the gardener. She was studyin' the home-life of bush settlers, specially the associations of young people an' the ways they go about their courtin'.

"Poor Jerry had been prospected for a bit of local color, so to speak."

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13: Giorgio, Giuseppe and Guido

Edward Dyson

1865-1931

Weekly Times (Melbourne) 21 Feb 1920

A GIFTED ITALIAN gentleman has stated that the descent of the pit is easy. He has never descended from the position of star boarder in an elegant south suburban establishment to that of a slouching Yarra-banker, with first claim on a doss among the cobwebs under a somewhat ricketty boathouse that flapped on its studs in a high wind, like a boot-upper broken from its sole.

George Edward Holt had made that descent, and had found it as easy as a fall down the Great Pyramid, with a terrible jolt at every step of the tremendous stone stair, and had arrived at the bottom with nothing to be grateful for but the fact that his neck was not broken in two places.

At "Willowholm," the select, elegant "residential" at which George Edward Holt put up after his arrival in Melbourne from Brandon, England, via 'Frisco, the young man was noted for the elegance of his manners and the neatness of his attire. For some good reason of his own he had chosen to represent himself as the son of a fairly well-to-do Chicago man occupied exclusively in the useful, if not onerous, task of mincing cattle into a kind of pork, diluting it with beans, and squeezing it into tins for home and general consumption.

Mr Holt retained his politeness, his affability, and, to some extent, the good looks he inherited from his mother, but it was not possible to remain conspicuously neat in a suit that had long since outgrown its usefulness in many respects, that was not even reputable except when sat upon, and which must necessarily bear testimony to the nature of George Edward's' sleeping- out place under the Yarra-Yarra boathouse, south-east corner, past where a board had been kicked off for purposes of ventilation.

In point of fact, though you might have found it hard to believe in the. more elegant days at "Willowholm," George Edward had run precipitately from home, friends, and family after killing a man, and, by virtue of doing what no sane person running from justice could by any stretch of imagination be expected to do, had eluded whatever pursuit was on his heels, and arrived in Australia, after a good time at Honolulu, with close upon two hundred pounds still left of the cash and chattels he had hastily scraped together ere making his break-away.

George had never at any time betrayed the customary mental attitudes of a murderer. He had had no particular compunction, and was not plagued with bad dreams. Even under the boathouse he slept well, and derived all the necessary refreshment therefrom. Doubtless in his own mind George, found ample justification for the act.

We know that there had been beautiful girl concerned, and that the man found on the Fens, with his head wretchedly disfigured, evidently with blows from his own stick, was young Holt's rival, and young Holt had been heard to say that if Rucknow (the slain man) persisted in a certain course of conduct towards Miss Gertrude Tannfather, something serious would certainly overtake him.

Holt was now penniless, he had nothing of value, and was put to strange shifts to procure his daily bread. He had even learned to be grateful if not even a rind of cheese went with the diurnal crust. There had all along been in the young man's mind a hazy intention of getting work, some light, pleasant, amply remunerative employment that would net take up too much of his time, an elegant office under the Crown for choice: but when at length the money was all gone, and it was a case of the devil driving, George Edward found to his intense amazement that nobody wanted him, and that, as a positive matter of fact, they were justified since he could do absolutely nothing. As his ambition dwindled, and, when the spur of hunger became an insistent goad, George Edward offered himself for the most menial services, and was once actually employed as assistant washer-up and peeler of potatoes at a riverside restaurant, only to discover, to his intense annoyance, that he could not wash up without breaking one dish in five (that was a three days' average), while as a peeler of potatoes he was a most egregious failure. Try as he might there, was no potato left when he had done the peeling.

Many times George Edward had been hungry, often he had been cold and wet. He had lost fastidiousness with the taste for expensive Turkish cigarettes; he now regarded a hotel bar sandwich as a dainty past compare, and a pint of hot pea soup at a cheap eating-house was a thing to day-dream about by the hour as more fortunate men might dream of *houris* and sumptuous banquets in cloud-capped palaces.

George Edward was sitting on a seat by the Yarra, wondering in a casual way how death by drowning took a man. He was not aware of the picture of collapse and utter misery he made, but presently was recalled to consciousness of the world about him by the fall of a coin into his hand. Standing before him was a pretty child of perhaps three.

"For you," she said, and tripped away.

A man who had been amusing her by sending their terrier into the river after sticks took the child's hand, and they walked along the bank.

Holt remained staring half stupidly at the silver piece in his hand, struggling with an effeminate inclination to weep. In his palm lay a fat five-shilling piece. George had to wait till evening for his hot pea soup, but he had it, and he had roast mutton, and potatoes and cabbage, and a liberal helping of solid pudding known as jam roly. That night he slept at the Toff's Doss, so called because the price of a bed was fourpence, a penny higher than the ordinary doss,

consequently the establishment was frequented by dead-beats of the more luxurious kind, temporarily in means.

It was at the Toffs' Doss that George Edward met Guido and Giuseppe. They were his room mates. Giuseppe was a barrel organist, Guido was his monkey.

"Excusa me, Giuseppe Visconti," said the peripatetic musician, introducing himself, "and Guido Visconti." This introduced the monkey.

Holt laughed under the humanising of the hot soup, and the cabbage, and mutton, and the roly-poly.

"Any relation?" he asked. The Italian's grin flashed a display of teeth so white that they conveyed an impression of a mouthful of snow.

"He iss firs cousin of me. Goot fella."

He held the monkey in his arm, and the little creature nibbled his ear affectionately, felt a little pang of envy. Poverty and loneliness are great humanising agents. George Edward had reached that condition in which even the fond regard of a little ape seems a desirable thing.

"He's great," said George Edward. "What can he do?"

"Ah, efferyting. Der iss notting he do notto do verra goot, better as myself. Ahh! He fine little a-fella, earna the plenty the mon'. I playa the org, Guido he waltza roun', stan on hees head, turna the head over the heel, twista the steek lika the mad Irish, gather in the sixa pence, the shilla! Ahh, the goot-a lettle ole monk!" He paused a minute, and looked down at Holt sitting on the side of his bunk. "Whata that I hear you seeng?"

"That was a strange song of Eastern Europe, called The Way of the World. I have had a full meal this evening, I was feeling a bit perked up. Hope you'll excuse."

"Eet was fine. Seeng heem again If please. Ahh, he iss fun, I lova the 'Wai, wai, go home now,' Ah, please, if you like."

George Edward sang the song *sotto voce*, and the monkey capered on the floor to the quaint cadence.

"See, see, he like eet! Guido Visconti is please!" cried the Italian in rapture. "Look, I tell you! You gott no mon. You all broke, what? Well whya not you come longa Guido and Giuseppe Visconti? I play the org, you seeng, Guido dance, he collecta da mon'."

Holt sat staring at Visconti. He saw the proposition only in one light, and a light that will appeal to all men who have gone without meals when going without meals was not merely a voluntary hygienic action, but the most awful compulsion in the world, it meant regular food perhaps, possible a decent kind of a sleeping place under a roof.

"But, I say, old chap, I'd be no possible use to you," he faltered.

"Ahh, yes, yes, you seeng the fine tenoro. I giff you the hat of the Tyrol, the beeg ear-reeng, the fine moustache. The great heap mon' we get. But you too beega the swell You noa like."

"Swell!" Holt thrust out a ragged leg. "Swell? Till a little girl, taking me for the rotten beast I was, put a coin in my hand today, I had not had a penny nor a bite for 56 hours Swell! by the Lord Harry I like that!"

"Ver' goot! Ve go halves, iss it? I taka the one half, you take the one half. Guido, the monk, he taka the one half."

Thus easily and simply it came about that George Edward Holt, gentleman, with the breeding, the education, and most of the instincts of the superior class to which he belonged, became an adjunct as it were to a lean Dago, a barrel organ, and a small but agreeable Gibraltar ape in yellow trousers, a red coat, and a blue cap, and sang about the suburban streets for his daily bread. If any fear of pursuit and recognition had ever haunted George Edward's more emotional moments it lied now.

His hair was naturally curly, of late necessity, which knows no hairdressers, had forced him to wear it long; he was given a down-drooping, black moustache, like that of a Bulgarian brigand, great brass ear-rings were swung in his ears, his complexion, as the result of out-door living through a Melbourne summer, was that of a saddle, a cute little rubber contrivance worn between lip and lower gum altered the expression of the mouth, and the eyes took on a languishing Italian quality as the result of Giuseppe's clever touch of make-up. Little indeed of George Edward Holt remained in Giorgio Visconti, companion of Guiseppe and Guido. Their method was simple, and not exacting. They strolled the better class suburb, and wherever there were children they pitched their hypothetical tent, and Giuseppe played. Then Giorgio sang his impish—

Wai, wai, go home now;
Thy husband is ill.
Is he ill? Praise God's will!
Darling Franz, but one more dance;
After that I'll homeward go.

Or he sang some other quaint song of the primitive, mid-European people of which songs he had a fairly large repertoire. Guido capered to the music, and went through his list of tricks, and then came the offertory.

One evening Giorgio assisted in a performance in the garden at "Willowholm," and with profuse bows and liberal thanks in the nearest he could get to Dago English, collected quite a substantial "plate" from many young ladies and gentlemen with whom he had associated on very friendly terms a year

before, and nobody dreamed that George Edward Holt lurked behind the bandit moustache and beneath the be-ribboned Tyrolean hat of the minstrel boy.

Giuseppe was delighted with the first day's takings. When he emptied his pouch on the bed at the doss that evening he uttered three words of pagan Latin, not printable here, and lifted his hat against the ceiling.

"Twenta-fi' shill!" he cried, "Twenta shilla and the nina pence. Goot. Seven shilla the eacha one, and weeth the four shilla nina pence, the gran feast. Whata you say? The gran fast and the good wine."

They went together to a little eating house in Exhibition street, and fared well at the price, Giuseppe ordering "the steaka the on', the spagett' with the tomat'," and standing a bottle of Australian burgundy in the great exuberance the success of the partnership inspired.

THEY had been working together over five weeks on that afternoon when they took their stand before a neat establishment in East Melbourne, cut into three flats. There were children playing on the well-kept lawn before the house, and Giuseppe long professional experience had taught him that children were conscionable creatures who believed in seeing that those who amused them were honorably rewarded, and Guido never failed to reach their hearts, even if the organ did not succeed and the gaudy light tenor was not particularly to their taste.

Giuseppe played *Killarney*, Guido danced, and threw flip flaps, and walked on his hands. The children screamed happily at his funny capers and quaint friendly advances. Windows were opened when Giorgio Visconti lifted up his slight, sweet tenor and sang a peculiar Tyrolean Herdsman's Song.

"Goot!" whispered Giuseppe. "Singa the 'gain. They loofe heem. Eet weel be plenty the mon. Seenga the sad song; breaka the heart."

Giorgio sang his sad song.

Ah, gloomy the forest is,
Ah, trees loom on high,
Ah, handsome my sweetheart is,
Ah, proud then am I.

He had finished, and there was some applause, when Guido, attracted by some pleasant scent, or some fond, simian hope, fled down the garden path, and went hand-over-hand up the strands of creeper fronting the balcony.

Giorgio went after him. He reached the verandah and pulled himself up through the thick creeper, intending to stand on the baluster and reach the runaway. Instead he drew himself into sight of a party of two seated at a wicker table on the verandah, taking afternoon tea. They were a man and a woman,

the man perhaps forty, heavy featured, with a purpled skin, hinting at dissipation; the woman not more than 22, and extremely pretty. The woman was looking at Giorgio with strained eyes, her face was deadly pale. As the singer's face come into view she started up, extending a tremulous hand.

"That song," she faltered; "that song?"

Giorgio Visconti dropped from the verandah, fled back along the garden path, and without a word to Giuseppe hastened down the street, almost running. He took the first turning and disappeared. He did not return.

Giuseppe lingered about the locality, full of wonder, and shaken with apprehension.

"We do-a not wanta lose heem, Guido." he told the monkey. "Giorgio ver nice chap; whyfor he runa the way. I notta understan'. P'raps he notta come back never."

Giuseppe returned home earlier than usual. They had a small vine-clad cottage at Richmond now, where they batched very comfortably, each putting a fair proportion of his earnings. Giorgio was at home; he sat at the table in the kitchen, all his make-up off, his face very pale, his eyes full of trouble.

"For why?" cried Giuseppe. "Ah, my good-a frien', for why?"

George Edward Holt gripped his arm.

"Suppose you had once loved a woman desperately, Visconti," he said; "suppose that you loved her so much that you once killed a man for her sake. Suppose you fled round the world, and that one day, long after, you climbed a verandah front in this far-out-of-the-way place, and came suddenly face to face with the man you killed and the woman you killed him for, taking tea together, what would you do?"

Giuseppe fell back with staring eyes and twitching hands.

"Body of Christi!" he said.

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14: Curmudgeon Castle

Lucy C. Bickerstaffe

1884-1937

Australasian (Melbourne) 5 Dec 1925

DICK ELLISON found the car which ought to have met him at the station stranded plumb in the centre of a narrow country road some mile and a half away.

An exceptionally pretty girl in chauffeur livery was peering into the engine, while a cart laden with mangels, unable to squeeze past, was drawn up in the ditch, its impudent carter-boy jeering at her."

"Oh, good! Are you the new footman?" asked the girl relievedly as Dick rounded a bend in the road and came on the group. "Then do, for goodness' sake, help me to push this old boneshaker out of the way. I'm frightfully sorry I wasn't at the station to meet you, but the rotten thing stopped dead, and nothing will induce it to budge."

"Happen you dropped some salt on its tail by mistake, miss. Or maybe it wants anuvver donkey to make un go."

Here the young carter caught Dick's stern glance, and, abandoning both his horse and his pleasantries, lent vigorous aid in pushing aside the car, after which he touched his cap in acknowledgment of a small tip, and drove on.

"What a mercy you" came just then," sighed the girl. "I should have murdered that boy in another minute. He wouldn't do a thing to help until he saw your awful glance. I say, do you understand cars?"

"A bit," admitted the new footman, applying himself to the refractory engine, andomitting to mention that not long ago he had been one of the best motor mechanics in the Army Service Corps. "This one seems to be a somewhat antediluvian specimen, though."

"Antediluvian! It's prehistoric. No one could make the beast go. Oh, well done!"

The old engine had responded gamely to Dick's skilful manipulation. The girl took her place at the wheel, and he threw in his bag and clambered beside her.

"Thanks so much." said the girl chauffeur gratefully. "Let's introduce ourselves. My name is Marian Sanders, and I know you are Richard Ellison, the —er — er footman. If you will excuse my making personal remarks, you do not look very like a footman."

"I m afraid I'm a wretched amateur, or, rather, a beginner," he confessed humbly. "I applied for the job of chauffeur, you know. but as that was taken. Mr. and Mrs Trundleton asked if I would care to try the other. I told them I had had no previous experience, but they were still willing for me to come and try, and as I'm an ex-army man with a groggy leg and no capital, I in pretty glad to get

any sort of work. Do you think I'll be able to hold down this job? Is there a tremendous lot to learn?

"No— o—o. But I don't think you will stay here," returned Miss Sanders, enigmatically. "In fact, I wouldn't mind betting (only it wouldn't be fair to bet on a certainty) that early to-morrow I shall be driving you back to the station, always providing the old car allows itself to be driven."

"What! Don't say I shall be hoofed out as soon as all that!" -

"You'll see," she nodded. "I "don't want to prejudice your innocent mind. Besides, it isn't my business. Still, I don't mind admitting that I shall be sorry for you to go. It seem as though you might be a distinct improvement upon the present— um— er— footman."

"That's very kind of you."

"Don't say that till you've met the present one! Frankly, you know, I'm one of seven sisters, and have been most of my life at a big girls' school, so I haven't a lot of use for men of any sort."

"We are rather a rough lot," agreed Ellison sympathetically, stealing an appreciative look at Miss Marian Sanders, whose smart brown costume enhanced her vivid beauty. He particularly liked the way her brown curls pushed rebelliously from underneath the leather cap, and the alert expression of her brown eyes. She was a crisp study in brown.

At this moment the alert eyes met his with great severity.

"It isn't a question of roughness," she told him; "It's conceit. I don't mean you, personally, of course. I don't know you. But nearly all men think they can do everything better than a woman, whereas the truth Js-a modern athletic girl is the equal of the average man in physical sport, and miles and miles his superior in brains. At least that is my firm conviction."

"I daresay you are right," Mr. Ellison conceded. He already perceived that this marvellous girl had a large bee in her bonnet, and that if he wanted to be on friendly terms with her it would be advisable to be nice to the bee. But Marian , was not easily hoodwinked.

"You don't think anything, of the sort," she said, laughing. No man would. It's jolly decent of you to rend me to bits, though, especially as I suppose you realise that I'm that female pirate who robbed you of your job. The Trundletons engaged me because I was cheap, and not very efficient. I don't profess to be a first-rate mechanic, and I don't get paid as one, but there are seven of us at home and mother, and since dad died the family budget has been such a terror that I had to do something."

"Very plucky of you."

"I like work. But I feel awfully guilty at having sort of ousted you. You might possibly have endured being a chauffeur at "Curmudgeon Castle," but in any other capacity you will find the place and the people quite impossible."

"Curmudgeon Castle? I thought it was Elton Grange."

"Well— my name for it is Curmudgeon Castle. You wait an hour or so, and I expect you'll call it something far stronger."

With which dark utterance she swung the car between two high gates lolling drunkenly on broken hinges into a wilderness of disorder.

Ellison stared in blank amazement as the car rattled through weed-infested grounds to a big desolate-looking house, and drew up by the back door, which opened into a stable yard. Here there was a semblance of order; the yard was clean, and the old stable was an exceedingly picturesque building. No horses' thrust interested heads from the loose boxes, but the coach-house was fitted up tidily as a garage.

"Here goes," thought Dick; as a slovenly man-servant opened., the back door for him. "I only hope I shan't be expected to flirt with all the housemaids."

He need not have worried; there were none.

It took him barely five minutes to discover that he had been tricked. He was no more a footman than he was a chauffeur; as far as a name could be applied to his new calling, he was a general servant. To be sure, there was the surly and smutty personage who had admitted him, and who announced that he was Brownley, the cook. But this gentleman hastened to add the information that he was leaving at the end of the month, which would be in less than a fortnight.

After which," he explained, "you'll be the only servant kept; same as I've 'ad to be. You'll 'ave to cook, an' scrub; you will. That is if you stays."

"Good Lord!" said poor Dick, looking round the huge dirty kitchen. "Why, a house this size wants about a dozen servants— half-a-dozen at least— to keep it decent."

"It 'as to go ondecent, then," retorted Mr. Brownley. "Them, two," he jerked expressively with his thumb, "is misers. Now you knows wot you're in for. They wouldn't 'ave a servant in the 'ouse if they could 'elp theirselves. Good money goin' to waste— that's wot servants is. Still, they does their best to get 'em cheap... This your fust place?"

Ellison nodded. He was overwhelmed by an intense depression. The cook looked him over critically.

"We-e-ell," he drawled, "if you ain't got no pertikler objections to 'elpin' yerself, like, you mayn't get on so badly. Otherwise, you'll be druv to death and starved into the bargain. Come on an' be interjuiced to them two."

It was in Ellison's mind to pick up his worn cabin trunk and tramp back to the station with no further parley. He resisted the impulse, and followed the cook upstairs to where his employers awaited him in a bare, comfortless room, dingy and undusted. They sat on each side of the empty fireplace, spring having advanced far enough to enable them to dispense with a fire, though the mornings and evenings were chilly. In the centre of the rug was an enormous

dog basket, occupied by a minute Pekingese, who made up in dignity all that he lacked in size.

Mrs. Trundleton was a pathetic figure of flabby fat, which wrinkled round her scared, watery grey eyes. Dick pitied her. Presumably the purse strings of this household were held by Mr. Trundleton, a small thin man, slightly off his head on the subject of money. He began by impressing upon Ellison the importance of keeping ever door and window latched and bolted.

"We live in constant dread of burglars," he told him, "though they'd have but a poor haul here if they came. Not much of value in a poor old man's house, eh! Ellison? Except, perhaps, Fido. I should be sorry for Fido to be stolen. He is a pedigree fellow, and was a present to my wife from her uncle. When you are not doing anything else, Ellison, we shall want you to take Fido out for exercise."

Dick thought that, if he waited until he had nothing else to do, Fido would get precious little exercise. Probably the Pekingese thought so, too, for he goggled mournfully from his absurdly large basket, all padded with silken cushions. Like most of his breed, he had the air of a deposed monarch. It may have rankled in his aristocratic little heart to be obliged to answer to so plebeian a name as "Fido."

In spite of longing earnestly to pick up Fido's stringy old master by the scruff of his neck and administer a sound shaking for the trick he had played on him, Dick found himself agreeing to stay and do the best he could for a time. After all, it was a job. And he did pity the poor scared Mrs. Trundleton.

For the first ten days Dick bad the pleasure of Mr. Brownley's society, but he did not enjoy this privilege. Neither a prig nor a snob, Dick would have hobnobbed cheerfully with any man who was passably clean and honest, but Mr. Brownley was neither. He was emphatically not one of those who improve on acquaintance, and his talk was as nauseating as his cookery.

Miss Sanders never came indoors, and one day, watching her busy in the yard, Dick observed to the cook that it seemed rather inconsistent for a couple as mean as their employers to keep a car at all.

"They got a girl married 'bout fifteen mile away," explained Mr. Brownley, "Often likes to go 'n see her, they does, specially in fine weather. They gets free meals! It's a good six mile to the station though, as you know, and even the old devil draws the line at footing it. 'E quarreled something cruel with the folk at the pub 'bout wot they charge 'im for taking 'im to the station. So 'e bought this old bus for 'bout twenty quid, maybe less. Bin a good car it 'as, too, but it'll sure bust up one of these days if it ain't looked after better. That gal ain't no cop."

The cook gave a laugh. "Did the old devil proper, she did, though, when she come, all strite from 'er innercent 'ome, they thought she was going to be a sort o scullery drudge in 'er orf time, from cleaning the car, but not me lady! She ups

and tells 'em she's 'ere, on shocking low wages, to mind the car. She'll keep the yard and garridge clean and nowt else."

"Good for her," commented Dick warmly. He had been conscious of a distinct warmth in his attitude towards the lady chauffeur. She contrasted so pleasantly with her master and mistress, and with the grubby cook. Much as he still disapproved of her having taken the job he would so greatly have preferred to his present one, Dick was glad that she had refused to be put upon.

"Oh, she'll look after 'erself— them kind always does— Devil's spawn," said Mr. Brownley, with bitterness. "Poor ole Cookie weren't good 'nuff for 'er neither, nor me kitching weren't. I thort she'd a bin nicer to poor ole Cookie, I did. Just two days she spent with me 'ere, and 'er nose cocked up like as if she smelt a bad smell the yole time."

"She probably did," Dick suggested helpfully. "That scullery of yours has to be seen— and sniffed— to be credited."

"Well, it'll be your job to look after the darned place d'reckly. Then see wot you ses abart it! I've 'ad more 'sperience, I 'ave. Used to be a cook in a workus."

"My hat! Are any of the original inhabitants still alive? All right, don't get stuffy. I quite agree it isn't an easy matter. Where does Miss— er— Sanders get her meals now?"

"Cooks for 'erself, and lives in the loft over the garridge. She told the old 'uns she'd leave if she warn't let to. They didn't want that, cos they'd never get anyone else as cheap.... Stir up them spuds, mate, they gotter be mashed."

"This spoon has been on the floor by the look of it," Dick objected, squinting at it distrustfully. Mr. Brownley muttered something disapproving, and, snatching it from him, plunged it wrathfully into the saucepan.

"Some folks is too pertikler to live. You wait while you've bin 'ere a few more weeks; you'll be glad to eat anythink," concluded Mr. Brownley.

Meanwhile Miss Marian Sanders had been observing the new footman a great deal more closely than he had any suspicion of, and after the departure of Mr. Brownley relations between garage and kitchen became pleasantly cordial.

True, after the morning when her employer had discovered Marian in the latter, and had accused her of begging for food to supplement her meagre salary, the girl refused to come inside the door; but it was really astonishing how often Ellison's duties took him into the yard, where he helped her to solve many a problem connected with the internal complaints of her engine. Marian began to be seized by violent spasms of conscience as she watched his deft work. She felt she had no right to be usurping his functions while he struggled with the kitchen chores. Also, she even began to qualify her opinions as to the immense superiority of girls over men. Certainly Dick had his points, and although a mere man, he did manage a car immeasurably better than she did herself. Still, she told herself, she had only received a short training.

From the day that Mr. Brownley had turned his short, squat back upon the kitchen premises, they had been brushed and scrubbed and polished and rubbed until they shone like the galley of a yacht.

Marian, bored by the innumerable ailments to which aged motor engines are prone, was conscious of this cleanliness, although she did not enter the house. She bad to confess that she looked forward with increasing eagerness to casual chats in the yard with Mr. Ellison. It was good to be alive that summer, even at Curmudgeon Castle.

As Mr. Brownley had explained, Miss Marian Sanders lived in a loft over the garage, and did her own cooking, on an oil stove. She was by no means uncomfortable up there, with her camp bed drawn close to the open window, from which on a clear day she could see over miles of pasture-land. A favourite game of hers was to plan what she would do supposing Curmurdgeon Castle was hers. In her active imagination the rank garden broke forth into flowers, and the deserted yards became musical with the cackling of hens, the quacking of ducks, and the grunting of fat pigs.

One night, however, she awoke suddenly in the dark, shivering with fright. She thought it must have been a nightmare.

Then she heard a movement in the house across the yard. A scream broke the stillness, followed immediately by another, stifled half-way.

Thoroughly awake now, Marian tumbled out of bed, thrust her feet into slippers, and, putting on a long coat, unbarred the door of the garage, and ran to the back door, which was locked. The kitchen, window was broken, though, and the sash flung in. Marian introduced a tentative foot— then another— and she stood listening; in the inky blackness of the kitchen.

The screams had ceased, but upstairs there was a scuffling noise. She dared not flash her torch. No doubt existed in her mind but that the burglars, of whom Mr. and Mrs. Trundleton were constantly in dread had really come at last to try to find a miser's hoard .One of them might even be close to her in the dark. Marian jumped at this thought— jumped with sudden dread— and, creeping towards the fireplace, gripped the first of the fire-irons she could feel, which chanced to be a heavy pair of tongs. Holding them tight gave her more confidence, and she tiptoed up the stairs, the sounds of strife growing in intensity as she advanced. A light shone through the door of her employers bedroom.

Marian pushed it wider, and peeped in.

The room looked as though a boiling whirlwind had just been let loose in it.

Movable articles were mostly upside-down and on the floor. Breakable ones strewed; the carpet in fragments. Poor Mrs. Trundleton was sitting up in bed, trying to yell for help through a pillow-slip, which had been tied tightly over her

mouth; her thin grey hair straggled on her shoulders, and on her forehead was a red, angry mark, where she had been struck.

Her husband, quivering with terror, lay on the floor among the rest of the wreckage clasping in his arms, of all unlikely things, Fido's basket. Marian wondered compassionately whether, in his maddened distress he fancied be was holding the dog, of whom he was certainly fond in his own queer way. If he did think this, however, he was much mistaken.

Fido was thoroughly enjoying this exciting interlude in his dull existence, and was prancing joyfully about, yapping at the pitch of his voice, and nipping light-heartedly at any ankles which came within his reach.

The foreground was taken up by—

(1) burglar No. 1, a tall masked ruffian, locked in furious combat with—

(2) Dick Ellison, in blue pyjamas; while

(3) masked burglar No. 2, a stumpy fellow, was about to deliver the knock-out blow on Dick's skull from behind with a large spanner.

Marian decided that she had arrived at the right moment exactly.

Wasting no time in meditation, she dodged in front of the combatants, and thrust her tongs energetically into the waistcoat of the man with the spanner, who instantly relinquished his intention of knocking Dick on the head, and sat down. Fido, highly pleased at the arrival of yet another playmate in this heavenly rough and-tumble, took advantage of the other burglar's momentary pause of surprise to get a really satisfactory mouthful of his leg. He was sent flying against the opposite wall, which he struck with a pitiful little yelp, but he had given Dick the opportunity he was needing. Burglar No. 1 thudded down, cracking his bead on the overturned fender.

The next few minutes were quite busy. Dick produced rope from somewhere, and firmly trussed the would-be burglars. He then removed the masks, and the stumpy one glowered at him with the disgusted features of Mr. Brownley.

"Oh ho!" cried Dick, "so this is why you honoured this humble dwelling with your presence for so long? You hoped to collect your employer's savings, did you?"

"Anyway, thick'ead, you'll never find it, if we can't. Dunno where the ole bloke's got it 'id, but I'd aknown in a minute if you 'adn't abutted in," muttered the disconsolate cook, as he and his friend were securely locked into an empty room.

Marian tended the frightened old lady, while Dick rescued plucky little Fido, who was not much hurt, and tried to soothe Fido's master. Mr. Trundleton was badly shaken, both physically and mentally, and still retained his hold upon the dog's basket. Dick thought that his employer's mind must be temporarily unhinged by the shock; but he himself was unable to puzzle things out just then,

because the room seemed to be wobbling around him in a fashion which was only too familiar.

'"What's the matter? You are hurt!" he heard Marian's voice say from a great way off.

"No thanks. Perfectly fit. Feeling rather lazy— but– it– was great fun.

And having, in his opinion, satisfactorily answered all inquiries, Dick tottered to his own room, and fell across the end of the bed.

Mr. Dick Ellison was aroused by the taste of neat whisky in his mouth. He sat up and choked.

"That's better," said Marian, complacently. "What is wrong with you, my lad, is that you are absolutely starving. What a mercy I brought this flask in case of illness! Drink some, Dick, while I go and raid the larder."

Ellison sipped from the glass she had put in his hand, but his weakness was gone. A medicine more potent than even the raw spirit coursed through his veins. One word. She had called him "Dick!"

He scrambled to his feet, still giddy, but aflame with the light of a tremendous discovery. He now knew the reason he had endured so long and so happily with the intolerable Trundletons, with drudgery and with semi-starvation.

Hurrying into rather more ceremonious attire, he fairly raced downstairs, employers, poverty, and burglars completely forgotten. The kitchen fire roared genially, and Marian was doing marvellous tricks with his frying-pan.

The ardent lover, having carefully, if hastily, prepared a long and fervid proposal, lost it on seeing his lady, and merely blurted out:

"Marian, darling, I love you! You are the only girl in the world. Will you marry me?" and tried to take her in his arms, frying-pan and all.

"Bless the man, he'll have all the fat in the fire! Of course you love me just at this particular moment. Am I not making lovely smells?"

Mr. Ellison solemnly possessed himself of the pan.

"If you don't say 'Yes' I shall tip the whole concern into the fire. And," he added, sniffing wistfully, "it will break my heart."

For a few seconds the girl's eyes met his.

"I do love you. Dick dear," she replied soberly. "I think I have loved you ever since you came— only I didn't know it myself at first. But for any sake, darling, don't ruin my omelette. "

"Well, well! Here are fine goings on!" Mr. Trundleton, still white and scared-looking, ambled into the kitchen, followed by his wife and Fido. "No, don't get up. Go on with your meal. You've earned it!"

Such sentiments from the miserly owner of Curmudgeon Castle actually bereft Marian of speech. Dick rose and set chairs by the fire for the old couple.

"Get on with your supper, boy," repeated the old man irritably. "When you have finished I want you to take those robbers to the police station in the car. I know I can trust you, and it is no job for a girl."

"Very good, sir."

Mr. Trundleton stared thoughtfully at Dick.

"Haven't had enough to eat, eh? Too honest to prig food like that scoundrel Brownley did? Perhaps I am a shade too careful. Take care of the pennies— you know. But you are not much of a cook, boy."

Gorging on omelette, Dick admitted this freely.

"I think," began Marian slowly, "that I had better be the cook for the future, and Dick— I mean Ellison— the chauffeur. It would be more suitable."

What an admission from Miss Sanders!

Mr. Trundleton looked from one rosy young face to the other. Then at his wife. Then he chuckled. "Guessed it all along," he mumbled. "Listen to me, young woman, and take your mind for a minute from 'Dick-you-mean-Ellison.' I want you to tell me what you think of this house."

It was a surprising and apparently irrelevant question.

"It's a beautiful old house," said Marian, wonderingly; "only, perhaps, rather out of repair, and dismal in consequence."

"How would you two like to have it for a wedding present? What would you do with it?"

The girl gulped, but he waited for her answer.

"I d-don't know," she stammered, with a guilty remembrance of her idle dreams in the loft. "I think, perhaps we might repair it and do it up ourselves— it would be a great game— and open it as a guest house. The country round is glorious, and we might make the garden delightful with a little hard work. By degrees, if we had lots of visitors, we might run to tennis lawns and billiards and wireless. Why do you ask me this?"

"Because I am going to give it to you," replied the amazing Curmudgeon. "My wife and I would not spend another night in it for any inducement. Those men would certainly have murdered us but for Ellison. There is a little house near my daughter's in a civilised town— not this abominable countryside— where we can more if we choose. It belongs to us. But we should like to prove our gratitude for what Ellison has done, and it seems we can't do better than help him to marry and earn a livelihood for himself and his wife. You are a capable young woman, and your idea is a possible one."

"But—"

"Don't interrupt me, Miss Sanders. I am going to give Ellison and you this house and the furniture and the car. And because Ellison was ready to risk his skin in the service of an old Curmudgeon, I shall give him £500 to start that guest

house with. I understand that in doing this I am benefiting you as well. No, don't thank me. You helped Ellison to save my little fortune for me."

"It was in the house then? I thought those men were fools," said Marian, involuntarily speaking her thoughts.

Mr. Trundleton laughed— a queer grim chuckle.

"Oh, yes, it was in the house. Would you like to know where? I don't hold much with banks, so I had a small steel safe made for me where no rogue would dream of looking. You'll never guess, and I shouldn't tell you— but— you saved me and my little bit of money. Well, it is no use asking you to guess, so I'll tell you. The safe is concealed in the double bottom of Fido's basket."

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15: The Exorcism

Alexander Vindex Vennard (as by "Joan Vindex")

1884-1947

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LIFE IS FULL OF SURPRISES; for, of all men under the heaven, Bill Bedford believes in ghosts. Not, perhaps, in the timid way that some people imagine vague, grisly spectres that float from nowhere in particular; but he is calmly convinced of the existence of "people of another breed," as he puts it. At the same time, he has no theories; and would rather not talk about them.

He is a shrewd; quiet, strong young bushman; unimaginative and apparently rather stolid. Yet he firmly believes the following story, which he told the writer so shortly that it could never have been written but for details supplied by other members of his family.

IT WAS traditional among the Bedfords that, as their daughters should be homely in looks and unrivalled as housewives, so their sons should be of prepossessing appearance, and of more than average strength, physical and mental— in the case of the eldest son until he was twenty-one.

On the day that he reached that age the eldest son was invariably closeted with his father in private, and invariably appeared next morning a broken man.

In what particular part of the man the change was wrought none could say; but the fact remained that to the end of his days he had no heart and no spirit left to cope with life. From a worldly point of view they were not without moderate success; they were simply without any power to enjoy it. It is not wonderful that the family never grew to any size, and that no member of it ever gained distinction in any walk of life.

Bill was the only son of his father, who, in turn was the only surviving member of the family.

It had, always been rather a joke with Bill and his sisters that when he came of age he would have to go through an initiation ceremony. When the day actually came— a blazing day in December— they were full of anticipation and the supreme confidence of the young in youth.

Bill was late coming in from work, and when questions were asked, had to admit that, in knocking the ashes out of his pipe, he had started a fire in the dry grass. A bend in the river and the stillness of the day had been his allies in limiting the damage to a couple of acres. It was after the evening meal that their father gave up his fruitless attempts to smoke; and said: "Come into the office, Billy. I want to talk to you."

The use of the name that had been discarded years ago was rather a surprise; but Bill, sprawling over the "Farmer and Settler," on the dining table, winked surreptitiously at his sisters.

"Righto, sir," he said.

As they stood facing one another, there was an extraordinary contrast to be noted between father and son. The younger man's whole bearing and expression bespoke strength, and vitality, and supreme confidence— qualities of which his father's every word and movement betokened an utter lack. He was a tall man, but bore himself as though the very strength to carry his limbs had been drained from him. On his face was the "down and out" look of a man who has tussled with the world, and lost. It was a look he had not earned, for in his tussling with the world he had at least held his own, perhaps more.

He had landed in Australia twenty-five years before; a young man of twenty-one, with a look of tragedy in his eyes, and no earthly possessions beyond a good education and upbringing, and a small tin box, which to this day had lain, unopened under the office table. Now he owned a small property in the Hunter Valley, and was considered a successful man, but with no apparent enthusiasm over his success; only the dull look in his eyes as of an animal in pain.

Bill followed his father on to the verandah. It was a fiery night, and something in the wind that had sprung up in the west caught his attention. He sniffed.

"Do you smell smoke; Dad?" he asked. "No," said his father absently.

The office was a box of a room, being in reality only an end of the verandah boarded in, and tonight it was insufferably hot.

"Couldn't we talk outside?" asked Bill, standing in the doorway.

"No," said his father, still absently, and Bill followed him into the office. For years now this boy had felt towards his father as a grown person feels to a child who must be humoured.

Bill took off his coat, and they sat down. For some minutes there was silence; finally the older man cleared his throat, and obviously braced himself.

"William, you are twenty-one to-day."

Bill had expected something of the sort; and said "Yes" with a note of inquiry in his voice, for which his father was grateful. It bridged an extraordinary distance.

"You are the only surviving representative— male representative— of our family."

"What about yourself, Dad?" inquired Bill.

"I don't count. I haven't counted since I was your age." The words were spoken in a low, toneless voice, but Bill did not miss them, any more than he missed the twinge of pain that flashed across his fathers face. A sudden

irritation seized him against this mystery that he had always looked on in the light of a joke.

"What do you mean ?' he asked, and his voice was sharp.

The man looked at his son with relief.

"That is what I have to tell you," he said, "and it means I have to go back a long way in point of time."

He sat still for some minutes, biting the ends of his moustache, and Bill; following the direction of his gaze, found that it was fixed on the tin box under the table. Finally, he began as though with an effort. "The whole thing dates from the year 1187, when a certain John Bedford was taken prisoner after the battle of Hallin. He was a crusader, you know. He was remarkably handsome, and brave in the hot-headed, cut-and-come-again way they affected in those days, and he was very big. We always have been ever since, brave, and handsome, and big. He spoke without the slightest feeling in his voice, as though these were not unusual attributes for a man to apply to himself. Then he looked at his son, and there was feeling enough in the words he added, "You are; I was."

Bill laughed, a little awkwardly. "You can beat me in looks any day, Dad," he said; but his father took no notice, and went on.

"This John Bedford was wounded, and taken in by a man called El Hazif. who was an astrologer and master of the Black Art, and that sort of thing. I don't know how long he was there, or anything that happened there, but in the end he ran off with El Hazif's daughter, and married her. If he hadn't been a headlong sort of fellow he would not have done it. El Hazif was not the sort of man to forgive, and he followed them, and before long got them into his power. He was, I suppose, within his rights, and he was bent on revenge."

The man paused, fingering the pen-handles that lay on the table beside him.

"Bill," he continued, "you've heard the three parts of a man's being?"

"Yes," said Bill, "what were they, now?"

"Body, soul, and spirit, eh?"

"That's it."

"Well, there's something else, something vital. A man may have all those three and yet be dead."

"How do you make that out?"

The man shrugged his shoulders ever so slightly. "I can't explain it," he said, "but that's how it is with me."

Bill wanted to shout with laughter at the absurdity of the whole thing, but instead, he looked at his father, and that drove any desire to laugh out of his mind at once. Could there possibly be anything in this extraordinary theory to explain why his father was so absolutely different from any one he had ever seen?

"What's it all mean?" he asked. "What have El Hazif and John Bedford got to do with us anyway?"

"Everything. As I said. El Hazif was wise, and knew what was of most value to a man. To die, to lose your body, that is no great horror: we all do it. It is the only natural simple thing in the world. For a man to lose his mind, that would have been merciful; and the soul was out of El Hazif's department. But can't you see, there is still something else. The desire, the power to live not merely to exist. The very sap of one's being. The strength, the vigour, the power, to enjoy, I don't know, the word for it. The difference, in fact, between you and me. It was that that El Hazif took from John Bedford, and let him go. Comparatively, it would have been kindness to torture him to death."

"But father, how does that affect you?" Bill was leaning forward, his elbows on his knees, and his great red-brown hands clasped under his chin, his eyes fixed on his father's face.

"The strength that he drew from John Bedford he lived on for twenty years. Then he came to John's son, and took his—"

"But how," broke in the young man.

"By strength of will. It is a thing a man can only part with through weakness of will. It has happened in every generation since."

"But you, Dad?"

"Yes, me too. I had three brothers older than myself; everyone of them as fine a man in every sense, as ever I knew. Not one of them could endure life for a year after he was twenty-one: the power and joy of life had gone out of them. It has been the same for seven hundred years with every Bedford man. Never has there been one who could win back his birthright."

"It would be better to let us die out, then. There's no point in keeping a thing like that going," said Bill gruffly.

"At home we used to have a crest," said his father; "it was a hand holding a child, and the motto was, 'I hope.' Don't you see, everyone of us has hoped to have a son who would be able to hold his own. I never realised till now how much we hope, and how much they must have been disappointed."

The two men sat in silence for a time, the younger man pulling deeply at his pipe, the older still fidgeting about with his hands. At length Bill spoke.

"I can't see it," he said; "I don't understand; it's so ridiculous."

"None of us can understand," said his father, speaking with more vigour than Bill had ever seen him show; "but Bill, you can believe what I tell you? The day I was twenty-one I was as full of youth and strength and confidence as you are; my mind was as keen and alert as yours. I was afraid of neither man nor devil. The next day I was what I have been ever since— oppressed with life; an old man full of depression and disillusionment before I had fairly begun my life. I don't understand it either, but there it is."

Bill looked at his father in silence, and with mixed feelings. There was pity for the man for the moment on top, and beneath that, anger at the mystery of it all: In every sense the child of a new country, to him this strange thing was unintelligible, and the vague horror of it roused in his unimaginative mind no thought of fear, only one of strong resentment. Under all was a great grim determination to put an end to this damning, blighting, ridiculous superstition.

"What do you do, Dad?" he asked.

"To-night you must meet El Hazif, and fight for your life— for it is your life, my boy."

"If I win?"

The man drew in his breath sharply. After seven hundred years there was still hope left in the composition of the Bedfords.

"You have peace and freedom, and this curse comes to an end."

"And how about your lot? Can I win that back too?" Bill had forgotten the absurdity of it all: his one idea was to clear from his father's mind this mad notion, that somehow or other had got planted there. His father almost smiled.

"If you hold your own," he said. "I'll ask for nothing more."

Then he got up, took a key from his pocket, and unlocked the tin box under the table. From it he drew a bright blue garment of soft heavy silk. I was neatly folded, and, as he undid it, a strange heavy odour; faint; but undeniable, filled the little room. It was a long cloak of the wrapping kind, tied at the throat with a silver cord.

"This is John Bedford's cloak; you must put it on," he said.

"I think I could get on better in my shirt-sleeves," said Bill, but his father shook his head, and Bill stood up.

The older man put the cloak round his son's shoulders, and tied the cord; then looked down to the ground at his feet. The cloak hung straight from the broad shoulders, and cleared the rough board floor by an inch. In seven hundred years, that cloak had covered many shoulders, and lain on many a rich carpet, and polished floor, but perhaps never, since the days of the ill-fated John Bedford had it swung clear of the ground.

The father caught his breath, he put his hands on his son's shoulders, and looked into his eyes.

"I must leave you now, Bill," he said, "but, I shall be just outside."

Bill did not smile as he looked kindly down into the anxious face.

"All right, Dad," he said.

The man moved slowly out, and as he closed the door Bill called him. He turned back at once.

"Can I smoke?" asked the young man.

"You may;" and his father closed the door.

Once more Bill sat down in his chair, shook the heavy folds of the cloak back from his arms, and, leaning back, with his legs crossed, filled and lit his pipe. Gazing into the smoke, as it hung about him, in the stuffy room, he thought of what his father had told him.

To sit there long enough to satisfy his father was his idea. This tom-fool notion had somehow got planted in his father's mind, and it would evidently please him if Bill spent a couple of hours in the office, and then appeared in his usual serene state of mind.

To pass the time, Bill picked up a magazine, but found that, try as he would, he could not keep his thoughts from what he had heard from his father. The father, though he did not know it, was at that moment on his knees just outside the office door.

The thing was absurd. With an exclamation of impatience, he flung down the magazine, and sat up, determined to waste no more time in the sweltering room. As he did so, he felt his eyes caught and held.

He has never been able to explain to the satisfaction of the sceptical what exactly, it was that he saw. A pair of eyes, colour uncertain, and a face, whether old or young he does not know. Flimsy evidence, and Bill was an unimaginative man. At other times he says he's not sure that he saw anything; that he only felt a hostile presence. Once, years before, he had been nearly drowned, and now the same feeling of sinking and losing strength came over him. He pulled himself together, and put out every effort of his will against it. But still he gazed into the eyes opposite him, and felt himself losing his grip.

Everything vanished— the stuffy little office, with its evil-smelling lamp; the desk and chairs which he knew were there. He was alone in space with something that drew the blood away from his heart.

He grew light-headed, and things turned black all round him. Something was slipping slowly but surely from him. In another minute it would all be over. That would be a relief. He had lost all sense of time; the struggle might have been going on for years; in the eyes that held his there seemed to be dawning a look of triumph, and his father's words flashed across his mind, "I never realised before how much we hoped."

He pulled himself together for a last effort. It was only his own imagination; he was mesmerising himself. The room was so airless that he was getting suffocated with the heavy odour from the cloak.

He sprang up and crossed to the window, which he flung open, and then stood aghast for a second.

A gale of wind rushed in, bringing with it the acrid, stinging smell of smoke, and over the hill opposite, not a mile away, swept a sheet of fire, leaping before the wind through the long, dry grass, and luridly reflected on the heavy pall of smoke above.

Below the house a broad strip had been burnt as a protection, just in time, for against the glare Bill saw his father, darkly silhouetted, beating along the smoking edge with a green bough. One of the girls, in a strange mixture of clothing, was busy in the same way, and the State boy was driving in a terrified and unmanageable collection of horses and cows into the garden. At the other side of the house someone was working the pump, and on the roof Bill saw his other sister emptying a bucket of water over the shingles, and disappearing for a moment, only to return with another bucket.

His quick glance took it all in. The homestead would be safe from flying sparks, and the fire would sweep past on one side. But what of the five hundred fat lambs on the flats at that side? For one anxious moment he hesitated; then remembered the patch he had burnt by the river that after-noon; he must get them on to that.

Quickly he turned from the window, and met the steady eyes fixed on him, and waiting. He stopped— for the first time in his life irresolute.

"Look here," he said; "we can't stay fooling here all night. I've got to go out; you can come, too if you like." And he says someone was at his side as he rushed down the veranda, vaulted the fence into the yard, loosed his dog, caught his horse, and finally spring into the saddle.

His mother at the pump saw him kick his left stirrup free and look down as though someone were standing near him. She heard him say, "Come up behind," and the next second he dashed out of the yard, the great blue cloak flying behind till he caught it and twisted it round his waist. It was daylight before the homestead could be safely left, and then the older Bedford went with a couple of men from a neighbouring farm to find his son. On the river bend they found his horse, standing, and his dog keeping the sheep in a compact mob on the cool, black grass that had been burnt the day before. The fire had swept through the paddock, and not a blade was left on the smoking ground.

"Cripes, Mr Bedford, Bill's saved your lambs, said one of the men; "there'd a been roast mutton about if he hadn't got them on here."

And then they came on Bill, lying near the river, his clothes and hair singed, his face and hands red and blistered. Round his neck was a piece of silver cord, with some charred remains of stuff on it.'

The man was at his son's side in a moment, nervously, ineffectually, feeling for his pulse, while one of the others brought a hat full of water from the river, and dashed it in his face.

The boy moved his great limbs, and turned his head.

"He's all right," said the man; "just exhausted."

"I must speak to him," said the father; "I must look into his eyes. Bill, Bill," he called.

Bill opened his eyes, and for a time looked vacantly in front of him; then saw his father's face, and smiling, stretched out his great, sore, red hand.

"It's all right, dad," he said. "Methusaleh's a pretty hot member in a stuffy room, but he's no good when there's work about. But, by Jove, he dies hard." he added, and closed his eyes again with a sigh.

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16: The Fall of the Gods

Edouard A. Aujard

1885-1936

Australasian (Melbourne) 9 Aug 1919

Australian journalist and short story writer

IN THE jungle tangle of the island heights lived the one lone tribe of the Winkie Winkie, enjoying a precarious peace in the superstitious atmosphere of the tribal gods— those grotesque wooden idols which circled the Sing-Sing ground at the edge of the Sacred Pool, which was like unto a little hand mirror of the stars, but was in reality the toilet glass of the devil, wherein he gazed to polish his horns, comb his hair, and curl his tail.

Pig-hunting and slothfulness formed the physical pleasures of the Winkie Winkie, while their spiritual welfare was assiduously catered for by the imaginary devil spirits, who were ever on the look-out to inflict some evil on these simple dusky children of the forest. From time to time they had received reports of the existence of a strange white man, who dwelt away down on the coast of the great Saltwater, but to that distant part they had never journeyed, being unaccustomed to stray jar from the Sing-Sing grounds of their gods.

So shut off from the outside world by an overfilling riot of vegetable life, and unfettered as yet by any contact with civilisation, they enjoyed the same questionable tranquility of existence as did their ancestors in that far-off time when Torres and De Quiros named their island "Terra Australia del Espiritu Santo."

Basscombe was an anachronism, an error that Time had made. By nature he was a pirate, and though fate had set him down in an age which offered little chance of following his true profession; yet he had not altogether wasted his mistimed talents, for he was known as the most notorious "blackbirder" of the New Hebridean group, and many were the islands which had good cause to remember him, and his subtle, hawk-like methods of kidnapping.

He was an extraordinary man, or, more correctly, an extraordinary part of a man; for some of the original Basscombe was missing. A wooden leg, a glass eye, and a complete set of false teeth, formed the scientific additions which had replaced the missing parts. His ambling mode of progression was not unlike the run and stop movement of a spider, which in fact he resembled in craftiness and character.

There came the day when a temporary wave of reform against blackbirding passed through the New Hebrides, and all Basscombe's hopes of securing further native labour for his plantation from the neighbouring isles, were dashed to the ground by the vigilance of the naval patrol. Basscombe was a man of

resource. He lifted his eyes to the Santo Hills, and gave a whipcrack of a thought to the unknown tribe of the Winkie Winkie. There was labour in plenty, untapped as yet, only waiting for, a bold spirit to exploit it. He was that spirit, brave Basscombe, the blackbirder, a man who death could not get, and life could not shake.

"Bah!" he cracked his fingers in the direction of a distant fleck of smoke that marked the position of the naval patrol far out at sea. "Gentlemen sailors and flunkeys! Ha, ha, ha!" The joke was too good, so he shared it with a wheeling seagull. "Get-him-Basscombe? Never."

The tropical sun had commenced its down ward swoop. In the festooned seclusion of their crudely fashioned grass huts the hill men drowsed away the heat of-the early afternoon. The tick-ticking of falling seeds and leaves alone whispered that time was not dead, but only slept, breathing in the unceasing workings of giant trees and "jungle vines. Here and there a wild orchid lifted its face to the light and beckoned a coloured invitation to the richly tinted forest butterflies. From time to time a crackling of twigs disturbed the stillness of the mountain side, as though the forest would lift a warning voice to its children, and wake them ere it was too late. Nearer and nearer came the voice, until at last an evil face framed itself amidst the leaves of a young cocoanut palm on the outer edge of the hillmen's village. Basscombe, the blackbirder, had arrived.

"Lazy swine," breathed Basscombe, glimpsing the Sleeping Winkie Winkie. "Good, healthy greasy niggers goin' to waste. I'll get you, my beauties. Exercise! Ah, that's what you need— exercise; and I'm a physical culture expert. You'll make a good team."

Having made this semi-mental comment on the situation, the lone hand blackbirder jerked himself through the last intervening barrier of foliage, and entered the village with his quick, characteristic, hobbly gait. He was tired and beragged with three days' climbing— a battered, lame wisp of a man; yet possessing the stinging energy of a wasp, and the spirit that knows no failure.

"The devil!" shrieked the women, and covering their faces with their hands they fled into the encircling hills, lest the devil's evil eye should fall on them and blight their lives forever.

Basscombe smiled, for he was relieved to find that the language of the Winkie Winkie was similar to that of the coastal tribes. He held out some beads and gaudily coloured calico as a token of peace and goodwill. The hillmen brandished their clubs as a declaration of war, and, swaying to and fro, they commenced a war chant to their tribal gods for courage.

"Picanninnies, women," hissed Basscombe in the Santo tongue, employing an insult which is as a spear thrust to a native. "You'd fight, should you? Good! But you can't win, you sorry swine; you can't win."

With his hand on his automatic, Basscombe stood waiting, seeking to measure the mob mind of the swaying, chanting hillmen. Rising and falling the chant increased in volume, like the fitful voice of a gathering storm. In a similar manner do dogs bark themselves into a frenzy when they attack a 'superior' victim. Not far removed from the animals are these dark, untutored minds of the lower order of South Sea natives; and the eye of the white, always creates fear.

At last the frenzied leapings and chanting worked the natives to passion and banished fear; and they seemed to pause for a moment as though they awaited a leader to govern the mob mind. As Basscombe jerked his automatic from his pocket the leader came, yet not from the front, but from the rear he appeared, and with one bound he had enfolded the lone white man in his grasp. It was all that was needed; for with one accord the rest surged forward, and thus. taken unawares. Basscombe went down under the undisciplined, struggling, fighting mass. The white man's chance was hopeless beyond hope, and Destiny had put to nod to Death, and the end would have arrived.

Perhaps at this very moment the devil came to the edge of the sacred pool to part his hair, or was it luck that marked the cards in favour of the lone white man.

Whichever it was, as Basscombe emerged from one edge of the scrimmage, something in the fighting atmosphere snapped, and the hillmen stood back while courage oozed from their hearts and superstition palsied them with fear, for in the rough and tumble Basscombe's false teeth had been knocked half out of his mouth, and as he held them from falling between his toothless gums, they added to his face the look of a thrice-intensified snarl of a fighting ape-man. The hillmen fell back.

Quick to sense the reason of their inaction, Basscombe sought to multiply the effect which chance had dealt him. In a twinkling he had his false teeth in his hand, and, holding the double row of ivories twixt forefinger and thumb, he clicked them together in a series of impressive bitings. One of the bolder hill men sought to remove his teeth also, an action which Basscombe promptly rewarded with a very healthy and severe nip, which had the effect of making the presumptuous one roll about the ground as though a thousand demons had nipped him. Basscombe, the blackbirder, was a demon, a demon to be revered. He hillmen laid taro, breadfruit, and yams at his feet as a peace offering.

Then Basscombe played his last card with the power-drunken arrogance of a conqueror. Over his artificial limb was a detachable trouser-leg. With a dexterous movement he now removed the limb, and hopping towards the pile of gifts, he scattered them with scornful sweeps of the leg. Basscombe replaced his leg, and after surveying the surrounding faces with the contemptuous slowness of a superior being, he began to address them in the Santo tongue.

"The gods of the Sea, Big Wind, and Fire Mountain have sent me unto you, for they are angry, and their wrath is as the anger of the hurricane which destroys your huts and the yam gardens. This rubbish," he indicated the pile of goods which lay at his feet, "is an insult to the gods, the gods of the white man of the big Saltwater. What the gods want is work. As your women work for you in the yam gardens, so you shall work for me, for Fire Mountain has spoken."

He paused for a moment, and looked over towards the island of Ambrym. In the distance hung the smoke of the volcanic Mount Benbow, filtering up into the sky; it silhouetted itself against, the blue, like some gigantic mushroom of a forgotten Titan world.

"See," continued the scheming black-birder, pointing towards, the volcano. "Gifts without number, such as these you offer me, have the men of Ambrym poured into the mouth of the Fire Mountain, and never yet has its wrath been. appeased. Only one thing will please the god of the Fire Mountain, and that is work for me at the edge of the great Saltwater. Work such, as your women do for you; for your laziness has angered the gods."

Having thus addressed them Basscombe, blew a shrill blast on a whistle and ere its lingering echoes died in the forest, a score of sheep dogs came bounding into the village, and commenced to leap about him in a manner expressive of canine affection. Never did the blackbirder go far from the coast without his dogs, and more than once had they saved him in a tight corner. He now proceeded to make some trifling presents to the stronger members of the tribe, explaining that two hundred workers would be sufficient. This diplomacy effectually separated the weak from the strong, and within an hour of his entry to the village, he commenced his descent to the coast with two hundred of the Winkie Winkie in the lead. Superstition, Basscombe, and his dogs were the agents which drove them onward.

It was but a matter of a few days ere this very. raw material was disciplined into a very efficient working machine by the live-wired energy of Basscombe. The virgin forest fell before the axes and knives of the hillmen, and neat regular rows of cocoanut plants appeared in the cleared portion. Did a recalcitrant native imagine he could creep back to the hills under the shadow of the night, so sure would the dogs round the deserter up, and return with him to the compound, as though he were no more than a stray sheep or goat. Basscombe was master, and he wrung the last ounce of working power from his slaves.

One day malaria took a hand in the game, and Basscombe was compelled to take to his bed, a fact which extremely annoyed the little man, as he was aware that the Winkie Winkie would do very little work in his absence. Then the bright idea came— the lightning flash of inspiration. He managed to stumble weakly to the plantation to put it instantly to the test. He blew his whistle as a signal that he wished to talk with his workers.

They came hobbling, hop-step-and-a- jumping, and limping, according to their particular labour-made cuts, wounds, and blisters— a sorry looking spectacle. In one fell swoop they had been wrenched from an Arcadia-like ease into the blistering toll of a full working day. When the last sorry straggler had ambled up to the rail of the whistle Basscombe commenced.

"The god of the Fire Mountain has spoken. He is angry at the little work you do in my absence. He will not be cheated by the Winkie Winkie. He is angry— very angry. Henceforth, Fire Mountain shall watch you through the Eye of his white servant."

Whereupon Basscombe removed his glass eye and placed it on an adjacent log. The Winkie Winkie fell back a step, and a shiver ran through their ranks.

"It is well that you understand," he concluded, "for the Eye shall report to me the names of those that sleep. I have spoken."

Time went on and the work progressed, though, away down in the collective heart of the Winkle Winkie revolt was smouldering, now and then peeping out in some semi-veiled sulky action.

For three months the Reign of the Eye endured, and then—

Chance is a fickle goddess, and those whom she favours to-day she smites tomorrow.

One day a bird alighted on the log, and made a playful, speculative peck at the eye, irreverent bird that it was. Its curiosity must have been aroused, for, after looking to right and left, and noticing that only the Winkie Winkie were watching, this feathered meddler decided that the little glass hollow thing was worthy of deeper study, a fact which led it to carry off the eye to some more secluded spot, possibly to a birds' laboratory of investigation. The Winkie Winkie set up an agitated chattering with the wonderment of it all. The bird did not drop dead, turn into a caterpillar, or disappear in a puff of smoke. So chance smote Basscombe.

It was a sultry day when it happened. A languorous atmosphere rested on the face of the waters. Fine Mountain and the Sea were asleep, and Big Wind was too far away to matter. Once and for all the Winkie Winkie had decided to put an end to Basscombe, and return to the hills. The time was auspicious. They would act now, and so cheat the white man's gods.

Basscombe entered the clearing and sniffed mutiny. Instantly the Winkie Winkie completed a circle— a chanting black circle of revenge. Into the fight that followed the lone adventurous black-birder put all the sting of his wasp-like personality. From his automatic a staccato of shots bit the air, and three plugs of dynamite shook the earth, and then the dark circle closed, and then loosened again. Basscombe had passed on the last long, great adventure path.

It seems a singular coincidence, though true it is, that at that very moment the earth trembled under the feet of the Winkie Winkie. The earth trembled,

and trembled again. Perhaps Venus blew a kiss from stellar space, and the earth's cold heart experienced a tremor of passion, and the rumbling thunder that came from the volcanic Mount Benbow was but a sigh. No! No! No! The Fire Mountain, was angry. The devil held the earth in his teeth and he was going to shake the Winkie Winkie off into a dreadful eternity of unknown torment. Away to the hills fled the Winkie Winkie.

The peaceful filterings of volcanic smoke had been replaced by a belching eruption of steam and smoke and ashes, and red streamers of fire leaped from the newly made tissues in the palm-clad slopes of Mount Benbow. When night fell the flames seemed to multiply, lighting up the lava streams, which moved with glacier like slowness down the mountain side of Ambrym. They crashed through the huge teakwood and banyan trees, hurling them into the air, from whence they returned only to rebound again and again. In the distance. these trees looked like so many popcorns jumping in a long hot pan. Faster, faster fled the Winkie Winkie, covering their faces with their hands.

Two days and nights of terror, and the Winkie Winkie arrived back. Again they felt safe near the Sing Sing grounds of their gods.

Now mark the subtle finger work of Fate, or, if you like it better, ascribe what happened to the evil spirits which lurked at the edge of the Sacred Pool. One of the Winkie wore a waistcoat he had stolen from the ill-fated Basscombe. In the higher left-hand pocket of the waistcoat were two spare glass eyes, which Basscombe had kept handy in case of accident. As the hillman stooped to drink, they fell into the Sacred Pool, and lodged there on a stone scarcely an inch below the surface, so craftily did the evil spirits work, to stage the last act of this story.

It was during the rain of ashes which were blown over from the dying fires of the eruption of Mount Benbow that the Winkie Winkie first glimpsed, the watching eyes—

Which looked up from the crystal dear waters of the Sacred Pool. There were the Eyes of the invisible white man— those Eyes that none could mistake— accusing, challenging, triumphant, the Eyes of the malicious demon white man— Basscombe. The Winkie Winkie gathered around amazed, bewitched, palsied.

"Ah ah, ah!" laughed the invisible demon of the little white man. "You thought to escape me, but I followed you hereof, the unkillable Basscombe; I, the servant, of Fire Mountain, whose anger you incurred. Forever and forever shall I watch him now, and you must burn your wooden gods and kill many pigs as a sacrifice to me. And if you obey not, many are the evil spirits which are only waiting to pounce upon you. Take heed— I, Basscombe, have spoken!"

Plainly the Winkie Winkie heard the words, as they often heard the voices of the other spirits of the dead. So, as the white demon commanded, so it

happened, and the gods of wood were burned at the edge of the Sacred Pool, which was like unto a little hand-mirror of the stars— or was it the toilet-glass of the devil, wherein he gazed to polish his horns, comb his hair, and curl his tail?

Who can tell?

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17: Tragic Sequel

Mark Hellinger

1903-1947

Daily Telegraph (Sydney) 6 July 1941

Hellinger is reputed to have written over 3,000 short-short stories, as he was writing one a day for his New York daily newspaper. I have collected 200 in two volumes already of his stories published in Australian newspapers. This one is not in one the collections.

CLEM tossed his hand in, and stretched himself while George bid to the skies on two pairs— and lost three bucks.

"I think I'll be getting along now, boys. So long," Clem said, and left.

George and Harry watched him go. They got their own coats and walked over to the club bar. Harry observed that Clem was a chump for his wife, that he had to leave early all the time. George shrugged and said that Clem was just that kind of a guy.

"Say, Harry," he asked suddenly. "Can a person get grey overnight? I mean from a fright or something."

Harry studied the answer in his glass. "You're not so grey," he returned. "What are you worried about?"

George said he wasn't thinking of himself, but of Clem. For Clem had married a woman with the world's most beautiful hair. George had seen it. In daylight it looked faintly reddish. At night, it was almost blue-black.

Clem was a man who remained single until he was 39. Then he got a peek at that hair, and he married it. She was about 40 at the time, George Said, and she wanted to settle down and spend her life reading the funnies and listening to the radio. But Clem had other notions. He still felt like going out with the boys and having fun.

So their start was bad, George said. Plenty of fights, and plenty of days when Mrs. Clem wouldn't speak to her husband at all. But, in spite of everything, they loved each other. And both felt that things would adjust themselves In time.

One night Clem said he was leaving on a short hunting trip. Mrs. Clem said no, but Clem said yes. And off he went.

There were five of them altogether, including George. "I didn't really want to go," George said, "but Clem kept urging me, and I had a few days off, so what the devil. Jose, a cross-eyed Mexican that Clem liked, drove the car. He had no licence, so Clem lent him his. They were about the same build and the same complexion. All except the eyes."

They had a case of booze in the car, George went on. and they started to nip on it before they got out of town. George said he remembered Clem falling off the back seat on to the floor. And he remembered having a few more drinks

himself when he got out into the country. Vaguely, he remembered big lights shining in his eyes and the grinding of brakes. He felt as though someone kicked him powerfully in the stomach. And then— lights.

"I CAME to in a hospital," George said. "It was all white and clean, and panels of yellow sunlight cut diagonally down to the floor. "Jose, our Mexican friend, was dead. I had a lump on my head, and the others all had cuts and bruises. Jose had tried to avoid another car, and had swung too wide. We had turned over in a ditch. And when the police arrived Jose's eyes were closed. Permanently."

Well, George continued, they found Clem's registration cards on the body— and naturally, the first reports were that Clem had been the victim instead of Jose. Clem's wife rushed upstate to identify the body. But by the time she arrived the cops had found out that Jose was Jose, and Clem was Clem.

So they sent her to the hospital. And when she walked into the big room where the men were, her hair was snow white— and Clem popped up in bed as though he were looking at a ghost. Her hair was as snowy as the top of Mount Whitney. Clem just sat there and cried bitter tears. It wasn't only that the beautiful hair he had married had gone. It was the fact that he was directly responsible.

She kissed him, and he begged her for forgiveness: She broke down, too, and she swore she didn't care whatever happened, just as long as he was all. right. Then he took an. oath that he'd never go out again without her permission— and even with that permission he'd come home early every night.

George tapped., bar lightly. He drew a long breath.

"The strange thing is," he continued slowly, "that Clem has lived up to that vow like it was a religion with him. A lot of people make promises when they're emotional, but they forget them a little later. Not Clem. Every time we play poker about 10:30 he always screams just like he did now—

"And every time Clem blows like that, I get to thinking. I can't help myself." He rubbed his chin. "I never heard of a person's hair turning white overnight. I mean, really.

"Of course I've read about it in books and all— but in real life I never knew it to happen. Except in this case."

Harry ordered another pair of beers. He cleared his throat and nodded wisely.

"George," he said, "did you ever know that my wife and Clem's wife came from the same town in Maine? Well, they did. They went to the same school together. My wife used to go out with one of Mrs. Clem's brothers before I met her."

"Yeah?" said George.

"Yeah." Harry lowered his voice. "And, just between you and me, my wife says Mrs. Clem is pretty close to fifty. And, let me tell you, brother, my wife ought to know."

George was puzzled. "So what?" he asked.

"So nothing." Harry traced an idle finger along the outside of the glass. "Can you keep your mouth shut?"

"Sure," returned George. "Why not?" Harry grinned from ear to ear. "Clem's wife has had snow-white hair since she was thirty," he stated happily. "On the morning the cops told her that her husband was dead, she was so frightened she forgot to brush her daily hair dye on— and she could never go back to it again!"

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18: The Hope Beyond the Horizon

Harold Mercer

(as by "Hamer")

1882-1952

Weekly Times (Melbourne) 7 June 1930

"DUST to dust, hashes to hashes..." In an awed, reverent voice the old man spoke the words, one hand guiding the spade which piled back the earth into the shallow grave, the other holding the hand of a wonder-eyed child, her face looking up questioningly at his lowered one. And the sun spread the amber of its waking glory on the rocks and shrubs around them.

Old Sam had been taking his daily view of the wide, people-less domain that was his kingdom. This morning look-out had become a rite with him; to climb the craggy bluff above his hut just after the sun had risen, and look around on the vast emptiness.

Somewhere among the multitude of books that littered his habitation he had discovered the phrase. "There is hope beyond the horizon," had pounced upon it, as a fossicker might pounce upon some rare stone found in the sand, and treasured it. What meaning it should have for him, who by his own choice had selected this lonely habitation in the wilderness, because all he wanted was loneliness, he could not have explained; there was something in the words that gave serenity to his soul.

He started as his keen eyes, looking east, struck a movement in the solitude. Yes, there was something there. Shading his eyes with his hands, he made sure of that. He made a movement to descend out of observation, full of the repugnance for human companionship that had made a hat ter of him; but something peculiar about the far figure held him.

When he did descend it was in a hurry, to harness an amazed horse to a dilapidated buggy, both only used for his rare four days' trip to the nearest township for stores. and the books which had become a passion with him.

It was a woman he found lying in the scrub, in a fainting condition, a small child whimpering be side her. The woman partially revived as he forced water between her lips, but there was no time for questioning. He bundled his salvage of the desert into his buggy.

They were rough, awkward hands that made her comfortable upon his own hessian bed, and bathed her forehead and her lips with water. When, with a quivering sigh of weariness, the woman opened her eyes to a real knowledge of her surroundings, it was to see an old man spreading jam on damper for the little girl, assuring her that her mother would be well soon. He turned quickly at the sigh; the child, jammy of fingers, rushed to her.

"You'll be all right, missus," he said gently. "You want to lie still and rest; you're all done in. Beats me how you came to be right out here."

"I was at the Coollalloo home stead— Mr Campbell's," she said. "I wanted to get to Marantoo on my way to Sydney."

"You came the wrong way," he commented.

"I lost myself. My horse knocked up, and fell; and I tried to get somewhere, carrying little Lucy. All my water went— I had brough some, but Lucy had to have it."

Old Sam felt a glow— that's what a mother would do, give her child the water she needed badly herself. It explained the fine condition of the child, while the mother was exhausted.

"You Mrs Campbell?" he asked.

"Oh, no! Thank God, no!" she said with a shudder, "I went there as housekeeper— Mrs Campbell was away."

"I heard so," grunted Sam. "Campbell's no good, they tell me."

"I had to leave," she said, eagerly. "I took a horse, and got away earjy one morning. It seems to me a week ago."

Sam presently tiptoed out. Food had brought drowsiness to the woman; and the child, too, standing up, drooped to sleep over the bed. He lifted her up, gently, and placed her beside the sleeping mother.

Strangely, he felt no resentment at this intrusion on his solitude., It would mean, of course, a trip into Marantoo, when the woman and her child were fit to travel; but be was not resentful even of that trouble. It would be some time, anyway, before that became necessary: and Sam busied himself making a fresh camp for him self outside the hut. Occasionally he went to the door and lookof. in with a puzzled, searching gaze at the slumberers.

Presently he heard a movement, and found the child beside him.

"Is we going to live here?" she asked.

"For a while. Mummy's very tired," he answered.

"I like dis place." said the child, simply.

Sam, forgetting his hatter principles, glowed. The old hermit and the child were fast friends when the woman woke again.

Alice Grant was her name, she told him. The name conveyed nothing to him. but he did not bother asking her questions. He was prepared to accept these visitors without question, and put aside the thought of even referring to the time when they should move on. For as long as these waifs of the wilderness needed shelter it was theirs. It was obvious that it would be for a long time. Even when Alice had recovered from the severity of her exhaustion, a languidness remained, that grew instead of diminishing.

"You go up that hill every morning?" she asked him one day. The child, who had made herself the old man's companion, had wriggled out of bed, and the

woman, rising, too, had followed to the door, and seen them preparing to set off.

"Yes, missus," he said, shamed into an explanation. "There's a view up there." "I'd like to see It." The climb exhausted her; and she wondered, as she looked, what was the appeal of the vast wilderness around them.

"I allus say," said the old man, " 'There's hope beyond the horizon.' "

"Hope beyond the horizon!" She echoed it with a queer, bitter laugh, but the queerness was part sickness, for she almost collapsed.

Very tenderly he helped her down, got her to lie down on the bed, and brought her warm tea.

"I had no call to allow you to make that climb, missus," he said, staring at her pale face, when she had partially recovered. "Don't call me missus— call me Alice. I'm not a missus— I'm not married, and I've no right to impose upon you who've been so good to me."

She spoke with a bitter self-accusing impetuosity.

"It don't make no difference," he mumbled, but his look went to the pretty wide-eyed child.

"Oh, it makes so much difference!" she cried, sobs in her throat. "If you will only let me stay here until I am a little stronger— if I ever get stronger— and able to work for little Lucy to train her so as she won't be what I have been."

"Don't you talk, missus; you just lie still. There's no call to think of ever leaving here till you're ready."

"But I must talk," she went on hysterically. "I have to talk."

He led Lucy to the door and pointed out flowers in the near shrubs that she might pick. Then he came back.

"I don't want Lucy to be dragged up to what I was dragged up," said Alice. Grant. "I want her to have a chance to be clean. My mother ran away from her husband because she hated the country; and the man she went away with was a brute who taught her that wrong living was the natural thing. I was brought up to think that, living in dens in Sydney. I wasn't even ashamed of the life I've been taught to live; not even when I gave it up for my man. But he went, like the others, and then there was Lucy."

"Hush, hush, hush!" said the embarrassed old man. "You don't want to tell me this. It's a sweet little girl, and she'll be all right."

"I want her to have a chance— to be clean. That's why I got away from it all; I took a chance of going to Campbell's as house keeper, to give her a clean coun try life. I wondered why a woman like me could get the job so easily— until I got there!" she finished bitterly

"So you left him," said Sam. understanding. "There's always hope. When you get back to Sydney—"

"That'll be the end of me! Sam, I haven't got no morals; I'll go the way I've been taught to go. The wish to save my Lucy from going that way is the only good thing about me." She turned her head over, into her arm, weeping; and old Sam, embarrassed, patted her shoulder awkwardly. "Things'll sort out," he said. "There's hope beyond the horizon, missus." Then he went out. He called Lucy to him, and to gether they went down into the gully.

"Mummy, Mister Sam's been finding pretty pink stones like this in the water!" she cried excitedly as they returned.

But Alice Grant was indifferent, and hardly conscious, as she ate the food the old man had prepared. He was disturbed. Even her fleeting ideas of the necessity of medical help caused him to harness his horse to the buggy; but only to un harness it again after a look at the woman. The jolting journey would be too much for her; he could not leave her— or the child— alone whilst he went for aid.

Alice woke up that, night to find Sam sitting on a box, with a tin in his hand, staring at her. She must have put Lucy to sleep beside her; she did not remember the child coming there.

"Look!" cried Sam, spilling the contents of the tin into his hand so that the feeble lamp-glow shone upon It, when he saw her eyes opened and flxed upon him. "That's gold! It's nothing to me. I've only worked it for something to do, and I've only used the few grains I needed to buy stores and books. If I'd let it be known how much there was, here, there'd have been a rush."

She merely stared at him, her eyes strangely bright, but uncomprehending. "See what I mean," he said, approaching her so that she might see the gold better. "No need for you to worry about little Lucy. You can send her to good schools, see?"

She sat up suddenly and seized his sleeve, staring at him.

"You are my father, aren't you?" she almost screamed. His heart gave a leap with a mighty hope. In an instant a vision came back to him of the empty home, the agony of the desertion which had made him a lover of solitude, filled him with an aversion for meeting his kind, after his unavailing search for his errant wife, to claim at the least his daughter. And, now—

"What was your mother's name? Who was the man who— went with her?" he asked eagerly.

"She was Lucy, like my baby," said Alice Grant, as eagerly; "the man was William Forster."

Old Sam's heart sank. Even as he had sought vainly for familiarity of feature in the faces of this woman and her child, so was there nothing to give him hope in these unfamiliar names. And yet— And yet here was a woman who in her circumstances might easily be his daughter, and a child, grown dear to his old heart in a few days, who might be blood of his blood. Here he could solace his

mind with the thought of re clamation from the wreckage that people make of life. Not here in the wilderness, he realised— swiftly he visualised pictures of a comfortable homestead with a happy girl romping about it, growing to healthy womanhood.

"Alice, the name of the wife who deserted me was Lucy," he said.

"Father!" she cried. He was alarmed by her panting as she clung to him. Disengaging himself, he lifted the sleeping child, who patted his chest happily, half waking, whispering: "Am I going to sleep in oo bed?" contentedly.

And then he came back to find the dying woman with arms outspread to the father she thought she had found.

HE HAD hoped that he could do it all before the child arose, but Lucy woke too soon. The buggy was packed with a few books grown precious, the store of gold for which he had never anticipated use, and the few things needed for their journey; the body of the woman lay in the grave he had dug during the grey hours of morning.

"Mummy is very, very tired," he had explained gravely, when the child had come to him. "She is fast asleep, and we must not disturb her. You and I must go away, and make a nice home where she can come to us, when she wakes; but we must cover her over with earth so that the flies cannot bite her."

He invented the excuse for the burial quickly, the baby accepting it with grave, trusting eyes. And in them he saw visions of the future, the hope beyond the horizon that had come to him. And that hope gleamed brightly a, repeating the memorised words of the service, he said, reverently, "Dust to dust, hashes to hashes," over the remains of what his daughter might have been.

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19: The Cynical Miss Catherwaight

Richard Harding Davis

1864-1916

The Century Magazine Dec 1890

MISS CATHERWAIGHT'S collection of orders and decorations and medals was her chief offence in the eyes of those of her dear friends who thought her clever but cynical.

All of them were willing to admit that she was clever, but some of them said she was clever only to be unkind.

Young Van Bibber had said that if Miss Catherwaight did not like dances and days and teas, she had only to stop going to them instead of making unpleasant remarks about those who did. So many people repeated this that young Van Bibber believed finally that he had said something good, and was somewhat pleased in consequence, as he was not much given to that sort of thing.

Mrs. Catherwaight, while she was alive, lived solely for society, and, so some people said, not only lived but died for it. She certainly did go about a great deal, and she used to carry her husband away from his library every night of every season and left him standing in the doorways of drawing-rooms, outwardly courteous and distinguished looking, but inwardly somnolent and unhappy. She was a born and trained social leader, and her daughter's coming out was to have been the greatest effort of her life. She regarded it as an event in the dear child's lifetime second only in importance to her birth; equally important with her probable marriage and of much more poignant interest than her possible death. But the great effort proved too much for the mother, and she died, fondly remembered by her peers and tenderly referred to by a great many people who could not even show a card for her. Thursdays. Her husband and her daughter were not going out, of necessity, for more than a year after her death, and then felt no inclination to begin over again, but lived very much together and showed themselves only occasionally.

They entertained, though, a great deal, in the way of dinners, and an invitation to one of these dinners soon became a diploma for intellectual as well as social qualifications of a very high order.

One was always sure of meeting some one of consideration there, which was pleasant in itself, and also rendered it easy to let one's friends know where one had been dining. It sounded so flat to boast abruptly, "I dined at the Catherwaights' last night"; while it seemed only natural to remark, "That reminds me of a story that novelist, what's his name, told at Mr. Catherwaight's," or "That English chap, who's been in Africa, was at the Catherwaights' the other night, and told me—"

After one of these dinners people always asked to be allowed to look over Miss Catherwaight's collection, of which almost everybody had heard. It consisted of over a hundred medals and decorations which Miss Catherwaight had purchased while on the long tours she made with her father in all parts of the world. Each of them had been given as a reward for some public service, as a recognition of some virtue of the highest order— for personal bravery, for statesmanship, for great genius in the arts; and each had been pawned by the recipient or sold outright. Miss Catherwaight referred to them as her collection of dishonored honors, and called them variously her Orders of the Knights of the Almighty Dollar, pledges to patriotism and the pawnshops, and honors at second hand.

It was her particular fad to get as many of these together as she could and to know the story of each. The less creditable the story, the more highly she valued the medal. People might think it was not a pretty hobby for a young girl, but they could not help smiling at the stories and at the scorn with which she told them.

"These," she would say, "are crosses of the Legion of Honor; they are of the lowest degree, that of chevalier. I keep them in this cigar box to show how cheaply I got them and how cheaply I hold them. I think you can get them here in New York for ten dollars; they cost more than that— about a hundred francs— in Paris. At second-hand, of course. The French government can imprison you, you know, for ten years, if you wear one without the right to do so, but they have no punishment for those who choose to part with them for a mess of pottage.

"All these," she would run on, "are English war medals. See, on this one is 'Alma,' 'Balaclava,' and 'Sebastopol.' He was quite a veteran, was he not? Well, he sold this to a dealer on Wardour Street, London, for five and six. You can get any number of them on the Bowery for their weight in silver. I tried very hard to get a Victoria Cross when I was in England, and I only succeeded in getting this one after a great deal of trouble. They value the cross so highly, you know, that it is the only other decoration in the case which holds the Order of the Garter in the Jewel Room at the Tower. It is made of copper, so that its intrinsic value won't have any weight with the man who gets it, but I bought this nevertheless for five pounds. The soldier to whom it belonged had loaded and fired a cannon all alone when the rest of the men about the battery had run away. He was captured by the enemy, but retaken immediately afterward by re-enforcements from his own side, and the general in command recommended him to the Queen for decoration. He sold his cross to the proprietor of a curiosity shop and drank himself to death. I felt rather meanly about keeping it and hunted up his widow to return it to her, but she said I could have it for a consideration.

"This gold medal was given, as you see, to 'Hiram J. Stillman, of the sloop *Annie Barker*, for saving the crew of the steamship *Olivia*, June 18, 1888,' by the President of the United States and both houses of Congress. I found it on Baxter Street in a pawnshop. The gallant Hiram J. had pawned it for sixteen dollars and never came back to claim it."

"But, Miss Catherwaight," some optimist would object, "these men undoubtedly did do something brave and noble once. You can't get back of that; and they didn't do it for a medal, either, but because it was their duty. And so the medal meant nothing to them: their conscience told them they had done the right thing; they didn't need a stamped coin to remind them of it, or of their wounds either, perhaps."

"Quite right; that's quite true," Miss Catherwaight would say. "But how about this? Look at this gold medal with the diamonds: 'Presented to Colonel James F. Placerl by the men of his regiment, in camp before Richmond.' Every soldier in the regiment gave something towards that, and yet the brave gentleman put it up at a game of poker one night, and the officer who won it sold it to the man who gave it to me. Can you defend that?"

Miss Catherwaight was well known to the proprietors of the pawnshops and loan offices on the Bowery and Park Row. They learned to look for her once a month, and saved what medals they received for her and tried to learn their stories from the people who pawned them, or else invented some story which they hoped would answer just as well.

Though her brougham produced a sensation in the unfashionable streets into which she directed it, she was never annoyed. Her maid went with her into the shops, and one of the grooms always stood at the door within call, to the intense delight of the neighborhood. And one day she found what, from her point of view, was a perfect gem. It was a poor, cheap-looking, tarnished silver medal, a half-dollar once, undoubtedly, beaten out roughly into the shape of a heart and engraved in script by the jeweller of some country town. On one side were two clasped hands with a wreath around them, and on the reverse was this inscription: "From Henry Burgoyne to his beloved friend Lewis L. Lockwood"; and below, "Through prosperity and adversity." That was all. And here it was among razors and pistols and family Bibles in a pawnbroker's window. What a story there was in that ! These two boy friends, and their boyish friendship that was to withstand adversity and prosperity, and all that remained of it was this inscription to its memory like the wording on a tomb!

"He couldn't have got so much on it any way," said the pawnbroker, entering into her humor. "I didn't lend him more'n a quarter of a dollar at the most."

Miss Catherwaight stood wondering if the Lewis L. Lockwood could be Lewis Lockwood, the lawyer one read so much about. Then she remembered his middle name was Lyman, and said quickly, "I'll take it, please."

She stepped into the carriage, and told the man to go find a directory and look for Lewis Lyman Lockwood. The groom returned in a few minutes and said there was such a name down in the book as a lawyer, and that his office was such a number on Broadway; it must be near Liberty. "Go there," said Miss Catherwaight.

Her determination was made so quickly that they had stopped in front of a huge pile of offices, sandwiched in, one above the other, until they towered mountains high, before she had quite settled in her mind what she wanted to know, or had appreciated how strange her errand might appear. Mr. Lockwood was out, one of the young men in the outer office said, but the junior partner, Mr. Latimer, was in and would see her. She had only time to remember that the junior partner was a dancing acquaintance of hers, before young Mr. Latimer stood before her smiling, and with her card in his hand.

"Mr. Lockwood is out just at present. Miss Catherwaight," he said, "but he will be back in a moment. Won't you come into the other room and wait? I am sure he won't be away over five minutes. Or is it something I could do?"

She saw that he was surprised to see her, and a little ill at ease as to just how to take her visit. He tried to make it appear that he considered it the most natural thing in the world, but he overdid it, and she saw that her presence was something quite out of the common. This did not tend to set her any more at her ease. She already regretted the step she had taken. What if it should prove to be the same Lockwood, she thought, and what would they think of her?

"Perhaps you will do better than Mr. Lockwood," she said, as she followed him into the inner office. "I fear I have come upon a very foolish errand, and one that has nothing at all to do with the law."

"Not a breach of promise suit, then?" said young Latimer, with a smile. "Perhaps it is only an innocent subscription to a most worthy charity. I was afraid at first," he went on lightly, "that it was legal redress you wanted, and I was hoping that the way I led the Courdert's cotillion had made you think I could conduct you through the mazes of the law as well."

"No," returned Miss Catherwaight, with a nervous laugh; "it has to do with my unfortunate collection. This is what brought me here," she said, holding out the silver medal. "I came across it just now in the Bowery. The name was the same, and I thought it just possible Mr. Lockwood would like to have it; or, to tell you the truth, that he might tell me what had become of the Henry Burgoyne who gave it to him."

Young Latimer had the medal in his hand before she had finished speaking, and was examining it carefully. He looked up with just a touch of color in his cheeks and straightened himself visibly.

"Please don't be offended," said the fair collector. "I know what you think. You've heard of my stupid collection, and I know you think I meant to add this to

it. But, indeed, now that I have had time to think— you see I came here immediately from the pawnshop, and I was so interested, like all collectors, you know, that I didn't stop to consider, "that's the worst of a hobby; it carries one rough-shod over other people's feelings, and runs away with one. I beg of you, if you do know anything about the coin, just to keep it and don't tell me, and I assure you what little I know I will keep quite to myself."

Young Latimer bowed, and stood looking at her curiously, with the medal in his hand.

"I hardly know what to say," he began slowly. "It really has a story. You say you found this on the Bowery, in a pawnshop. Indeed! Well, of course, you know Mr. Lockwood could not have left it there."

Miss Catherwaight shook her head vehemently and smiled in deprecation.

"This medal was in his safe when he lived on Thirty-fifth Street at the time he was robbed, and the burglars took this with the rest of the silver and pawned it, I suppose. Mr. Lockwood would have given more for it than any one else could have afforded to pay." He paused a moment, and then continued more rapidly: "Henry Burgoyne is Judge Burgoyne. Ah! you didn't guess that? Yes, Mr. Lockwood and he were friends when they were boys. They went to school in Westchester County. They were Damon and Pythias and that sort of thing. They roomed together at the State college and started to practise law in Tuckahoe as a firm, but they made nothing of it, and came on to New York and began reading law again with Fuller & Mowbray. It was while they were at school that they had these medals made. There was a mate to this, you know; Judge Burgoyne had it. Well, they continued to live and work together. They were both orphans and dependent on themselves. I suppose that was one of the strongest bonds between them; and they knew no one in New York, and always spent their spare time together. They were pretty poor, I fancy, from all Mr. Lockwood has told me, but they were very ambitious. They were— I'm telling you this, you understand, because it concerns you somewhat: well, more or less. They were great sportsmen, and whenever they could get away from the law office they would go off shooting. I think they were fonder of each other than brothers even. I've heard Mr. Lockwood tell of the days they lay in the rushes along the Chesapeake Bay waiting for duck. He has said often that they were the happiest hours of his life. That was their greatest pleasure, going off together after duck or snipe along the Maryland waters. Well, they grew rich and began to know people; and then they met a girl. It seems they both thought a great deal of her, as half the New York men did, I am told; and she was the reigning belle and toast, and had other admirers, and neither met with that favor she showed— well, the man she married, for instance. But for a while each thought, for some reason or other, that he was especially favored. I don't know anything about it. Mr. Lockwood never spoke of it to me. But they both fell very deeply in love

with her, and each thought the other disloyal, and so they quarrelled; and— and then, though the woman married, the two men kept apart. It was the one great passion of their lives, and both were proud, and each thought the other in the wrong, and so they have kept apart ever since. And— well, I believe that is all."

Miss Catherwaight had listened in silence and with one little gloved hand tightly clasping the other.

"Indeed, Mr. Latimer, indeed," she began, tremulously, "I am terribly ashamed of myself. I seemed to have rushed in where angels fear to tread. I wouldn't meet Mr. Lockwood now for worlds. Of course I might have known there was a woman in the case, it adds so much to the story. But I suppose I must give up my medal. I never could tell that story, could I?"

"No," said young Latimer, dryly; "I wouldn't if I were you."

Something in his tone, and something in the fact that he seemed to avoid her eyes, made her drop the lighter vein in which she had been speaking, and rise to go. There was much that he had not told her, she suspected, and when she hade him good by it was with a reserve which she had not shown at any other time during their interview.

"I wonder who that woman was?" she murmured, as young Latimer turned from the brougham door and said "Home," to the groom. She thought about it a great deal that afternoon; at times she repented that she had given up the medal, and at times she blushed that she should have been carried in her zeal into such an unwarranted intimacy with another's story.

She determined finally to ask her father about it. He would be sure to know, she thought, as he and Mr. Lockwood were contemporaries. Then she decided finally not to say anything about it at all, for Mr. Catherwaight did not approve of the collection of dishonored honors as it was, and she had no desire to prejudice him still further by a recital of her afternoon's adventure, of which she had no doubt but he would also disapprove. So she was more than usually silent during the dinner, which was a tête-à-tête family dinner that night, and she allowed her father to doze after it in the library in his great chair without disturbing him with either questions or confessions.

They had been sitting there some time, he with his hands folded on the evening paper and with his eyes closed, when the servant brought in a card and offered it to Mr. Catherwaight. Mr. Catherwaight fumbled over his glasses, and read the name on the card aloud: "'Mr. Lewis L. Lockwood.' Dear me I " he said; " what can Mr. Lockwood be calling upon me about?"

Miss Catherwaight sat upright, and reached out for the card with a nervous, gasping little laugh.

" Oh, I think it must be for me," she said; " I'm quite sure it is intended for me. I was at his office to-day, you see, to return him some keepsake of his that I found in an old curiosity shop. Something with his name on it that had been

stolen from him and pawned. It was just a trifle. You needn't go down, dear; I'll see him. It was I he asked for, I'm sure; was it not, Morris ? "

Morris was not quite sure; being such an old gentleman, he thought it must be for Mr. Catherwaight he'd come.

Mr. Catherwaight was not greatly interested. He did not like to disturb his after-dinner nap, and he settled back in his chair again and refolded his hands.

"I hardly thought he could have come to see me," he murmured, drowsily; "though I used to see enough and more than enough of Lewis Lockwood once, my dear," he added with a smile, as he opened his eyes and nodded before he shut them again. "That was before your mother and I were engaged, and people did say that young Lockwood's chances at that time were as good as mine. But they weren't, it seems. He was very attentive, though; very attentive."

Miss Catherwaight stood startled and motionless at the door from which she had turned.

"Attentive— to whom?" she asked quickly, and in a very low voice. "To my mother?"

Mr. Catherwaight did not deign to open his eyes this time, but moved his head uneasily as if he wished to be let alone.

"To your mother, of course, my child," he answered; "of whom else was I speaking?"

Miss Catherwaight went down the stairs to the drawing-room slowly, and paused halfway to allow this new suggestion to settle in her mind. There was something distasteful to her, something that seemed not altogether unblamable, in a woman's having two men quarrel about her, neither of whom was the woman's husband. And yet this girl of whom Latimer had spoken must be her mother, and she, of course, could do no wrong. It was very disquieting, and she went on down the rest of the way with one hand resting heavily on the railing and with the other pressed against her cheeks. She was greatly troubled. It now seemed to her very sad indeed .that these two one-time friends should live in the same city and meet, as they must meet, and not recognize each other. She argued that her mother must have been very young when it happened, or she would have brought two such men together again. Her mother could not have known, she told herself; she was not to blame. For she felt sure that had she herself known of such an accident she would have done something, said something, to make it right. And she was not half the woman her mother had been, she was sure of that.

There was something very likable in the old gentleman who came forward to greet her as she entered the drawing-room; something courtly and of the old school, of which she was so tired of hearing, but of which she wished she could have seen more in the men she met. Young Mr. Latimer had accompanied his guardian, exactly why she did not see, but she recognized his presence slightly.

He seemed quite content to remain in the background. Mr. Lockwood, as she had expected, explained that he had called to thank her for the return of the medal. He had it in his hand as he spoke, and touched it gently with the tips of his fingers as though caressing it.

"I knew your father very well," said the lawyer, "and I at one time had the honor of being one of your mother's younger friends. That was before she was married, many years ago." He stopped and regarded the girl gravely and with a touch of tenderness. "You will pardon an old man, old enough to be your father, if he says," he went on, "that you are greatly like your mother, my dear young lady— greatly like. You mother was very kind to me, and I fear I abused her kindness; abused it by misunderstanding it. There was a great deal of misunderstanding; and I was proud, and my friend was proud. and so the misunderstanding continued, until now it has become irretrievable."

He had forgotten her presence apparently, and was speaking more to himself than to her as he stood looking down at the medal in his hand.

"You were very thoughtful to give me this," he continued; "it was very good of you. I don't know why I should keep it though, now, although I was distressed enough when I lost it. But now it is only a reminder of a time that is past and put away, but which was very, very dear to me. Perhaps I should tell you that I had a misunderstanding with the friend who gave it to me, and since then we have never met; have ceased to know each other. But I have always followed his life as a judge and as a lawyer, and respected him for his own sake as a man. I cannot tell— I do not know how he feels towards me."

The old lawyer turned the medal over in his hand and stood looking down at it wistfully.

The cynical Miss Catherwaight could not stand it any longer.

"Mr. Lockwood," she said, impulsively, "Mr. Latimer has told me why you and your friend separated, and I cannot bear to think that it was she— my mother— should have been the cause. She could not have understood; she must have been innocent of any knowledge of the trouble she had brought to men who were such good friends of hers and to each other. It seems to me as though my finding that coin is more than a coincidence. I somehow think that the daughter is to help undo the harm that her mother has caused— unwittingly caused. Keep the medal and don't give it back to me, for I am sure your friend has kept his, and I am sure he is still your friend at heart. Don't think I am speaking hastily or that I am thoughtless in what I am saying, but it seems to me as if friends— good, true friends— were so few that one cannot let them go without a word to bring them back. But though I am only a girl, and a very light and unfeeling girl, some people think, I feel this very much, and I do wish I could bring your old friend back to you again as I brought back his pledge."

"It has been many years since Henry Burgoyne and I have met," said the old man, slowly, "and it would be quite absurd to think that he still holds any trace of that foolish, boyish feeling of loyalty that we once had for each other. Yet I will keep this, if you will let me, and I thank you, my dear young lady, for what you have said. I thank you from the bottom of my heart. You are as good and as kind as your mother was, and— I can say nothing, believe me, in higher praise."

He rose slowly and made a movement as if to leave the room, and then, as if the excitement of this sudden return into the past could not be shaken off so readily, he started forward with a move of sudden determination.

"I think," he said, "I will go to Henry Burgoyne's house at once, to-night. I will act on what you have suggested. I will see if this has or has not been one long, unprofitable mistake. If my visit should be fruitless, I will send you this coin to add to your collection of dishonored honors, but if it should result as I hope it may, it will be your doing. Miss Catherwaight, and two old men will have much to thank you for. Good night," he said as he bowed above her hand, "and— God bless you!"

Miss Catherwaight flushed slightly at what he had said, and sat looking down at the floor for a moment after the door had closed behind him.

Young Mr. Latimer moved uneasily in his chair. The routine of the office had been strangely disturbed that day, and he now failed to recognize in the girl before him with reddened cheeks and trembling eyelashes the cold, self-possessed young woman of society whom he had formerly known.

"You have done very well, if you will let me say so," he began, gently. "I hope you are right in what you said, and that Mr. Lockwood will not meet with a rebuff or an ungracious answer. Why," he went on quickly, "I have seen him take out his gun now every spring and every fall for the last ten years and clean and polish it and tell what great shots he and Henry, as he calls him, used to be. And then he would say he would take a holiday and get off for a little shooting. But he never went. He would put the gun back into its case again and mope in his library for days afterward. You see, he never married, and though he adopted me, in a manner, and is fond of me in a certain way, no one ever took the place in his heart his old friend had held."

"You will let me know, will you not, at once,— to-night, even,— whether he succeeds or not?" said the cynical Miss Catherwaight, "You can understand why I am so deeply interested. I see now why you said I would not tell the story of that medal. But, after all, it may be the prettiest story, the only pretty story I have to tell."

Mr. Lockwood had not returned, the man said, when young Latimer reached the home the lawyer had made for them both. He did not know what to argue from this, but determined to sit up and wait, and so sat smoking before the fire

and listening with his sense of hearing on a strain for the first movement at the door.

He had not long to wait. The front door shut with a clash, and he heard Mr. Lockwood crossing the hall quickly to the library, in which he waited. Then the inner door was swung back, and Mr. Lockwood came in with his head high and his eyes smiling brightly.

There was something in his step that had not been there before, something light and vigorous, and he looked ten years younger. He crossed the room to his writing-table without speaking and began tossing the papers about on his desk. Then he closed the rolling-top lid with a snap and looked up smiling.

"I shall have to ask you to look after things at the office for a little while," he said. "Judge Burgoyne and I are going to Maryland for a few weeks' shooting."

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20: The Crumpled Bill

William MacLeod Raine

1871-1954

Short Stories 25 June 1933

Short Stories Sep 1951

THE LANCASTER is a small inexpensive hotel below Twenty-third Street. It is the sort of place where guests live year after year, unsuccessful men who have outlived ambition. Some of them are gray, colorless clerks. Others are shabby promoters, just about to put over a big deal involving millions but anxious about next week's room rent.

To this refuge for the defeated came one spring evening a man who registered under the name of Gustav Ludwig. He took a small room on the top floor with a skylight. Since he was interested in amateur photography he had to have a place not too dark, he explained in his broken English.

Ludwig was not one that anybody would look at twice, yet it developed later that several of those about the hotel could give a fairly accurate description of him. He was above medium height, thickset, perhaps about forty years of age, and he walked decidedly lame. One of his teeth, an incisor, had a gold crown. His red mustache was long and ragged. Through thick glasses he blinked a good deal in a shortsighted way. His clothes were cheap and unpressed. He had the sagging shoulders of one of life's derelicts. The only neat thing about him was his hair. This was explained one day when he had a slight controversy with the room clerk about a charge on his bill, He grew excited, broke into guttural German, and snatched his hat from his head, taking with it a wig which showed that he was so completely bald that he did not have a hair on his crown.

It happens that there can be no question of his height and weight. The Lancaster is a place where misfits and provincials gather. They sit around the lobby and gossip as loafers do in a small town. One day an argument arose to the weight and height of two of those present. A tape line was brought and each man in the group was measured, his height being marked on a door with the initials penciled beside the line. Upon the lobby scales they weighed in turn. Ludwig tipped the beam at one hundred sixty-five pounds.

The German spent a great deal of time in his room, to which nobody was ever admitted, not even a chambermaid. He was a friendly enough soul, but in one respect his mind was filled with suspicion. It appeared that he was an inventor, engaged in perfecting an improved process of color photography, and he spared no pains to see that no rival found a chance to study his processes. He not only locked his door when out of the hotel; he padlocked it.

The senate of the Lancaster lobby decided he was probably a crank but a harmless one. Since freaks were not uncommon there, his idiosyncrasy aroused only some idle amusement.

On a Monday night, the Fourth of July, Ludwig walked out of the Lancaster and never returned. With him he carried a suitcase. Since his rent was paid until the end of the week, nobody was greatly interested in his disappearance. In his room were found a few worn-out clothes but no papers by which he might be identified. The police were notified, and he was put in the registry of missing persons.

"A queer guy," was the verdict of the lobby loungers. "Crazy, probably."

Later they changed their minds.

THE Fourth of July having fallen on a Monday, the banks were closed from Saturday noon until the day after the holiday. About noon Tuesday there was much telephoning from the banks of the city to the United States Secret Service. The town had been flooded with ten, twenty, and fifty-dollar counterfeit bills, and they were pouring into the cages of the tellers for deposit.

F. B. Dawkins, operative in charge, pushed a button that summoned Frank Sullivan, one of his subordinates in whose judgment he had a good deal of confidence.

"Got a job for you, Frank," he said, and in six sentences told him what it was. "Hot foot down to the First National and get an eyeful of this paper. Bring samples back with you. It may be Lefty Carter on the job again."

As soon as Sullivan saw the counterfeits he knew they were not the work of Carter or of any other crook he knew. They were not bad imitations, but no expert could have been fooled a minute by them. The operative guessed they were made by a new man. They had been floated at pool rooms, speakeasies, the race tracks, and restaurants. All of them had been taken in between Saturday noon and Tuesday morning.

Sullivan was a ruddy faced young fellow with stiff red hair and keen blue eyes. He was a dynamo of energy. Quickly he discovered that one man had been the agent through whom the false notes had been distributed. He was described as a German speaking broken English, middle-aged, heavyset, lame, with a gold-crowned incisor, wearing a ragged red mustache.

"This ought to be a pipe," Dawkins said, after Sullivan had made his first report. "The fellow is too marked a type to escape long."

The dragnets went out, swept the city, and came back full of the flotsam of the underworld. Men and women were questioned without avail. In every newspaper was printed a description of the man wanted. Within twenty-four hours the issuer of the bad notes was identified as Gustav Ludwig, who had been living at the Lancaster. The police department of cities all over the country

were notified. A dozen suspects were arrested at various points between Portland, Maine, and Portland, Oregon. All were able to prove unimpeachable alibis. Ludwig could not be found.

Dawkins was not discouraged.

"He walked out of the Lancaster at eleven-thirty Monday night," the operative in charge said doggedly. "He's gone into a hole just now, but he's got to come out some time. When he does, we'll get him."

Sullivan was a good deal less sure. An idea was lurking in the back of his head. He did not believe that Gustav Ludwig would ever be seen again. His opinion was that the German had been rubbed out.

Except the description of the criminal the secret service operatives had nothing to go on. Their stool pigeons could unearth nothing about Ludwig. He was not known in the underworld. Apparently he had no confederates, no mistress, and did not indulge in any vices, and so had protected himself against the three most usual causes of detection. As the weeks passed, he continued to pop up here and there over the country but invariably turned out to be the wrong man.

Operative Sullivan began to think this was the perfect crime. Ludwig had not made a single mistake.

It was about a year after the floating of the bills that the episode of the ten dollar bill occurred.

INTO a cigar store on lower Sixth Avenue a man walked. He was a good looking alert young American with a springy step, not tall but with the shoulders of a trained athlete.

He asked for a package of cigarettes and gave a twenty dollar bill in payment to the man behind the counter. Two or three men were present and others were in the pool room at the rear of the shop. The clerk was a keen-eyed Jew. He continued to talk about the chances of the Yankees in the pending series as he changed the bill. To the customer he handed a ten, a five, four ones, and some silver.

An odd dismay came over the face of the man who was buying the cigarettes, the look of one who has unexpectedly received bad news. He stared at one of the bills, then swept the change into his hand and thrust it all into a trousers pocket.

The young man lit a cigarette at the lighter, moved for a moment toward the pool room, hesitated there, then turned and walked out of the shop. The clerk had been watching him, idly enough, while making a small bet that the Babe would slam out a homer that day. He noticed something that nobody else had seen. Before leaving, the man had dropped a little wad of crumpled paper into the spittoon.

The thing had been done furtively, and the clerk moved forward at once to the spittoon, inspired by curiosity. He picked up the crumpled paper. It was the ten dollar bill he had given the customer.

Why had the man thrown it away? Young Goldstein could think of no good reason. It seemed an insane thing to do. At that moment the policeman on his beat, a young Irishman named Tim Murphy, came swinging into the store. The clerk spilled his story in three hurried sentences.

Now Tim knew that a cop can make a more fatal mistake by arresting an innocent man than by letting a crook escape. But he was young and still enthusiastic. Something about this thing intrigued his interest. He followed the customer and touched him on the arm.

Tim could have sworn the man jumped.

"This belong to you, young fellow?" the policeman asked.

In his hand was the crumpled bill.

The man with the cigarette looked at it. Taken by surprise, his face betrayed him. "No. No, it isn't mine," he said.

"Didn't lose it?"

"No."

"Didn't drop it in the cigar shop a minute ago?"

"Never saw it before," he gulped.

"Say, come back to the store with me a minute," the officer suggested.

THE other man made a mistake. He started to run. Tim was the champion sprinter on the force and had half a dozen medals to prove it.

Underneath the elevated the fugitive ran, dodging trucks and taxis as he crossed the street. He raced toward Fifth, Tim at his heels. Half way between the two avenues the policeman dropped him with a high tackle.

"You would, eh?" Tim growled cheerfully. "You've got another think coming, young fellow me lad. You're going with me."

The captured man looked up the street and saw another policeman moving toward them. He gave up all thought of resistance.

"What's the matter with you?" he demanded, as if in anger. "Who the devil do you think I am? You've got no business jumping on me."

"I don't know who you are, but I'm going to find out," Tim countered.

"You can find that out right here and now," the prisoner said. He was pale and breathless, but that might have been from the shaking up he had been given when one hundred and seventy pounds of bone and muscle had landed on him. "My name is James T. McPherson. I live at 212 E. 64th Street. I'm a bond salesman employed by Cannon & Simon."

"So you say," grinned Tim. We'll find out about that."

"I'll have you broke for this," the captive said.

An investigation showed that the prisoner had told the truth. He was living with his young wife at the address he had given in an apartment house. That he had thrown away the ten dollar bill he denied flatly. It was his word against that of Goldstein, and he would have been freed if an inspection had not showed the bill was counterfeit.

That was how Operative Sullivan came into the case. He saw at a glance that the bill was one of those which had been circulated by Ludwig a year earlier.

SULLIVAN had McPherson detained on a charge of assaulting an officer, while he made inquiries. He discovered that the young man had been graduated at the Colorado School of Mines two years before. He had played a creditable part in college activities, having been especially active in dramatics. After leaving school he had hung around his home in Denver for a few months. McPherson was a good looking young fellow, with a plausible manner. His story clicked. There was only one hiatus in it. He could not or would not account for the six months prior to the circulation of the counterfeits.

"That's my business," he told Sullivan quietly.

"Were you in prison?" the operative asked.

"It doesn't matter where I was. I don't happen to want to tell."

"It matters a lot," Sullivan replied bluntly. "If you can't tell us where you were, it is because you are guilty."

"Not at all. I have another reason."

"What is it?"

"My business, as I just mentioned," McPherson said with a smile.

It was possible of course that there was a page in his past, not connected with this affair, which he wanted definitely closed.

It might have been a woman. Or he might have been in an asylum for mental trouble. But Sullivan did not believe it. The thing was too pat. McPherson had married in Cleveland, July 8. It looked to the operative as if he had wanted to get this counterfeiting finished before he returned to normal life. From the young wife, a charming young girl much in love with her husband, the secret service operative could get nothing whatever. She took refuge in "I don't know," repeated whenever questions grew embarrassing.

"Why did you run when the officer asked you to go back to the cigar store with him?" Sullivan asked McPherson.

"I'm very nervous, and I had a pint of gin in my pocket— meant to take it home for cocktails for our wedding anniversay," the suspect replied.

That may have been true. At any rate the gin had been found in his hip pocket.

NONE of the habitues of the Lancaster could swear that McPherson was the man who had called himself Gustav Ludwig. Two or three of them thought it was possible he might be, but most of them rejected the idea without hesitation. They said there was absolutely no resemblance between this well-dressed young fellow and the slouchy middle-aged German. With the prisoner in tow Sullivan made a round of a score of places where the bills had been circulated. The result was the same. This clear-eyed, light-stepping young American could not be the man who had passed the bills. He was not lame. He weighed twenty or thirty pounds less than the German. His teeth were perfect, not a gold crown in his head. Nor did he have the peering, weakeyed look of the other.

Sullivan believed he had the right man but he could not prove it. McPherson's lawyer got busy, and after a detention of a couple of weeks the prisoner had to be freed. The government could not go to trial with no evidence except that he had thrown away a counterfeit bill, had started to run when arrested, and would not tell where he was living at the time the bad money was made and issued.

"Maybe you're barking up the wrong tree, Frank," Dawkins suggested to Sullivan.

The younger man ran his fingers through stiff red hair and shook his head. "No, chief. He's the man. I'm dead sure of that. Everything fits in like the pieces of a jig saw puzzle."

"Except that twenty men have told you he isn't the German," said Dawkins dryly.

Sullivan waved this aside. "Nothing to that. Of course he was disguised. He's clever as the devil. After he had got through with the job all he had to do was to be himself again. He felt himself a hundred per cent safe, and he would have been if it had not been for one bit of bad luck that caught him unprepared—one of his own ten dollar bills coming home to him. He must be the man. Psychologically, he has got to be. When he saw that bill, after so many months, he went panicky. He could have handed it back across the counter and asked for another bill, or he could have put it in his pocket and walked out of the store. But he had not time to work out a defense against this danger which had jumped at him out of his past. Of course you can say it was no danger at all. It wasn't, if he had kept his head. But the one thing that drummed in his brain was that he was the only man in the world who couldn't afford to be caught with the bill in his pocket. The chances were fifty to one he could drop a paper in the spittoon without being noticed. He had to get rid of the bill. That was how he felt. He tried it—and failed."

"You have a perfect case against him— psychologically," Dawkins admitted. "I think he's the man. All right, Frank. We'll handle this the way you say."

McPHERSON was a free man, but he had never felt more a prisoner. Secret Service men shadowed him wherever he went. They loitered outside his place of business. Along with him they moved in the subway to the apartment house where he lived. If he and his wife went to the theater, he could see them out of the tail of his eye. They even followed him to church.

Under this supervision he grew nervous. He knew that others noticed it. His wife began to break. The manager of the sales department of the bond house where he was employed explained to him that while the firm had implicit confidence in him it could not keep in its service a man suspected by the government of counterfeiting. The superintendent of the apartment house gave him notice. Other tenants objected to having him in the place. It was very unfortunate of course. The superintendent did not mean to imply he was not a man of the highest character, but—

The McPhersons moved. James found work with a wholesale importer. Still the shadows trailed him in taxis, rode up and down in elevators with him, waited outside the office and his home. Again he lost his position; again he moved, as secretly as possible.

When he stepped out to the street the next morning one of the sleuths grinned at him.

Impulsively, hot with anger, McPherson stepped up to the man. "Why do you persecute me?" he demanded. "Why don't you let me alone? If you have any case against me, arrest me. If not, clear out."

"Better see the chief," the man suggested, and that was all he had to say.

McPherson saw Dawkins. At the interview Sullivan was present.

The suspect had lost weight. He could not sleep at night. His face was drawn and haggard.

"Why are you trying to ruin my life?" he asked sharply. "I have lost two positions. Twice I have moved. My wife is a nervous wreck. The neighbors look at me with suspicion. I want this stopped. If you have evidence against me, I demand that you bring me to trial."

Dawkins shook his head. "It will not stop. We have not evidence enough to convict you, but we know you are the man who called himself Gustav Ludwig. You are too dangerous not to be under supervision. A man with your skill might flood the country with counterfeits. It is our business to protect the currency of the United States. We intend to do it."

"This is persecution," McPherson cried.

"It is protection. If you feel it is unfair, you have only to give a satisfactory explanation of the six months of your life which is unknown."

"I don't have to prove my innocence. My constitutional rights—"

"—are not being invaded," Dawkins cut in. "You are free to go anywhere you like, are you. not?"

"It is physically impossible that I am this Ludwig. I'm not like him in any particular. He is nearly two inches taller than I."

SULLIVAN came into the conversation.

"You wore thick-soled and high-heeled shoes, and anyhow you could easily have rubbed out and changed the initialed mark on the door at the Lancaster."

"He's fifteen years older than I." Sullivan smiled. "Make-up, Mr. McPherson. Don't forget how remarkably you did impersonations at college."

"He has a gold tooth, and there's not a filling in my teeth."

"A false gold cap."

"He was bald as a billiard ball."

"Yes, he had shaved his head the day he showed it, but that was four months before he left the Lancaster. Does your hair grow rapidly, Mr. McPherson?"

"He wore heavy glasses and had weak bloodshot eyes."

"More make-up. You should have gone on the stage."

"He weighed one hundred sixty-five pounds, the records show."

"And you weigh about one hundred thirty-five, Mr. McPherson," Sullivan guessed. "You're not in good condition just now. Of course Ludwig was heavily padded and wore a leaden belt the day he was weighed. It was a clever trick to start the talk about heights and weights, so that his could be put on record before witnesses."

McPHERSON threw up his hands in despair. "You've made up your minds to ruin an innocent man. I can't stand it. How much money was issued by this counterfeiter?"

"As near as we can find out, about fifty thousand dollars," Dawkins replied.

"Very well. I'll give you fifty thousand dollars to stop this persecution. It's blackmail, but I'll have to submit to it"

"We've looked up your Wall Street record," Dawkins told him. "You began buying stocks about July 15. As far as we can follow your deals you have made on a rising market something like a quarter of a million dollars. It would be cheap to buy the United States off for fifty thousand, wouldn't it? I assume you are offering the money to the government and not to us personally."

"I don't care who gets it," McPherson cried wildly. "I want to be let alone."

"There's only one place you'll be let alone," Dawkins answered curtly. "That's in a prison cell, after you confess and are sentenced."

McPherson went home, hopelessly depressed. There was one shot left in his locker, but he knew before he fired it that he had lost.

The same evening his wife took the train for Cleveland, where her father and mother lived. Three days later McPherson eluded his shadow and slipped out of town.

For one blessed month he was a free man. He wrote to his wife to join him at Kansas City. The letter was opened and read and sealed again before it reached her. A secret service operative was on the same train that took her to her husband.

The same dreary round of shadowing began again. Mrs. McPherson could not stand it. She left her husband and went back to Cleveland to stay.

A MONTH later a haggard wildeyed man walked into the office of Dawkins.

"I give up," he said. "I confess I did the counterfeiting. I've brought back fifty thousand dollars with me. I'd rather be in prison than tormented as I am."

"Just as you say, McPherson," Dawkins replied. "Since you are making restitution you'll probably get a rather light sentence. I think you've made a wise choice."

Wise or not, it was the only one the young man could make. He had found himself unable to commit suicide, the other alternative. To continue as he had been doing was impossible. The only gleam of light he could see was to serve his sentence and begin life again.

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21: The Sheep

Douglas Newton

1884-1951

Short Stories, 25 June 1925

MALLALEN, Pontal and the others felt that their plan for overthrowing Esteban Soltura and his government of scoundrels was hopeless when they heard of John Ho.

Damice, the owner's agent, who was under Pontal's thumb, told them the *Wooden Horse* was on time. She had signaled the Torre Perdido station yesterday afternoon. She should anchor off Facho soon after noon.

"Excellent," said Mallalen, "Kenny is making good time this trip."

He was pleased, Pontal was pleased; it seemed an omen. Damice looked down his nose to hide a snigger. He said, "Captain Kenny is not bringing out the *Wooden Horse*, senhors."

They stared at him, too aghast to speak.

"Captain John Ho is in command," said Damice.

"But Kenny? What is the matter with Kenny— ill?" Mallalen cried.

"No, not ill; suspended," said Damice. "There was an affair with an Italian freighter on the last trip back. That freighter tried to cut ahead of him on the bar at Puerto Norte. Kenny crowded her and she went aground on a shoal. That is so like the Irish Kenny is it not?"

It was. It was also the state of mind they counted on in Kenny; only that devil-may-care Irishman could carry out their desperate plan. The news was a calamity, and the agent rubbed it in. "He has done it once too often," he said. "The owners are tired of paying for Kenny, so he has gone, and this steady Captain Ho takes his place."

Steady John Ho. The very sound was ominous.

"Do you know anything about this Captain Ho?" Mallalen asked anxiously.

"No, senhor. I do not think he has been to this coast before. But once Captain Kenny spoke of him." The snigger was pronounced. They knew that worse was to come.

Pontal said harshly, "What was it that Kenny told, Damice?"

"He said he was a sheep," grinned the agent. "He say he was so timid that he would not cross his own shadow in a dead calm unless he had his leadsman out. A cautious man, and slow. He will be a change after that Kenny."

Certainly a change after the reckless Irishman— and a fatal change for them, they thought. They were sure of it as they watched John Ho bring the *Wooden Horse* into the anchorage. He crept upstream like a frightened old virgin crossing a busy road. He had the lead going on both quarters and his signaler positively stuttered questions at the pilot boat that led him in.

And he was all they feared when they met him.

They had to put it up to him. There was no other chance and by this date they had already gone too far to turn back. They tackled him in his own cabin, Mallalen and Pontal. He was tepidly polite to Mallalen. Mallalen was American and he was also *Os Grandes Concessio*, which meant freights. But Pontal need not have existed as far as he was concerned; galling this for Pontal, who intended to be Presidente of Encabecado before the month was out.

John Ho wasn't hostile; he was just negative. There was nothing to the man. He stood before them a figure of middle height, inert and rather bulgy, as though his torso had been constructed of dough so soft that it wouldn't hold its lines. He had a blurred, square face, not lean, not fat. In it a dim caution glimmered feebly behind a conspicuous lack of interest in anything at all.

He was the sort of man who has nothing at all to say. Nothing! He just stood flaccidly until a question was shot at him and then he returned the vaguest and shortest answer. That wasn't taciturnity, it was just flat stagnation of mind, the mind of a man who had never initiated a thing; never, apparently, had an ardent impulse, never left his groove. He had just oozed along through life by safe bearings and dead reckoning, steady, reliable, stolid, solid because he had neither the imagination nor guts to be anything else. A man who stirred in them the fury of despair.

They dragged a few miserable facts out of him. He'd had a fair run out. No, he couldn't say he knew this coast. No, that didn't mean he hadn't been here before. Well, he had "sort of" been here before—

What he meant was, he'd been here before years ago. Twenty-five years ago when he was an apprentice.

No, he didn't suppose conditions had changed much in that time. He reckoned they were always bad among the lot who ran things on this coast.

Pontal, one of the lot who ran things on this coast, almost choked at that. Mallalen, to cover an outburst of rage from the South American, talked about Encabecado and its scoundrel presidente. He said that Captain Ho must know that there were good men among the South Americans who deplored the state of things as they were. It was unfortunate for Encabecado, for instance, that it should be judged by the acts of the criminal who was its presidente, and the gang of robbers who supported him in his government. He gave many instances of the *presidente*'s tastes in plunder; the crushing taxes and royalties on trade, the sequestrations, and above all the shipping and harbor dues. That hit at John Ho and his owners,

John Ho said flatly that he thought these Dagoes were all alike, no hoping for any sense of decency or honesty in them. Pontal, a "Dago" whose blood ran straight through without stain to the chivalry of old Castile, bristled. Mallalen went on quickly to tell of the *presidente*'s personal infamies.

He told of a habit of murder as a method of removing dangerous enemies or even rich men who would not yield to plunder with good grace. He told of wholesale arrests and imprisonments and even of mass slaughter against barrack walls. He told of the man's bestial, hateful methods with women.

There was almost a glimmer of response in the vague brown eye at that. It was not so much horror, but rather as though Mallalen in some chance way had touched a responsive nerve swaddled deep in that mass of inertia. Mallalen quickly told of one very hateful case.

The brown eyes came vaguely onto his. "Why, that's bad," said the flat voice.

"Bad? It's fiendish!" snapped Mallalen. "Now you can see why we want to sweep Esteban Soltura and his devils away." Mallalen waited for some sign of agreement. Instead John Ho stared blankly at him, mouth a little open. Then he said, "Esteban Soltura !"

"Esteban Soltura, the presidente of Encabecado," cried Mallalen irritably. "The ruffian I have been telling you about. I say we can't stand any more of him. And, in confidence, Captain, we are prepared to sweep him away."

He paused. The man might at least show interest, might at least ask what he meant. That would be a sign of hope. John Ho said nothing. He said nothing, just stared dully, flatly, his mouth still a little open. It might have indicated surprise if it did not indicate idiocy.

Mallalen was in despair. He knew it was all up. He knew they could never get this dead log of a man on their side. Their plan was smashed— and that meant they were. Esteban Soltura knew enough about them to make no bones about dealing with them. Yes, the mere sight of this sheep meant the end of hope, and yet Mallalen *had* to go on. With certain knowledge of failure he had to make his try.

"In the strictest confidence, Captain Ho, I can tell you we have made plans to end the career of this monster. We have planned a rising and a land attack on Coroa, the capital. We have, we feel, a one in ninety-nine chance of success. General Pontal, here, has the whole thing schemed, troops, transport and the munitions to carry the day already stored here in Facho. The one thing against us, however, is of first importance. It is the warship *Prestdente Esteban*."

John Ho was making motions toward speech. Mallalen, a gleam of hope in his soul, paused. John Ho said with utter fatuity, "Called after him?"

"Yes," Mallalen snarled. "She's an old American cruiser. Nothing much as a fleet, but her four ten-inch guns are good, and her secondary armament, too. Those guns stand between us and success. In the first place she can steam up here at the first hint of trouble and blow our depots and munition dumps to blazes. That would scupper us. Then she can go back to Coroa, and from her anchorage can command the one pass by which our troops can get into Coroa

through the mountains. That means we don't get in, which means we lose all. We have nothing to deal with those guns, you understand."

He waited for a remark. John Ho seemed to say less than nothing.

"It is imperative then," Mallalen went on, "that we deal with the *Presidente Esteban* if we are to triumph. In certain respects this should not be difficult. We know she is making for Coroa now after a month's cruise. She is due at Coroa in four days' time, on the 18th. She will oil there— she'll have to for her fanks will be practically empty by the time she makes the port. She will be oiled from lighters alongside, as there is no pipe-line or tanker at Coroa. She will then be tied up to a mooring buoy at the man of war anchorage which is just inside Coroa inlet. Tied up, with lighters on each side, practically helpless. If resolute men could get at her on the night of the 18th, they could place bombs against her side and sink her!"

He again waited for John Ho's comment. The Captain looked, said, "Eh, what's that?" as though dragging his mind from a vacant mooning, and then demonstrated his hopelessness by muttering, "Forbidden to enter Coroa after sunset and before sunrise, And I'm told they fine you if you steer within half a cable of a man of war at anchor."

"We didn't think to pay much attention to harbor rules," snarled Mallalen. "Or rather we doubted whether Captain Kenny would."

"Kenny," said John Ho vaguely. "No, he wouldn't— and he's walking the beach today out of a billet for just that sort of foolery."

Mallalen sat back in despair. It was all up, they'd never get this thick minded chump to aid them. Pontal saw it, too. Pontal lost what few shreds of diplomacy he had in a gust of angry despair. "Whatever Kenny was, Senhor Captain," he snapped, "he knew that it was a man's job to move heaven and earth to sweep this monster Esteban Soltura away. He would not have feared or drawn back. He—"

John Ho was leaning forward. His vague eye was on Pontal. He said as though puzzled, "Can you tell me something? Is this the same Esteban Soltura who was Prefeito of Police or something in 1899?"

Pontal glared, frowned, thought. "Yes, he is the same man. In 1899 he assassinated Don Egreja on the plea that he was trying to escape from custody. Do you ask for some reason, senhor?"

But apparently John Ho had asked for no reason at all. He had sat back in his chair, the blank, flat look had come to his face again. He had, apparently, no further interest in the matter. They knew he was beyond persuasion, beyond hope.

Mallalen tried another line, tried to show how the sweeping away of Esteban Soltura would serve John Ho's owners in the matter of reducing shipping dues, which would be one of the first matters a just government would consider.

Tried, even, te bring the weight of his own important business with the owners to bear. But he had a sense of helplessness all the time. He felt that log of a man was not even listening, was sunk in his thoughts, or rather sunk in that blank abstraction that went for thought with such a thick-skull.

He wasn't quite fair there. John Ho indeed was thinking his thoughts.

He was folding back twenty-five years. Mallalen would have been startled if he could have looked into that dull, negative mind, for John Ho was thinking rather startling things. He was thinking of 1899, of Esteban Soltura who was Prefeito of Police in 1899, of himself and of Amata Agradavel.

John Ho had been an apprentice then, Not one of your dashing, paint-the-town red and kiss-any-girl apprentices. A sobersides even then, the butt of the wilder spirits on the half-deck for his slowness, lack of mettle, utter lack of initiative, timidity in thought. Yes, he'd been a sheep even then, but all the same Amata had loved him.

Their vessel had stayed in Coroa for nearly a month. They were to take in hides, lumber and piassava, and some sort of jamboree up country had blocked the railway transport so they had to wait, kicking their heels. He had met Amata one day when his fellow apprentices had given him the slip; they were bent on some adventure which his timidity and dullness would spoil.

He had mooned about alone. It was just toward the end of the *siesta* period and the main streets were shuttered and dead. He had gone through the town and mooched along under the marvellous filigree of the silk-cotton trees that lined the Estrada da Boca. Even he was touched by the amazing emerald of that walk under the molten gold of the sun, the diamond sparkle of the fountains, the great, shining entrancement of the bright queer flowers and their almost wanton tropic profusion. It was an exotic and sense-stealing fairyland. And he found Amata alone in it, a creature from another world, fragile, exquisite and as vivid as a flower petal for whom all this beauty was but a natural setting. Amata was older than he, say eighteen, but still a child with the quick, foal-like grace of a child; and yet a woman, too, as are these southern girls, She was twenty years older in knowledge and worldly wisdom, infinitely his superior in grasp of life, its realities and sweetnesses, hard facts and dangers.

Perhaps the strangeness of his foreign ways, walk and face appealed to her. He was stocky and strong then, but had elasticity and a figure. Also youth was in his face, lighting it with a sort of virility. Amata liked his air at once and spoke to him. Yes, Amata spoke to him; he never would have made the approach.

Amata had stolen out from a sleep drugged home, was playing truant during the *siesta*. She wanted, unfettered, to snatch her moment of beauty. Amata loved beauty, tenderness, fineness. She sat here in a little jewel flowered bower of the Estrada, and looked through trailing purple creeper at the swinging blue splendor of a view. Below her were palms of all delicacies in pattern, and white

houses so very white among their leaves, and houses with blue and red and green and yellow walls, and red roofs and those of hard, thick, shiny Spanish tiles.

Beyond palms and houses the bay stretched in a vast floor of mother of pearl, all the colors of shot silk fusing gradually into blue and deep purple as the sea marched toward the horizon. And scattered on this shining floor were the quaint islands, humpy and bright and almost unreal in the tropic glare so that they looked like drawings from a book of gnomes.

All this Amata told the new lover in odd English which broke into delicious tangles as her soft voice wrestled with its difficulties. Beauty and another matter that troubled her brought her out here to think alone, and John Ho who had never bothered about beauty was suddenly aware of the loveliness of the world— and of her.

Something had happened to him which never happened to him before— or since. A glamor stirred, and beauty transfigured his life. He lived in an exquisite dream. The neglect of his fellow apprentices no longer troubled. He was no longer a dull youth alone. Day after day he slipped off to the Estrada da Boca and sat with Amata, talked with Amata, held the fine, small hand of Amata and lived in beauty outside himself, outside the world.

Siesta hour and the warm, scented, glamorous dusk were theirs. How a girl of her race managed it he did not ask. How he himself held her he did not know. Perhaps he had touched his height. Perhaps for that one radiant and splendid period he was transformed by this divine and delicate thing that had come to him. Perhaps Amata, so fragile, so vivid had a magic that could conjure out of him things that no other human being before or since had found in him.

He vowed no vows. He was not that sort. He just adored her and held her tight in the rich, rare beauty of the night. He did not think of what was to happen when his ship was ready to sail. Again he was not that sort. He could not look beyond the wonder of the moment.

Only that thing that troubled her troubled him— vaguely, She told him about it gradually. There was another man. He was a rich man, he was a great man and he was very powerful in Encahecado. This man's name was Esteban Soltura and he was Prefeito of Police and as wicked as they were made. He wanted her. He had approached her, approached her very unpleasant aunt and had made his advances. He was so very rich and important and dangerous for those who had to live in Encabecado that— well, one had to think seriously about him.

She did not speak in horror of this Esteban Soltura. She was a Latin. Underneath her loveliness of face and temperament there was the queer, hard Latin practicality of outlook in matters of love. Or there was at first. Presently she was saying, "You will hold me against him, dear John Ho? You are strong and powerful, too— and English. It is you only I love."

John Ho vowed, rather haltingly, that he would. But he felt an unease. He was rather troubled by the strength and importance of this Esteban Soltura, A Prefeito of Police! One should be very careful how one dealt with such a fellow. Then, too, Amata seemed to expect that he should fight this powerful fellow, kill him even. Of course it was the way in these parts. But— but— well, it was rather a dangerous thing to do.

Of course he did vow, and he meant it. He wasn't going to let any man take Amata and her wonder from him.

But then one *siesta* Esteban Soltura found them. He must have had full information, of course, for he came straight to them. He was a big bull of a man of a flashing and glittering elegance in his would-be London style clothes, his diamonds and the cloth uppers to his boots. That and the strength of his face, the bright black eyes, the big hooked nose, the lips and chin of flashy power, intimidated John Ho, who actually rose and stood sheepishly as though his captain was about to give him a wigging. He didn't even think about that; it was his nature controlling him.

Esteban Soltura looked at him with sneering contempt, and spat it, too. He turned his back on the boy and addressed the girl. Addressed her with a cool, jeering unpleasantness that stung John Ho even though he did not understand a word. When she wailed, "John Ho, strike down this man," he did move forward, but not in the way she expected, not in the way of her race.

Esteban was of her race. He swung about with swift suppleness and he had hold of John Ho's ear, had him by the ear as if he were a stupid schoolboy, and he shook him by the ear in supercilious contempt. He jeered in English so that John Ho should have the full flavor of his disdain: "This poor son of a peeg is of no use to you, Amata, *mia*. They have no stomach, these Engleesh cowards. Here, you, you get out before I gif you the tee!"

John Ho hit him then. John Ho was awake at last. He slashed the fellow and landed on the cheek. The man staggered and John went after him and struck him again,

The brute tripped and fell, sitting on a pile of crockery. Amata called: "Your knife, John Ho. Now is the time for your knife!"

John Ho knew it was the time for his knife; that was the way of this place. That was the way one must keep one's love here— but he hesitated. This fellow was a most important man, Prefeito of Police— That ingrained caution held him for just that fraction of a second too long, for Esteban was of her race and he did not hesitate about the knife. He whipped his out even as he recovered from his fall, and with that supple jerk of wrist sent it hissing at John Ho. It was more his own flurry than John Ho's alertness that made it miss the throat artery by a fraction. John Ho dodged wildly and recovered too late, for Esteban was up with a piece of rock in his hand, and was onto John hammering at his head.

John Ho came to in jail. He remained in jail until he was taken off in a pilot boat and put onto his ship even as she was clearing the bar of Coroa. Esteban did not want his career troubled by any foreign complications caused by his purely private affairs. By the time he was put on board John Ho's first passion of fury and pain of loss had exhausted itself. It was a dull, morose, sullenly aching boy who took the lecture from his captain. And that sullen dullness had dwindled until it had merged into the long, dull, gray spiritless life that stretched without an event from that day to this day— for twenty-five years, Twenty-five years of do-nothingness and flatness. Not once in all that time had he strayed again outside his groove or done a venurresome, an ardent or an unexpected thing. Never again had he touched the heights of glamor he had known with Amata,

The chance that Esteban Soltura had robbed him of! That is how it came back to him now— not that moment's failure to use the knife that had lost him Amata, but Esteban's theft of Amata. Esteban was the thief who had robbed him of the one good and beautiful thing he had ever known in his life. Esteban Soltura. He knew he had hated the man all his life, that he hated him still.

MALLALEN and Pontal had given up. Pontal said in fury, "It is useless. This man has no courage and he is a blockhead also." It was Esteban Soltura's sneering contempt all over again.

Mallalen in stark disgust was standing, He was saying bitterly, "You are right, Pontal, this fellow isn't a man. But let me tell you, Captain, we have no use for creatures of your sort here. We know how to treat them!"

John Ho to their utter amazement said slowly, "I don't think your idea of placing bombs against the side of the *Presidente* a good one. We can do better than that!"

They couldn't believe it of the man. Mallalen traveled on the *Wooden Horse* himself because he couldn't quite believe it of John Ho. And every minute of the trip seemed to argue the utter impossibility of such a man carrying out any dangerous scheme. He was as vaguely nervous and fussy as a hen. It wasn't enough for him to take the usual four angles of any fixed reck or point; he doubled the bearings always, and worked his position out by Sumner line, too. He lost miles by the wide berth he gave to any reef or shoal. There never was a man so cautious and timid.

On the evening of the 17th Mallalen was on the verge of either stunning or shooting the inert fool so that he could take command himself. John Ho went to anchor behind Cabo Irtiuama before daylight was done. He stared blankly at the protesting Mallalen and said, "Can't pass the signal station on Monte Jaocoso. They'd wire the news of our coming to Coroa. Well, I think it does matter. We might fail and then where would my owners be?"

"If you went straight ahead now," snarled Mallalen, "you could get into Coroa anchorage at two o'clock tonight. And there's no moon, an ideal chance to do the job."

"But I'm not allowed to enter Coroa between sunset and dawn," said John Ho in sheepish amaze. Astounding chump, saying that when he was out to scupper a battleship! "Also the inlet is full of shoals, some shifting. Also the water is against us. Only twenty-three feet of water on the bar at two, and we draw nearly thirty. No, an hour after dawn is the best time. We can see what we are doing then."

"So can they and shoot us to splinters," snarled Mallalen. "And you are forgetting that there is a deep water channel against Ilha Allegral."

"But only half a cable wide. Oh, no, I owe it to my owners not to run the risks of fiddling about those banks in the dark, and being shot up into the bargain."

Mallalen spent a night of fury. When he came on deck an hour before dawn he saw that John Ho's caution had kept the hands busy most of the night. The topmasts of the two stumpy masts had been lowered away, and so had most of the derricks. The stack had been whitewashed over its red up to the black band round the top. Other things had been done to the old *Wooden Horse* to give her not a complete but anyhow a confusing change. Also they had passed Monte Jaocoso signal station in the dark and without lights so the Coroa authorities would not know of their coming,

There was rough water on the bar and the blue bad weather flag flew from the pilot building. Beyond the bar they could see the fine inlet of Coroa harbor opening out in a clear, sharp panorama, with the warship, the *Presidente Esteban,* in the best anchorage well inside the bar and clear of all shipping save for the iron oil lighters that nuzzled against both her sides. The norther which was piling up on the bar and filling the imlet with a sharp, quick chop lifted the heavy barges against the fenders with a motion telling of their fullness.

John Ho stood stolid on his bridge like aruminant bull. He headed stoically for the bar, but gave one or two helm orders which made even Mallalen stare at him, so erratically did the Wooden Howse steer. The yard arm at the pilot house broke out in a flutter of flags. The quartermaster at John Ho's side said, "They're asking who we are, sir."

John Ho grunted, did not answer. He stared dully, inertly ahead. The vast inlet expanded to their gaze. The kick of the rough water began to be felt under their forefoot. John Ho muttered an order that made the old *Wooden Horse* sidle and yaw like a rudderless scow.

More flags fluttered from the pilot house

"Three fourteen," read the quartermaster. "They want us to heave to, sir." He took another look. "Demand that we report fully, sir."

"Answering pennant," said John Ho dully, and as the red and white stripes broke aloft he pushed his boat straight into the bar.

The bar began to jostle and heave them, slinging the old freighter about in an abandoned manner. The cruiser loomed up bigger.

"Fourteen," said the quartermaster at John Ho's side reading off the flags. "Pay attention to signals!"

"Answer Thirteen," said John Ho dully and the quartermaster gave a loud gulp. Thirteen in the flag code of Encabecado means, "Unable to read your flags."

The *Wooden Horse* drove on through the rough water, and a mad order from John Ho made her yaw frantically as though she intended to charge head on the steep-to side of the harbor entrance. Only another mumbled "Steady the helm" brought her up floundering with her iron cutwater pointing straight at the cruiser.

Excitement now. Figures appearing frantically on the platform of the pilot house, some waving foolishly, another wagging and rattling the semaphore arms. On the cruiser even, there was a dawn of interest. Men came topside and stared at the strangely steering *Wooden Horse*. Their interest, as yet, was amused, speculative and unalarmed.

"Three fifteen," said the quartermaster, staring at a new flutter of flags. "Want us to go astern, sir." More flags. "Getting jumpy, sir. Wanter know what is the matter with us. Wanter know if we need assistance."

Mallalen who had been standing by in a daze stared at the dull, inert bulk of John Ho. Could he stand up to all this? Could he carry through? John Ho stood with his hand on the rail, his eyes dimly anxious, his timid look on his face. He stared at the cruiser, seemed to hesitate— read her name in letters of gold, Esteban's name!

"Tell 'em I'm all right," he mumbled to the astonished quartermaster. "Tell 'em my steering engine is damaged and a little erratic, that's all."

The quartermaster gaped open mouthed at him, but getting no other order went to his signal locker with the air of a man serving the whim of amadman. No sooner had the code flags broken aloft, when another order dropped from John Ho's mouth, and as a result the helm went over and the *Wooden Horse* sheered away from the cruiser at the maddest possible tangent.

A roar of laughter came from the men on the cruiser, all her crew seemed on deck now enjoying the antics of the Wooden Horse. They probably read his signal and laughed at the fool ship. No doubt they did the same at the pilot house as they signaled. "Anchor where you are. Tug is coming out."

Another gale of laughter as the *Wooden Horse* spun idiotically on her heel and almost completed a circle to port. And then, suddenly, no laughter at all. No

laughter, only an abrupt silence that was like a giant gasp; and then wild shouting.

There was reason! When the great stem of the freighter was no more than one hundred and fifty yards from the cruiser. The *Wooden Horse* flicked straight and charged at its full twelve knots. For one insane minute the whole harbor seemed to go mad with shouting. And then the grinding crash of the impact drowned all other sound.

The iron bow of the *Wooden Horse* sheered clean through the side of the oil lighter for ten feet with a gigantic rending and tearing of plates. She might have gone straight through to the armor of the cruiser but John Ho was thinking of his owners. Even as they struck he mumbled his order and the *Wooden Horse* changed over to full astern at once.

As she tore clear from the shattered and buckled plates a great gush of oil came out of the lighter settling heavily on the water of the harbor. The chop of the sea beat against this oil and sent it in long, thick eddies all round the cruiser. And as the *Wooden Horse* backed clear the second disaster happened. The oil took fire.

In that frantic and stunning moment nobody quite knew what happened, save John Ho and Mallalen. All that the hysterical onlookers on the cruiser or on shore knew was that calamity was suddenly heaped on calamity. That on top of the ramming and wreck there came one gigantic blaze of flame. It hurled to the very heavens, it seemed, with a volcanic roar just after the *Wooden Horse* had put twenty feet of clean water between her and the oil patch. It was thought that some fool seaman must have been smoking a cigarette and so ignited the fumes.

That was not the reason, however. The reason was Mallalen. He had whipped into the cover of a deck cabin as soon as he saw that collision was inevitable. The crash threw him to the deck but he was up at once and sighting through a port with a pistol. At the moment he deemed the *Wooden Horse* safe he fired at the gush of oil pouring from the wounded lighter. And his pistol did the trick— for it was a Very star shell pistol.

For the next ten minutes nobody had eyes for the *Wooden Horse*. Every eye within range was mesmerized by the inferno of red flame and smoke that roared across the mouth of the inlet, held by the sight of over a thousand men taking to the water, shocked to fixity by the appalling spectacle of the other lighter on the starboard side of the cruiser going up in one ghastly spout of flame, hypnotized by the sight of the cruiser herself wrapped in a veritable hell of flame and lost beyond salving!

That is they were until they realized that presently the cruiser's magazines would be blowing up, and also that the wind and sea were driving the floating flames in toward the town. After that they had plenty to occupy them and never

had time to think of the unknown freighter that had caused all the damage. It was even surmised for a time that she, too, was engulfed.

She wasn't. John Ho always thought of his owners and his ticket. He backed away with a hose already playing on the bow that might have become covered with petrol. As he turned and headed for the bar his carpenter was below taking soundings, and a man was going over the side in slings to see if any plates were stove in above the water line. It was in keeping with the queer ways of the sea that this vessel which had done so much hurt suffered practically no damage except to paint. Also its getaway was perfectly untroubled and safe. There was reason for this apart from the blind panic that reigned in Coroa. The blazing petrol put a curtain of flame and thick smoke between the freighter and the town.

When the Presidente Esteban's magazines went up the *Wooden Horse* was already outside the bar and turning the headland that shuts out Coroa from the sea to the south. She ran down coast, John Ho working her like a nervous ox through the shoal water and the banks. That afternoon he put Mallalen ashore in a boat, and the only emotion he showed was anxiety at Mallalen's praise and gratitude taking up so much of his owners' time.

Three days later the Wooden Horse with her topmasts up and the whitewash off her funnel, crept up the anchorage of Puerto Gris like a frightened old virgin crossing a busy road. And a few hours later John Ho was protesting against carrying a cargo of railway iron because it was too risky.

When he learned in a café a couple of days later that a certain General Pontal had headed a successful revolution in Encabecado and had become *presidente*, he just looked blankly at the speaker.

Only when he was told that the ex-president, Esteban Soltura, had been caught and shot out of hand did he seem to show a glimmer of interest. But all he said to his bewildered companions was, "That puts 'paid' to *him*,' and then began to discuss a new shoal that had been reported at the mouth of the La Plata, voting that it would be much safer to go in with a pilot, though the Admiralty Hydrographic Department declared that careful soundings would suffice. "The first duty of a shipmaster," said he like a solemn sheep, "is never to take a risk."

22: The Jelly-Fish

Francis Flagg

George Henry Weiss: 1898-1946

Weird Tales, Oct 1930

"SPEAKING of jelly-fish," said the man.

We hadn't been speaking of jelly-fish, nor of anything else for that matter, but the tide had gone out and left the rocky strand full of them.

That morning I had left the village soon after daybreak for a ramble along the shore. I had walked a mile, perhaps, beyond the lighthouse and seated myself on a mussel-encrusted rock. The scene was indescribably bleak and lonely. Behind me dark spruce forest presented an unbroken front; on either hand the inhospitable beach stretched away; while in front the long rollers of the Atlantic came in and broke in smothers of foam. Far out, even on as calm a morning as this, I could see the water boiling and seething over the shoals and the cruel ledges of rock which made the approach to the harbor entrance so dangerous a place for ships in stormy weather.

It was while I sat there, thinking rather sadly, and perhaps morbidly, of the many marine disasters the spot had witnessed, that I became conscious of the man seated on another rock not a dozen feet to one side of me. I had not noticed his approach. He was a big man, not so tall as broad and burly, clad in an enormous pea-jacket (I think that is what they are called) much the worse for wear, and with gaping sea-boots on his feet. His hair and full bushy beard, brown in color but shot through with gray, were long and unkempt. A man of about fifty, I thought. At some recent time he had been wet. The water dripped from his clothes. Kelp and bits of seaweed clung to them. Perhaps in clambering over the slimy rocks he had slipped and fallen into one of the many pools left by the outgoing tide. I wondered how he had managed to approach me unheard. But he might have been on the spot before myself, hidden from view behind one of the many huge rocks. A fisherman, maybe; though what a fisherman could be doing in this place, at such an hour, without a house in sight or a fishing-boat to be seen along the shore, puzzled me. However, I wasn't curious— not at first. I drew in deep lungfuls of the damp salt air. Immersed in my own thoughts, I poked with the toe of one heavy boot at a viscous mass of jelly. A queer thing, a jelly-fish. Some of them look like glass, clear as crystal, while others are quite highly colored. But there is an immense variety of them, and often, when the wind blows landward, they are driven onto the beach in thousands. Earlier that morning the wind had blown quite a stiff breeze, though by no means a gale. I recalled once reading that jelly-fish were mostly composed of water— about four hundred parts of water to one of solid matter. There is nothing much to them except water, and yet they live and move, have eyes and

ears and locomotive powers, and are able to sting, digest, and reproduce their kind. It was a marvelous thing to think of: living, animate water, swimming in and distinct from water. And yet why be amazed at a jelly-fish? Surely men and animals were just as marvelous. In my own body I was seventy to ninety per cent water. The man on the rock to one side of me.... It was then he turned and spoke, the sunlight glinting on his red beak of a nose and hard agate eyes. It gave me quite a start.

"Speaking of jelly-fish," he said, as if reading my thoughts, "I've seen hundreds of 'em, thousands. Not just little fellows like those ones there, but giants"— he made a gesture with his hands— "yes, giants, six, aye, ten feet in circumference, and more than that tall. You've no idea," he said, "what there is down there in the depths of the sea that never comes to the surface, and that no wind blows ashore. But I've seen 'em," he roared, his voice like a fog-horn, like a voice accustomed to shouting against a gale, against the pounding of surf. "Yes, I've seen 'em— me, and two others! Mate of the old Harlow I was. You've heard of the *Harlow*, as fast and neat a clipper as ever plied 'tween here and London. Three-master, she was, bark-rigged, built at Glasgow in '45, twenty years old, and able to make the crossing in fourteen days. We were the crack ship of the line, old Captain Hayter in command, and Billy Doan second mate. Billy and me had our fortunes told by a slant-eyed heathen in a Limehouse dive who showed us queer things in a crystal ball; aye, bloody queer things. But we were twothirds drunk. 'Don't go down to the sea this voyage,' he warns. But by the time the *Harlow* cleared the Thames with seventy passengers and a full cargo under the hatches all memory of the warning had faded. And if it hadn't we would have sailed just the same. For that is the life of a sailor, my lad. Blow high, blow low, he goes down to the sea in ships."

He told me all this in one breath, as it were, and I studied him curiously. His face struck me as being familiar. Somewhere before I had seen it but just where I could not say. The village perhaps... and the name *Harlow* evoked something that stirred sluggishly in the depths of my mind.

"Blow high, blow low!" he roared. "And she blew high! Aye, she blew great guns. Snow and sleet. And through the snow and sleet, and the blackness of night, under bare poles, we raced before the gale, raced for the harbor entrance, missed it and struck— struck on them rocks out yonder and went to pieces!

"All night," he said, "the bodies came ashore. The coastguards built huge fires and tried to thaw 'em out, but it weren't no use. Corps they were, and stiff and battered. Yes," he cried, "the bodies of the passengers came ashore that night, and the next day, and the next, men, women and children, seventy of 'em, a piteous sight. And the cabin-boys came ashore, and the stewards, and all of the crew— all save the three of us, Captain Hayter, Billy Doan, and me. We

didn't come ashore, no. We went down into the sea with the pilot-house around us, and over us, as good officers should, a midsection of hull pulling us down. Aye, we went down; and there we were, suddenly, at the bottom of the ocean, ten fathoms under, and the roar and the noise of the storm was gone, and we were in blackness and afraid. And Billy Doan he gripped me by die arm and whimpered— whimpered like a child, he did— for around our darkness floated strange phosphorescent lights.

" 'God!' whimpered Billy Doan; and he said: 'D'you remember the crystal? This is what we saw in the crystal.' And the 'old man' was the first to understand, being learned-like and always reading in books. 'Lads,' he says, 'the pilot-house is built of teakwood and the windows snug. It's the air as keeps out the water.'

" 'Look!' cried Billy Doan in a voice that made me freeze to the marrow. 'Look! what's that?'

"Far away, through ghostly waverings of light, we could see giant jelly-fish advancing. Monstrous things they were, six, aye, ten feet around, and tall— I'm telling you, mate, they were tall, with big saucer-like eyes. Yes, they had eyes! They glued 'em to the glass and looked at us. God! it made the flesh creep the way they looked at us. For there was no mistaking their looking. Take their turns they would, just like people at a zoo. It fair made the blood run cold. Billy Doan whimpered again.

" 'I don't mind being a corp. I don't mind being drowned and going to Davy Jones' Locker proper-like. But this... this...'

"Then we could see that the ghastly horrors were trying to reach in at us. Long streamers fumbled at the glass windows, beat on them. We could hear the glass rattle. We crouched on the floor, cold and miserable; sick, aye, sick with fear. The 'old man' pointed to a part of the floor some feet away. Ghostly phosphorescent light grew there, a malignant eye, for the flooring had started, and there was a hole in the floor, and only the air was holding out the water. Through this hole, breaking the surface of black water, came a long reaching streamer. It stole toward us. We screamed. Billy Doan screamed. For the streamer had him. It wrapped around his body. Billy Doan fought like a madman.

" 'O God!' he shrieked, 'don't let it have me, don't!'

"I sought to tear away the slimy tentacle. The 'old man' grabbed one. of his legs, but the boot came away in his hands. Down through the hole went Billy Doan, and the giant jelly-fish enfolded him, ingested him, and he was gone. Aye, the jelly-fish had done for poor Billy Doan, and only we two were left, the 'old man' and me. We glared at one another in horror. We backed into the furthest corner of our refuge. Aye, mate, it was ghastly. Two of us alone on the bottom of the sea, waiting, waiting. The 'old man' went next.... I frothed at the mouth, I

tore at my hair in despair, for the phosphorescent light grew, the goggle-eye approached, and the streamer, streamer..."

But I waited to hear no more. For an increasing unease brought me to my feet. The wild stretch of shore, the dark forest behind me, the weird story of the madman (for I was positive he must be daft), all these things together wrought havoc with my nerves. I walked swiftly away, and after a few yards I looked back and he was standing up and waving his arms at me. I turned away. When I glanced back again he had disappeared. As I say, there were plenty of large rocks, large enough to conceal a man. Nevertheless, I started to run, and I never stopped running until I reached the village. Outside the village I met a coastguardsman. He shook his head.

"No, sir, I don't know of any such man."

I still persisted. He gave me a peculiar look, I thought.

"There ain't no crazy man in these parts, sir."

I made discreet inquiries in the village, but to no use. Fed up with my holiday I took the government boat that afternoon for the city. I had no longer any desire to tramp bleak seashores. And that is the end of the matter, save for one last thing.

Three months later I was paying a visit to an aunt of mine in Boston. Hanging on the parlor wall was the painted picture of a man, a man with bushy brown hair and beard shot through with gray, a red beak of a nose and hard agate eyes— a man perhaps fifty years of age. I stared, thunderstruck, for the painted likeness was that of the singular individual whose mad tale I had listened to on the beach.

"Who— who is that?" I faltered.

"Why," said my aunt, "that's a picture of your great-uncle Jim, your grandfather's brother. Surely you've heard about him. He was drowned, and his body never recovered, when the old *Harlow* went down off Sambro."

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23: The Harper in the Wood

A Legend of Wales

Alice Hegan Rice

1870-1942

The Century Magazine May 1911

UP in the Welsh Mountains, hid away in a deep ravine of the Lledr Valley is the far-famed Fairy Glen. Here the turbulent river Conway comes plunging over resisting boulders and mossy stones to meet its brother river the Llugwy in the valley below. Each season hundreds of tourists leave the highway to toil up the wood-path for a glimpse of the seething waters, the verdant forest, and the wildly picturesque Glen.

About half-way up the steep ascent the traveler was wont to hear, above the dashing of falling waters, and the wind in the tree-tops, the deep vibrant notes of a harp. Out of the wood it came, out of the dim, cool bowers that held their virgin solitude. At first it seemed so much a part of the voices of wind and water that one could scarcely be sure it was a human instrument; but gradually out of the harmony came a faint melody, the plaintive notes of an old Welsh folk-song, sum and substance of the soil that gave it birth.

Presently the strains grew more insistent, and the traveler came upon a little vine-clad shelter, like a sentinel's box, standing beside the pathway. Sitting before it, his head thrown back, and a pair of luminous gray eyes confidently yet strangely lifted to the light, a young Welsh lad played upon his harp, his lean, sensitive face responsive to every note, as his slender fingers unhesitatingly sought the desired strings.

Attached to the shelter was a small box with the printed inscription, "Blind from Childhood," and into this the chance passer-by, pausing involuntarily, dropped his penny, and then passed on.

To the thoughtful it was evident that the green bower in the hillside, saturated as it was with the sounds of falling waters, of bird songs, and the wistful strains of the harp, had acquired an atmosphere of peace and depth, such as comes where a lonely soul has lived and loved and suffered.

When old Ivor Kyffin, the shepherd, was himself gathered into the fold, the little blind son, left alone in the rude stone cabin on the mountain, had been gladly adopted by the kindly village folk. The ardent love and veneration of the Welsh for poetry made them eagerly welcome the little lad from the hills, who held within his frail body the priceless gift of song.

They ministered to his simple needs and vied with each other in kindnesses, and in return Evan poured out his gift for them freely. In their times of sorrow, and times of glee at the Eisteddfods and funerals it was his voice and harp that

strove earnestly to reflect the mood and express the emotions of the simple village folk.

But as he grew to manhood the desire for independence woke within him, and he chafed at his inability to do his man's share in the work of the world. It was then that old Hugh Owen, the carpenter, built him the shelter in the wood, and found the means for him to earn his daily bread.

For five long summers he sat playing by the roadside, aware of the passing feet but taking little heed of them, glad sometimes of a child's laugh, or a word of passing cheer, but for the most part completely absorbed in a world of his own.

He was a poet, and the song rose in him as the sap rises in the young tree in the spring. Without color, or form, or visible motion the earth was still beautiful to him. He smiled out into the darkness, and sang as the birds sing for very joy of living.

As he sat there, day after day, in the sunshine and the rain, with the music in his soul, something of the sweetness of the still wood, and the mystery of the sunlight became inwoven in his very being. It was as if Nature played upon him, as he played upon his harp, tuning the subtle strings of his sensitive soul, making him responsive to her moods and the moods of her children.

Without teachers, without guidance, he sought and found the highest life can give, in the silence of the wood, in the depths of his own soul, and in the gentle humanity that lies in the hearts of men.

Yet a very human craving at last took possession of him, a longing that would not be stilled.

As he sat one day in the warm luxury of the noonday sun, his hands dropped listlessly, and he sighed. Again and again he had told himself that he must not dream of love, that he must only sing of it, and know it through the joys of others, but he had not counted on the possibility of a rebellious heart.

Voices from the path below made him quickly raise his head. The sound of laughter and lively chatter told him that a band of village boys and girls were on their way to a merrymaking over beyond the Pont-y-Bryn.

In an instant he was all eagerness to go, as alert as a young hound who sees his master start for the hunt. He rose to put his harp under the shelter, but paused: the way was long and rough, and the sudden fear of being a burden held him back.

"Give us a reel, Evan, lad!" called one of the boys as the noisy crowd trooped up the hillside. "Well dance here on the turf, and lighten our feet for the rest of the journey."

Evan once more drew forth his harp, and struck up a lively air. As he played he could hear the shuffling of feet on the grass, and the merry exclamations of the dancers. His own foot tapped the time, and his body swayed, but he was not

thinking of the dance. He was listening, as only the blind can listen, for the sound of one voice in the crowd, the voice of Gladdwyd Owen.

Evan knew that where the jest was merriest and the laughter the gayest, there was Gladdwyd. He knew that her hand had been the first one claimed for the dance, and that every boy in the village, sought her smile. He knew that for him she was as some nymph in the wood of whom he dreamed, some beautiful intangible, elusive presence, that tormented and enchanted him. He knew above all that he was but Evan Kyffin the blind harper in the wood, and yet he dreamed.

A flower was brushed across his cheek, as some one dropped breathlessly on the bench beside him.

"There 's hot I am!" exclaimed Gladdwyd's voice, "I'll dance no more. Let me play, Evan!"

With mischievous fingers she swept the strings, and as she leaned past him, he could feel her soft hair brush his face.

"I wish thou wert going, Evan," she said impulsively as the dancing came to a sudden end. "There 's not one of us but would guide thee, right willingly."

He smiled straight before him but shook his head.

"I'll keep to my harp, Gladdwyd. But it will make the day less long to know thou wilt miss me."

"But thou'll wait for us, then, until we come back in the evening time?"

Still Evan smiled. "I'll wait for thee. Gladdwyd," he said.

When they were gone the wood seemed very still. He had held his breath to catch every word of the revelers until they were lost in the distance. Now he rose and paced up and down the path, and the youth in him cried out in protest against his blindness. He longed to run and leap and be free, free to see the world he lived in, free to live and love like other men.

But even as these thoughts tormented him, he lifted his head to breathe more fully the warm, scented air laden with the garnered treasure of wild flowers and meadow grass, and to catch the elusive note of a distant unknown bird.

He dropped beside his harp and eagerly sought to capture the strain. It was one of his joys to think that he was giving expression to the dumb things that could not speak for themselves, that his harp spoke the meaning of the wind, the inarticulate song of the little nameless weeds and grasses that strove vainly to lift their tiny voices. So ardently did he- crave the power of sight, that his heart leaped forth in instant sympathy to anything, animate or inanimate, that could not hear, and sing, and see.

What would the vision be, he wondered, could a flash of sight be given him? It was twenty years since he had seen the sun, and though memory treasured

each shape and color that was left by the obliterating years, yet he longed passionately for one moment of reassurance.

As one lies in the darkness at night and dreams of the coming light, so Evan sat in the darkness and dreamed of the light that was gone.

Again and again the sound of passing feet and the dropping of a penny in the box told of the presence of a stranger, but Evan played on, unaware of the world and of the flight of time. He was lifting up his heart to God, as a child brings its gift without explanation or apology, and lays it in the lap of one it loves.

After a time he opened his small lunch basket, and ate his barley bread and cheese. A thrush fluttered to his knee, then hopped to the tips of his fingers, daintily picking the crumbs from the palm of his hand. He felt the sensitive quiver of the tiny body, and knew that the wings were poised for flight. It would go, as all else went, on, on, out into the great, free world, leaving him there alone.

All afternoon he played patiently on. The passing of the minutes and the passing of the hours were one to him, except where Gladdwyd was concerned.

He waited for her now, playing softly, lest he should fail to catch the first sound of her voice. But no shouts and noisy chatter came to tell him of the return of the merrymakers.

The twilight twitter of the sleepy birds as they settled down for the night, and the stirring of the leaves by the cool, evening breezes, might have warned Evan that the day was done. But Gladdwyd had bidden him wait and the hope of going down into the village, even that bit of a way, with the glad, noisy crowd, and of walking beside Gladdwyd, with her hand perhaps in his, made him straighten his tired shoulders, and flex his cramped fingers, and play patiently on. Hour after hour he waited, while the evening dropped into night and darkness stole over the world as it had long ago stolen over his sight. The dew fell upon the faces of the upturned flowers, and a single star shone out from the branches of a sentinel spruce, but Evan could not hear the falling of the dew nor the dawning of the star, and it was still day to him until he should hear Gladdwyd's voice coming down the mountain side.

Wearier and wearier grew the waiting, and at last his fingers faltered on the strings, and he sat with his head drooped against his harp, and his sightless eyes turned patiently toward the hillside.

Suddenly a faint cry made him turn his head to listen. It was a cry he had often heard when a child, tending the sheep with his father on the moors of Gallt-y-Foel, the cry of a young lamb in distress.

Placing his harp in the shelter and seizing his stick, he started valiantly up the hill. The path going down to the village he knew, as the chipmunk knows his, though it be covered with the leaves of many autumns : he knew where the boughs bent over the pathway, how the rocks jutted out at the turn of the hill,

and when one must put a hand against the cliff and walk close to the granite wall. But up above there, toward Fous Noddum, where the footsteps were always going, lay a strange, unknown world, and he must feel each step of the way and be guided by the cries of the lamb.

That the little creature had strayed and was hurt was evident to him, and the cries, coming apparently from the same spot, made it probable that it was caught in the rocks and unable to free itself.

At the top of the hill the path turns sharply to the right and descends abruptly, by stepping-stones, around huge boulders and twisted tree trunks to the chasm below.

Evan called out to see if, by chance, there was any one in the ravine, but no answer came. He paused irresolute. It was a steep climb for one who could see, and for one who was blind it was fraught with peril.

The bleating of the lamb came to him above the roar of the waters, and the big heart of him and the strong hands of him went out instinctively to succor the helpless.

Dropping to his knees, he began laboriously crawling down from step to step, cautiously feeling each foot of the way, and pausing again and again to get his direction from the cries below. The brambles scratched his face, and the sharp pebbles cut his hands. Once the ground crumbled beneath his foot, loosening a boulder which went plunging from ledge to ledge until it splashed in the water below.

As the cries sounded nearer, the stepping-stones ceased, and the path growing wider, became less easy to define. It no longer descended but seemed to run along the edge of the stream, and Evan felt the stones wet beneath his hands.

Pausing uncertainly, he was aware of something struggling nearby.

Not daring to leave the path without a guide, he felt along the bank until his hand touched a mass of trailing ivy. Tying several branches together he fashioned a rope, which, secured to the bank at one end, and held by him at the other, served as a guiding line with which he fearlessly waded out into the shallow stream.

A few steps brought him to the object of his search. The lamb had evidently strayed into the Glen from the peat bog above and, following the course of the stream, had been caught in the rocks.

"What a batch of fear thou art!" said Evan as he knelt to release the captive, and tenderly felt over its body to make sure there were no broken bones. " 'T was a narrow escape," he added, ''Didst think, indeed, thy hour was come?"

For answer the lamb shivered against his warm, dry coat and buried its head beneath his arm.

The retracing of his steps to the path was simple enough, but the ascent with his burden was not so easy. Twice on the way his sense of direction forsook him, and it was some moments before he could make sure of his way.

When nearly to the top the lamb struggled in his arms, and Evan stopped.

"Thou too!" he said, loosening his hold, and smiling wistfully, "thou wouldst go on thy way, like all the rest, and leave me!"

The lamb leaped from his arms, and as Evan put forth a hand to steady himself by the wall, the earth seemed suddenly to crumble beneath his feet, and with a crash he plunged face downward over the edge of the rocky path to the narrow ledge below.

For seconds it may have been, or hours, he lay here before anxious voices, calling through the dusk of the wood, broke the silence.

"Evan!" they called; "Evan!" and one among them more appealing than the rest, and coming nearer, "Evan, lad!"

He stirred, half conscious, and opened his eyes. It was the voice he had waited for these weary hours, but he could not remember whose it was.

Anxious and fearful it came again, on the path directly above him. But the numbness closed upon him, before he could answer.

"Evan!" it pleaded, and this time it seemed to arouse his stupefied senses.

Summoning all his strength he sent it into the one cry: "Gladdwyd!"

In a moment she had scrambled down the rocks and was on her knees beside him.

"Evan, lad! Evan! What has happened to thee? What art thou doing lying here in the dark?"

"Is it dark?" he asked faintly, smiling up into the night, and quieting her trembling, hand in his as he had often soothed a frightened bird. "Where are we, lass?"

"On the Glen path, where thou must have fallen. But thou art hurt; I must call the others!"

His fingers tightened about her hand. "I— I waited for thee, Gladdwyd."

"Yes, lad, but we came down the Capel way. All the while I cooked the porridge for supper I watched for thy passing, and when thou didst not come, I could not rest. 'N'wncwl John and Father are searching the woods for thee now."

"And thou camest to seek me?" asked Evan tenderly. "Thou carest enough— enough for that?"

With a half-sob she laid her hand upon his arm. "Come, Evan, I will help thee; try to rise."

But he groaned with pain as she attempted to lift him.

"No! No!" he cried in anguish, "I cannot move, something crushes me here," and he lay his hand on his chest.

Gladdwyd started up in terror. "I will go for Father," she cried, "his light is flashing now through the trees."

But Evan turned his face to her beseechingly:

"Wait with me, here," he pleaded. "It's not for long."

Tenderly she lifted his head to her lap and sat waiting fearfully until the moving lights should come near enough for her father to hear her call.

Presently Evan stirred and moaned, then suddenly a flash of joyous wonder overspread his face.

"It 's beautiful, it is!" he murmured breathlessly, "all beautiful now. Life— and— love— and death."

THE YEARS have passed, but the weather-beaten little shelter, with its pathetic inscription yet legible above the penny-box, may still be seen on the path that leads to Fous Noddum. But it is only a place for the birds and squirrels now, and no vibrant harp notes mingle with the music of the Glen.

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24: Hatred House

Walter Ripperger

?—1945

Detective Story Magazine, Nov 1937

Between 1933 and 1941 this elusive author wrote extensivedly for the pulps, mostly crime but some westerns. According to his grandson, Walter Ripperger died in 1945.

CHAPTER 1: A MALICIOUS WILL

MR. SPECK, of Speck, Marvin & Spencer, Counsellors-at-Law, thoughtfully eyed the young woman who was occupying the chair beside his desk. The fact that she had lovely blond hair, blue eyes, and a deliciously curved mouth didn't interest Mr. Speck at all. What did interest him was her poise, her air of detachment and assurance. She appeared to be exactly the kind of a person that Mr. Speck needed. Of course, it would have been better, everything considered, if she had been a man, still it—

"A most unfortunate matter," said Mr. Speck, putting all the sympathy of which he was capable into his voice. "I mean the Green Clover Dairy Products Co. going bankrupt just when you won the contest, Miss Croydon."

Kathleen Croydon frowned briefly. Mr. Speck was reminding her of one of the bitterest moments in her life. The Green Clover Dairy Products Co. had conducted a contest through the newspapers; one of those affairs where one studies cartoons and from a given list of famous names selects the one name supposedly represented by the cartoon. There had been ninety-six pictures in all— one a day for almost four months— and Kathleen had labored hard over them. When the results were announced she was the winner of the grand prize of fifty thousand dollars. She had gotten a lot of publicity out of winning the contest, but not the fifty thousand dollars. The Green Clover Dairy Products Co. folded up a few days before the money was to be paid over, and greedy creditors had pounced down upon its assets, only to find that there were no assets.

"It must have heen a great blow to you," said Mr. Speck, breaking in on her thoughts; "a great blow."

"It was,' Kathleen said gravely. "You see, I had a very special use for that money."

She didn't go on to explain the "very special use": the fact that she was the sole support of her young brother, Jimmy, a youngster who had had a very bad case of infantile paralysis and who must have treatments that she couldn't afford.

"You achieved the most astonishing result in that contest, Miss Croydon."

Kathleen looked a little bewildered. Surely Mr. Speck, of whom she had never heard until yesterday when she received his letter, hadn't summoned her to his office to compliment her on winning the contest. What did he want?

As if in answer to her question, Mr. Speck reached into the center drawer of his desk and brought forth a piece of paper which he passed to Kathleen.

"What do you make of that?" he said.

Kathleen, looking down at the slip, saw four typewritten lines:

I men without me
The sailor's friend and one in every port
O' flight without light
As you seek I wish you no ill.

"I make nothing of it," she said. "It just doesn't make sense."

Mr. Speck nodded his smallish head several times.

"I didn't expect you to, my dear; 'that is not right off the bat. You're quite right in saying that it doesn't make sense, but I'm hoping that it will make sense after you've had time to study it. That's the reason I sent for you. Those four lines contain a hidden meaning; a meaning that will mean millions to one of my clients and a great deal of money to you. When I read in the papers how you had won that contest, it struck me that you had a gift, real genius for solving things of this kind, and if anybody could read this message rightly, you could."

Kathleen wanted to laugh, but Mr. Speck was so palpably in earnest that she restrained herself.

"Would you care to make a little sure money and perhaps a great deal?" he asked.

"I'm out of a job," Kathleen said. Even if she got only twenty-five dollars for working on Mr. Speck's little puzzle, it would help, she reflected.

"In that case," Mr. Speck asserted, "my proposition ought to interest you. Have you ever heard of Pearsonville? No? It's some stxty miles out of New York— a fair-sized town where my client, Mr. Judah Glayden lives. I should like you to go there; stay at the house for a week, until you have solved the secret of this little message."

Kathleen Croydon gazed at Mr. Speck wide-eyed.

"Mr. Judah Glayden? What an odd name!"

"I don't mind telling you," Mr. Speck continued, "that those four lines on that slip in your hand are part of a will. If correctly read they will disclose the hiding place of a fortune. A real fortune. Millions in negotiable securities. It was Mr. Glayden's, my client's idea that being on the premises might help you to solve the puzzle. You see, the securities are either hidden in the house or about the grounds."

Kathleen Croydon's wide blue eyes suddenly hardened.

"And did Mr. Glayden have any other ideas?" she demanded.

Mr. Speck looked shocked.

"My dear young woman," he said imploringly, "please don't have any such ideas. Mr. Glayden is a respectable married man over fifty, living with his wife. There are other people in the house, too; Mr. Glayden's brother-in-law, Mr. Silas Sneed. You needn't be afraid of Mr. Sneed either; he's bedridden, paralyzed from the waist down. Then there's Doctor Lombardy, Mr. Silas Sneed's personal physician, living there and— and— Well, you will be perfectly safe. Besides, Messrs. Speck, Marvin & Spencer are not the sort of a firm— " Mr. Speck broke off abruptly, his voice choked with indignation.

"I'm sorry," Kathleen said contritely, "but you must admit that the whole business sounds a little fishy."

"It does; it does," Mr. Speck agreed in a mollified tone. "And I don't mind telling you 'that the inmates of the house to which I am sending you are a trifle— a trifle eccentric. But you won't mind that considering the fee, and the great possibilities."

"What is the fee— and the possibilities?"

"I'll pay you one hundred dollars down plus expenses," said Mr. Speck. "You're to stay one week at the house, concentrating on this little problem I am giving you. At the end of that week you will receive an additional four hundred dollars— even if you fail."

"And if I succeed?"

Mr. Speck leaned forward across his desk fixing Kathleen with glittering eyes.

"If you succeed," he breathed, "you will get one hundred thousand dollars!"

Kathleen Croydon gasped. A hundred thousand dollars! Unconsciously she stared down at the paper in her hands. Her eyes caught the first line again. It made no sense at all, but perhaps it might upon careful study. A hundred thousand dollars was a lot of money; enough to see her brother Jimmy through all the treatments he would require, and a lot more.

"For some inexplicable reason, Mr. Judah Glayden and I have a feeling that you can solve this puzzle, if anybody can," Mr. Speck continued. "If a more detailed explanation of the situation will persuade you to undertake this commission I'll give it to you. The fortune which I am trying to locate was left by Abner Sneed, who died last year. Abner Sneed wasn't insane when he made his will— not legally at least— but he had a quaint sense of humor. He hated all his relatives; hated them bitterly; just why doesn't matter. He took this means of torturing them— of getting even. They know the money is there. They know he's given them a clew to where the money is located, yet they can't find it. Could anything be more tantalizing? What's more, the money being hidden

there, is forcing them to live together, watching each other, distrusting and hating each other."

"Why shouldn't they want to live together? I should think they'd want to help each other find the money."

"Abner Sneed thought of that. I told you in the beginning that these people were a little eccentric. Perhaps I should say that with the exception of my client, Mr. Glayden, they are not quite normal. They have always hated each other but that hatred has been intensified a thousand times by old Abner Sneed's will. You see, whoever finds the money gets half of it; the rest is divided between the others, including a butler, an old retainer of Abner Sneed's. Let us suppose that Silas Sneed, crippled and bedridden though he is, were to find those securities. He can't bear the thought that he'll have to give half of it to the others, and the others can't bear the idea that he would get so much more than they. So they watch each other night and day, for fear that one of them might find that hoard and sneak off with it. Of course Silas Sneed is pretty helpless, but he's got Doctor Lombardy. I think that he keeps Lombardy on just to look out for his interests. It must be understood that if you discover the cryptic meaning in that message, that you will impart the information only to my client, Mr, Glayden, and not the others.

"Here is an agreement," Mr. Speck said, "guaranteeing you your payments, as outlined. You will note that it is properly signed by Mr. Glayden and his wife, Matilda Glayden, and witnessed. You have nothing to lose and a fortune to gain."

"When do I go to Mr. Glayden's?"

"It isn't really Mr. Glayden's house," said Mr. Speck. "It belongs to all of them jointly. Old Abner Sneed left it to them that way, figuring that they'd have to live together and keep on hating each other." Mr. Speck reached into his pocket and brought forth a railroad ticket clipped to some bills. "The next train leaves at eight o'clock to-night. Here's your ticket and a hundred dollars. The sooner you get there the better; there's always the risk that one of the others might get ahead of us. Not Silas— he's confined to his bed— but Doctor Lombardy for instance, or Disk, the butler. Disk is shrewd. If he got his hands on the securities first, none of the others would get their share."

Mr. Speck held the ticket and money toward Kathleen.

She hesitated for many seconds before she reached out and took them. She studied Mr. Speck long and silently. There was nothing sinister about Mr. Speck, she decided. He was just a commonplace little man eager to have her undertake this job. She held out her hand for the agreement he had drawn up and put that along with the ticket and the money in her purse.

"I'll be on the eight o'clock train to-night," she said quietly.

CHAPTER 2. A CRY IN THE NIGHT.

THE train, a local, didn't get to Pearsonville until a little after ten. Kathleen Croydon stood on the platform peering through the darkness for a porter or a taxi. Presently a slouching figure came toward her.

"Taxi, ma'am?"

"Yes," Kathleen said. The driver picked up her bag and started for his car. When he got there he stopped and asked, "where to?"

"The Sneed place."

"The Sneed place! You goin' to the Sneed place?"

There was an odd note in the man's voice, and in a flash of lightening Kathleen saw an equally strange look on his face.

"Any reason why I shouldn't go there?"

"No, there ain't,' the man said slowly. "Not if you want to go there." He held the door open for her.

"What's wrong with the Sneed place?" she demanded with characteristic directness.

"Nothin'," the man mumbled. "It's just that people around here say that they're kinda queer up there."

Kathleen, her heart beating a little faster, got into the cab. She told herself that she mustn't at the very outset allow herself to be upset by the small-town gossip of a cab driver. She settled back against the cushions and tried to think of something else. Always her mind went back to that cryptic message from old Abner Sneed's will that Mr. Speck had given her. She had puzzled over it all the way down without success and now she couldn't restrain the thought that perhaps it had no meaning at all, that it was just a hoax, a pretext to lure her down here to some lonely house. Panic seized her, but she fought it off.

The cab came to a stop with a jerk. The driver climbed out and opened the door. "Here you are, miss."

Kathleen remained where she was. There was still time for her to turn back. She could tell the man to take her to some hotel. and come back in the morning. The house was a long rambling structure, higher in the middle than at the wings. Kathleen sensed, rather than saw, the general air of desolation about it. It was in complete darkness, save for a faint light above the front door. Kathleen turned to the driver to tell him to take her back, when the front door opened.

A tall, powerfully built man emerged. He came to the cab and took Kathleen's bag from the driver, in an unbelievably deep hollow voice he said:

"This way, miss."

As though hypnotized, scarcely realizing that she was abandoning her idea of going back to town, Kathleen followed him into the hallway. Here the man

paused, turned with a sort of deadly deliberation, and took her in from head to foot. He had a decidedly unpleasant face; not that there was anything vicious about it— at least not then. It was just that it was an unhealthy face, broad, flat, and dead-white. In strange contrast, almost black eyes glowed steadily at her.

"I'm Kathleen Croydon," she said a little desperately. "Mr. Glayden wanted me for a secretary." Mr. Speck had told her to say that.

"I'm Disk, the butler," the man said in a tone more sepulchral than ever. "Mr. Glayden has retired, but he is expecting you. I'll show you to your room."

The house was ominously quiet as Kathleen followed Disk up the broad wooden stairs; so silent that the girl wondered if the pounding of her heart were audible. On the next floor Disk led the way along the hall to a door at the left which he opened. He fumbled for a switch, found it, and Kathleen discovered herself in a fair-sized room modestly furnished. But something about the room made her gasp. It was a wreck; the floorboards had been torn up and were now only partly replaced; the baseboards along the entire walls had been ripped away and there were holes in the plaster of the walls.

"The house is somewhat in disrepair," Disk said without a trace of emotion. "You will have to watch your step."

Kathleen shrank back. It wasn't the man's words, but the way he looked at her, devouring her blond loveliness with his eyes. A horrible thought flashed in her brain. What if she were alone in this house with Disk?

"I think that will be all, Disk," she said, and somehow managed to keep her voice level.

"Very good, miss," Disk bowed. "You'll be quite safe."

His eyes traveled toward the door, and Kathleen saw two enormous bolts on the inside.

"All the doors in this house are fitted like that," Disk explained.

His voice was still hollow, but Kathleen thought that she detected a faintly ironic note in it. But before she could say anything more Disk had gone, shutting the door softly behind him.

Alone, Kathleen stood for a moment where she was, surveying herself in the mirror of the dressing table. Her face was white, almost as white as Disk's. If only the house weren't filled with that unearthly stillness. Yet if she moved, the loosely replaced floorboards underfoot creaked in a way that frightened her. What a fool she had been to come here! But the condition of her room, the holes in the wall, the loose boards on the floor and the baseboards torn from the walls, was reassuring; it bore out what Mr Speck had told her: there were people here who really believed that there was a fortune concealed in this house; they had made an obvious effort to locate it.

Slowly Kathleen began to take off her things; she would go to bed and see what to-morrow would bring. She got into her pajamas, and was about to put

out the light when it occurred to her to lock the bolts on the door. Suddenly she stood still, rooted to the spot, her heart going like mad. She was certain there was some one outside the door. She listened intently without hearing a sound. For minutes she stood there — minutes that seemed like hours. Then she tiptoed forward, took hold of the knob gently, turned it noiselessly, and summoning all her courage, yanked the door open. She had been right. The butler was there kneeling on the floor.

"What are you doing here?" she blazed.

Disk's pale lips moved. He was about to speak, but something happened to interrupt him. The unearthly stillness of that desolate house was broken by a weird cry. It was a high-pitched, shrill, whimpering cry, but stronger than a child's.

Disk stiffened. He turned his head right and left looking up and down the hall. The next instant he was gone.

Kathleen, her pulses throbbing, went to the door and peered out. Even with the aid of the faint light that came from her room, she could at first see nothing. Then at the other end, near the stairs, a door opened, and framed against the light from another room a woman in a loose wrapper stood silhouetted. Indistinctly, Kathleen made out her face— a narrow face with a sharp nose and a long, pointed chin. The woman stood rigid as a statue, in a listening attitude. Once more there came that cry, shorter, more feeble this time. Then the sound of scuffling steps overhead. The woman started for the stairs, changed her mind, and stood still. Endless minutes went by. Kathleen wondered if the woman would ever turn and see her standing there. But she didn't. Presently, there came the tread of heavy feet coming down from the floor above. A man came up to the woman. He was a medium sized, stocky individual, thick about the middle.

"You beat him," the woman said accusingly.

"Claude, the little beast," the man snarled in a coarse voice, "some one let him out. Not only that, but look what he had." The man held out his hand, palm upward. There was an object in it that looked to Kathleen like a knife; a knife with a long, thin black handle and a short, narrow, keen blade.

"You didn't have to beat him, did you?" the woman wailed. She hesitated, then, "I wouldn't care if he had killed him."

"Him? You mean you wouldn't care if Claude killed Silas? It wasn't in front of Silas's door that I found him, it was in front of ours."

"Just the same you didn't have to beat him," the woman persisted doggedly. "You could have— "

The door opposite to the woman's room opened. A tall man came out.

"What the devil is going on here, Judah?" he demanded in a strong, resonant voice.

Kathleen started. So the man who was holding the knife was Judah Glayden, her employer.

Judah Glayden turned to face the newcomer. He held out the knife.

"Is this yours, Doctor Lombardy?" he rasped.

Doctor Lombardy reached over, and with thumb and forefinger picked the object off Judah's palm and held it up to the light for a closer scrutiny.

"I can't say," he declared.

"It looks to me like a surgeon's knife; a scalpel," Judah went on harshly, "like the knife that killed Minton."

"That's what it does all right," Doctor Lombardy said. "Just the same, I don't know whether or not this one is mine. I've got dozens of these things in my case."

Judah Glayden, almost a head shorter than Doctor Lombardy, went closer and stuck his face up at Doctor Lombardy.

"Some one let Claude loose," he said, his voice now tense, "and gave him this. Was it you?"

Doctor Lombardy ran a tongue across his lips and said:

"Don't be a damn fool. Why would I?"

Suddenly aware of the partly open door where Kathleen was standing, Doctor Lombardy motioned with his head, and Judah turned and stared at her. Even at that distance, Kathleen could make out that Judah had great, round, protruding eyes, could see his thick-lipped mouth fixed in a snarl. For a moment no one moved. Then Judah, followed by the others, started toward her. Kathleen fought off an impulse to cry out, to retreat into her room and bolt the door. She decided to hold her ground and face the situation.

"'I'm afraid we've disturbed you, Miss Croydon," Judah said. He was trying to make his coarse voice sound ingratiating.

"T thought I heard a noise," Kathleen said.

Judah Glayden was trying to smile at her, trying to convert the perpetual snarl on his puffy lips into a grin, and the effect was ghastly.

"Your new secretary, eh?" Doctor Lombardy said.

Judah Glayden half turned and dragged the woman at his side forward.

"This, Miss Croydon, is my wife, Matilda," he introduced.

Kathleen said, "How do you do, Mrs. Glayden," and found herself looking into a hard, implacable face; a face that had a relentless, determined expression, yet a frustrated look, too, as though the woman had spent her life heading toward a goal she hadn't yet achieved. Her small, thin mouth moved, but no words came forth.

"I'm sorry that you should have been disturbed on your first night here," Judah said. "It was nothing of any consequence."

"It was nothing at all," Doctor Lombardy said ironically, "nothing at all."

"Why don't we let her go to bed," Matilda said in a hard, unfriendly tone.

"Of course, of course," Judah agreed. "This young lady will need her sleep. We have a lot of hard work ahead of us, haven't we?" He gave a broad wink that made Kathleen shudder inwardly, and started herding his two companions toward the other end of the hall.

Kathleen, her voice faint, managed to say, "Good night."

She shot the bolts and sank onto the bed. For a time she lay there staring at the ceiling with wide, frightened eyes. This was a madhouse. She had always thought of herself as being courageous, but there were limits even to her courage. She couldn't stand that beast of a butler; couldn't stand, Judah Gladyen, nor Matilda with that merciless look on her face. She was afraid of Doctor Lombardy who, with all his suave and polished manner, was underneath no different than Disk. And what was the meaning of that weird cry she had heard? That must have come from the one they called Claude. And Matilda had accused her husband of beating Claude. Who was Claude, and why was he locked up, and what did he want with a knife, a surgeon's knife?

Kathleen Croydon crawled under the sheets and closed her eyes.

CHAPTER 3. TRAPPED!

KATHLEEN woke late the next morning. She looked at herself in the mirror and saw the ravages of a sleepless night. There were circles under her eyes, a drawn look to her cheeks. She did her best with powder, rouge, and lipstick, but the results were none too satisfactory. Then she packed her bag. She snapped the suitcase shut, put on her hat, went to the doer, drew back the bolts and slipped into the hall. Then she got a shock. Doctor Lombardy was there waiting for her.

He studied her for a moment in silence. "Leaving, I see. Perhaps it's just as well, but I wonder if before you left you couldn't step in for a few minutes to see my patient, Mr. Silas Sneed. I told him about your being here. He's a very sick man— confined to his bed— paralyzed from the waist down. I think you will like him." Doctor Lombardy spoke easily, casually. In broad daylight he appeared a less sinister figure.

Kathleen had no desire to talk to Silas Sneed. The sooner she got out of this place the better. Yet she didn't wish to precipitate an argument. She followed Doctor Lombardy down the hall to a door next to his, which he opened. The shades were partly drawn; the room was in semidarkness; but the features of the man in bed with his head propped up on a pillow were plainly visible. It was an emaciated face with high cheek bones, a broad forehead, curiously veiled eyes, and a sensitive mouth. Silas Sneed's hair was gray, long, and straggly.

Somehow it contrived to make him look utterly helpless. He turned his head halfway to look at her and after a while in a wisp of a voice said:

"So you're Judah's new secretary." Then he laughed softly.

"I'm leaving,' Kathleen said. "I don't— I don't think I'm suited to the position."

Silas Sneed nodded feebly several times. "This house, my child," he said, "is no place for you, and my brother-in-law has no need of a secretary. This is a house of hate. The Sneeds have always hated each other," he explained in a rambling way, "and when Judah came into the family and married Matilda, my sister, because he thought that some day she would be rich, we hated him, and he hated us. When my father married again a few years ago, Judah made common cause with us in hating father because he saw Matilda's inheritance slipping away from him, going to father's new wife." Silas plucked nervously with thin fingers at the bed covers. "We hated father's wife most of all," he resumed after a minute. "She was a frail, pretty little thing; sickly, too. I guess she couldn't stand living here. I guess we made her life a living hell. Father was always a stubborn man. He should have taken her away, but he didn't. He was bound that she should be mistress of this house, that I and Matilda and her husband knuckle down to her. It used to make my brother Minton squirm, because father's new wife was in charge of the household finances and used to dole out his allowance to him. You see we were all dependent on father— Matilda and Glayden, Minton and I.

"Things got so bad in this house, that not even I could stand it. So I went away and lived in New York. Father came to see me there once. He came to tell me that his wife had died. He said that Matilda, Judah, and my brother Minton had killed her. I was never able to get out of him whether he meant that literally or not, but I still remember the way he looked when he said it. 'They want my money, he said, 'and you do, too. Well, they can fight for it when I'm gone, and if you want your share, you'd better go back there when I'm dead.' I did come back a year later, after father had died, but something had happened to me. I'd had a stroke, and Lombardy brought me here in a wheel chair." His eyes grew more clouded. "The Sneeds have always hated each other," he declared in a distant way, "and everybody that's ever come into the family. Strangely enough I could never hate father's second wife."

Kathleen stirred uncomfortably. "I must be going," she said.

Silas Sneed paid no attention to her. "My brother, Minton," he went on, "died a few months ago. He committed suicide. Lombardy will tell you that. Though there was a stupid policeman here, a Captain Toll, who thought that he was murdered. But the district attorney, Heinemann, took a more reasonable point of view." Silas laughed again softly. "The Sneeds are an old family," he said. "They still have some influence and a little money."

"I believe there's an early train," Kathleen ventured, "that I can just catch."

"Have I told you about Claude? Claude is a very interesting character." Silas Sneed's eyes flickered. The singsong quality in his thin voice made Kathleen shiver.

"I've got to go," she said, "I've got to."

He turned his head a little, so as to face her more fully.

"Of course," he said. "Your coming here was a waste of time in the first place. My brother-in-law's lawyer, Speck, sent you, didn't he? When Lombardy told me your name was Croydon, I saw it all right away. You see, I read the papers a great deal, having nothing much else to do, and I recognized you as the girl who had won the contest. And Judah thought you could solve the secret of father's will. You can't. Nobody can, unless— unless it's me." He braced himself on his elbows and managed to raise his head. A fanatical light came into his eyes. "I've got the first and third lines— the first and third lines!" For seconds Silas held himself so, tense, his thin face flushed with excitement, then he dropped back and in a weary tone added: "the second and fourth lines— "

Kathleen waited breathlessly, momentarily carried away by an unconscious excitement. She wanted him to go on. The puzzle of that will intrigued her. If he could tell her what the first and third lines meant, perhaps she could solve the meaning of the rest. It was odd how important, how momentous, the thing seemed just then, even to the point of making her forget that she wanted to get away from here and never wanted to see the place again.

"What does— " she began, then stopped.

"There's danger in this house," Silas whispered in an awesome tone. "Go away! Go away!"

Then it dawned on Kathleen why he had sent for her, why he had spoken to her so freely. He wanted to frighten her. He was afraid that she might solve the problem of old Abner Sneed's will and might give the solution to Judah Glayden.

Old Silas Sneed lay back on his pillows; his eyes were shut; his restless hands were still. The awful thought came to her that he had died right there before her eyes. Then she heard Doctor Lombardy's voice.

"He's asleep," Lombardy said suavely. "It tires him to think of that puzzle. He's got the first and third lines. Imagine that! Perhaps if you were to stay— "

He placed his hand lightly on her shoulder, but she shook it off with a feeling of revulsion. She picked up her bag and, without a word, went out of the door and down the hall.

On the floor below Kathleen made straight for the front door. She took hold of the knob, turned and pulled it quickly. The door wouldn't budge. It was locked, and there was no key in the lock. She couldn't for the moment grasp the idea that it had been locked on purpose, that she could possibly be held a prisoner here. She simply thought that it had been locked for the night and

nobody had as yet thought to open it. She turned a little irritably, just in time to see Judah Glayden coming toward her.

"Good morning," he said, trying to force his fat lips into a smile.

"The door is locked," Kathleen said. "Would you mind opening it, or having it opened? I'm leaving."

"I know it's locked," Judah said. "I'm surprised, Miss Croydon, that you would think of breaking our agreement— the agreement you. made with my lawyer, Mr. Speck— to stay here at least a week until that ingenious mind of yours has found the secret of my father's will. You've already been paid a hundred dollars."

"You can have it back," Kathleen said furiously.

Judah Glayden shook his head.

"I'd rather have you stay here," he declared doggedly, "and tackle the job for which you were hired."

Kathleen looked at him askance, as the meaning of her position slowly dawned on her. "You mean that you would forcibly detain me, keep me from leaving this house?"

"Certainly." Judah dropped all pretense of friendliness. A brutish look came into his purple, blotched face. His lips dropped back into their habitual sneer. "You're going to solve this thing," he snarled, "if I have to hammer it out of you."

The suitcase slipped out of Kathleen's hands and clattered to the floor. The clasp sprung open, the cover fell back, and Kathleen, looking down saw the revolver on top. She stooped down quickly, snatched it up and pointed the barrel at Judah.

"Open the door," she said through tight lips.

For a minute it looked as though Judah wouldn't budge. His great protruding eyes seemed to stick farther out of his head. His complexion grew more livid, then he relaxed and said:

"Very well, my dear, if you insist."He reached into his pocket and started for the door.

Kathleen turned, keeping her eyes on him, following him with the revolver— and then it happened. An excruciating stab of pain shot through her arm clear up to her shoulder. The revolver whirled into space. Disk had come up noiselessly behind her, had struck her sharply across the wrist with his fist.

"Very good, Disk," Judah said. He bent down and picked up the gun. "Much too large for a little girl like you, Miss Croydon," he declared, ence more genial. "And now if you will go into the dining room and have breakfast, we will forget all about this little unpleasantness, and afterward we will set to work."

In a daze, without actually realizing her position, Kathleen followed Disk to a room at the rear, where a place was set for her at a round table. The room had the same appearance of having been torn to pieces. Originally it had been

papered with grass cloth. Every inch of that had been stripped off. The floor boards had been torn up and replaced none too expertly. The mantel over the fireplace had been taken down. There was no doubt about it, the room had been subjected to a thorough search. Briefly, Kathleen's mind was diverted from her own plight by what she saw. Then she beheld bars on the windows and the position she was in came back to her. She wondered, too, why there should be bars on the windows. Surely they hadn't been put there just for her benefit. Were they put there to keep some one from getting in or some one from getting out? Her thoughts went back to the night before and Judah Glayden's reference to some one named Claude. Some one had turned Claude loose!

She scarcely noticed that Disk had placed food before her, yet she managed to choke down a few mouthfuls and drink the coffee beside her plate. Subconsciously, she noted that Disk never took his eyes off her every minute he was in the room. Once, he bent down to serve her and she could feel his hot breath on the back of her neck.

"Beg pardon, miss," Disk said, his pasty flat face expressionless. "I just happened to think that you and I could work together on this."

Kathleen stared at him frigidly, pretending not to understand.

"I know why you're here, Miss Croydon," Disk said. "Butlers overhear things. People get so used to them they forget that they are around, and they talk. If you were to find out where it's hidden and wouldn't tell anybody but me, I'd make it worth your while. Old Mr. Sneed didn't really play fair with me. He should have left me something outright. I was his friend. I looked out for his missus as best I could."

Kathleen rose, prepared to leave, but Disk barred the way.

"If any of the others get their hands on that money, I'll never see a penny of it. They're that sort— mean and selfish and greedy. Now you look like some one who can be trusted. We could go off together; we could be happy together with all that money. If we work it right, nobody would ever know that we found it."

Kathleen, white and shaky, her eyes blazing, stared at him. She lashed out and struck him across the cheek. Disk stepped back, his face a dirty-gray save for the marks that Kathleen's hand had left. He made an odd noise deep down in his throat and glared at her, his long, yellow teeth bared. She stepped past him and went out. He made no effort to detain her.

CHAPTER 4. THE HANDY MAN

SHE went along the hall to a partly open door. She heard the sounds of hammering. Without purpose, she pushed the door open and looked inside. It was the library. A young man was busy picking his way between piles of books that littered the floor; he was putting back bookcases that had been torn from

the walls, nailing back panels. He turned when he heard her come in and said "Hello" in a pleasant, friendly tone. It was like a breath of fresh air to see some one like that in this house. He had a frank, smiling good-looking face.

Kathleen said "Hello."

"You're new here, aren't you?" the young man said.

Kathleen nodded. :

"I've only been here a couple of months myself," he said.

"Are you a carpenter?"

The young man laughed. "Not exactly. I work about the place, doing odd jobs and things, trying to make enough money to finish my law course this fall. I'm a sort of a handy man. They pay good wages. Most people don't like to work here; seem to think Mr. Sneed and the Glaydens are kind of queer, People in town say there's been a murder here." He sobered for a moment. "I guess they are a bit queer," he said reflectively. "For one thing, they take this place apart faster than I could put it together."

The young man was eying her sharply. "Anything the matter?" he asked. "You looked sort of white and scared. Don't mind what I just told you." Inconsequentially, he added, "My name's Dick Snowden."

Kathleen said, "Could you— could you get me out of this place?"

He stared at her blankly, too amazed to take in the import of her words.

"What do you mean— could I get you out of this place?"

"The front door is locked," she said. "They won't let me go."

"But why not?" His amazement mounted. "What are you doing here anyway?"

For seconds she stood there considering before she decided to tell him. After all, what harm could it do? Everybody in the house seemed to know her mission here. When she had finished her story, Dick Snowden said:

"Well, I'll be damned." There was at first disbelief in his eyes, then anger, as he realized that she had told him the truth. "They've got a hell of a nerve," he said, "trying to hold you a prisoner— a girl like you." He looked thoughtful. "You say the butler has got a gun— your gun. And then there's Glayden to contend with and this Lombardy, if I try to get you out of here by force. But there's an easier way than that. When I get through here they won't stop me from going out. I sleep in the old coachman's house over on the left, and the minute I'm out of here T'I! hot-foot it down to town and get the police. There's an old codger down there, a fellow they call Captain Toll. He won't mind coming up 'here with a good excuse. He wasn't satisfied a few months back that Minton Sneed committed suicide. Don't you worry, you'll be safe enough until I get back with Captain Toll and his Cossacks."

He reached out and gave her hand a little squeeze, just a reassuring, boyish gesture, and she liked it.

Just then Judah Glayden came in. His round, popping eyes darted from one to the other, searchingly.

"Until further notice, Snowden," he said, "you'll take up your quarters in the house. There's a room in the attic you can use."

"All right, sir," Dick Snowden said. He gave Kathleen a quick, reassuring glance that told her not to worry; that he'd fix things somehow, even though Glayden had prevented him from carrying out his original plan.

"And now, Miss Croydon," Glayden said, "we'll get at that. little job you have undertaken. If there's anything I can tell you that might assist you z

"No, I'll do better if I work alone."

"Then perhaps you'd like to go back to your room?"

Kathleen, her mind working swiftly, said:

"No. I have an idea that it's something in connection with this room," she lied shamelessly. "This young man can help me. I may want some measurements made. I've got an idea." She paused, and then to convince Judah that she was keeping his secret, went close to him and whispered in his ear, "I think it's a formula— a mathematical formula."

Judah Glayden nodded.

"All right," he said, "I'll just make myself comfortable in this armchair and if you need any additional help— "

"I'd rather you wouldn't," she insisted. "You'll only distract me. It's complicated enough as it is. I won't mind this young man. I won't notice him. But with you, it's different. I can't have you sitting over me every minute, taking my mind off what I am doing."

Judah looked hesitant, and again divided a suspicious glance between Kathleen and Dick Snowden,

"All right," he said after a while. He started for the door and stopped. "You're here of your own free will, Miss Croydon, aren't you? You have a contract to do a certain job for me; a contract that's good for a week, haven't you?"

"Of course," Kathleen said.

Dick Snowden, who stood there trying to keep his expression wooden, grinned when the door closed behind Judah. s

"Nice work, kid," he whispered.

"But what good will it do us?"

Kathleen asked helplessly. It was funny how that "us" slipped out so unconsciously, so naturally.

"Don't worry," Dick Snowden said, "Tm full of ideas and I'll be around to-night in my stockinged feet. Don't forget I'm handy with tools. It won't be much of a trick for me to get those bars off one of the windows when it's dark, and no one's around to watch me." He stopped, struck by a sudden idea. "Say, suppose

you were to tell Glayden that you solved that little puzzle of old Abner Sneed's will, but that you won't give him the answer; that you'll only tell this lawyer who hired you, then they'd have to let you out of here. How's that for an idea?" he demanded with elation. Then his face fell. "I guess that wouldn't be so good. They'd probably try to force it out of you, and I guess they wouldn't be very pleasant about it."

"I guess they wouldn't," Kathleen agreed with a little shiver.

Dick Snowden picked up his hammer and started driving a few nails to give the impression that he was working, in the event that any one was listening. After a time, he put down the hammer and said:

"Let's see that slip the lawyer gave you. Might as well do that to pass the time as anything else. I used to be pretty good at puzzles."

Kathleen took the slip from her purse and passed it to him. He read it over a dozen times:

I men without me
The sailor's friend and one in every port
O' flight without light
As you seek I wish you no ill,

He frowned and scowled, then unexpectedly his face cleared, and he grinned at Kathleen.

"You say the old crippled boy upstairs told you he knew what the first and third lines meant? Well, so do I." He kept his voice low, but there was faint exultation in it.

"What do they mean?" Kathleen couldn't help showing a little chagrined.

"What's 'men' without 'me'?" Dick Snowden said. "Why it's nothing but an 'n? Look, I'll show you." He found a scrap of paper, a stub of a pencil and wrote the first line for her:

I (me)n without me

"Now you take that 'n' and put it together with the 'i' and you have 'in.' Perfectly simple," he bragged good-naturedly. "Now you take the third line: "O' flight without light."

"You don't have to tell me," said Kathleen. "I can see it now 'Flight' without 'light' is nothing but an 'f,' and you put it with the 'o' and you have 'of.' But what about the second and fourth lines?"

"There you've got me," Dick Snowden said ruefully. "What's a sailor's friend? It could be anything; tobacco, liquor, a star, a lighthouse. Gosh I don't know. 'One in every port,' of course means a girl. And as for the last line, that leaves

me absolutely stumped." He remained crestfallen for a few moments, until his natural high spirits reasserted themselves again, "Say, wouldn't it be great if we solved this thing, and Glayden really kept his word. Think of the fun we could have, or rather you could have, with a hundred thousand."

She smiled at him. "Half of it would be yours now," she declared. "You've already solved half the puzzle."

He started to shake his head, then grew unexpectedly rigid. The door opened softly. Judah Glayden stood there.

"So you've already solved half the puzzle," Judah said, his bulging eyes glowing. "How far have you got?"

"Never mind how far we've got," Dick snapped. "When we've solved the rest of it, we may tell you."

Judah walked slowly to where Kathleen stood. He seized her wrist and gave it a nasty wrench.

"How far have you got?" he demanded hoarsely.

Kathleen said nothing.

Judah twisted her arm more savagely. Kathleen winced, and despite herself a little cry escaped her.

"What have you found out?"

Dick Snowden looked at Kathleen. He saw the agony in her eyes and didn't waste a moment. His fist shot out, caught the shorter, bulky man flush on the jaw, sending him reeling, and making him release his grip on the girl.

"Disk," Judah screamed. "Disk! Help! Come here!"

The sliding doors at the far end of the room that opened into the dining room parted. The butler came in. Kathleen's gun was in his hand, the barrel pointed at Dick Snowden.

"Did you call, sir?" There was mocking deference in Disk's voice.

Judah, rubbing his marked jaw, said:

"They've solved half of the puzzle, Disk," and added irrelevantly, "He hit me."

Disk, his face unreadable, said: "Are you and I in on this together, Mr. Glayden?"

Judah Glayden hesitated only a minute. "Yes," he said, "you and I, Disk. It's ours, it's ours— if we get the secret out of them. Go around behind him, Disk. Let him have it if he makes a move."

The butler stepped back of Dick Snowden and poked the barrel of the gun hard between the latter's shoulder blades.

Kathleen thought she had never seen a more vicious expression on a man's face as the one that came into Judah's now. She knew what was coming and wasn't surprised when Judah, his bulging eyes gleaming, stepped up to Dick Snowden and struck him in the mouth with his clenched fist. Dick Snowden took it, smiling without mirth. He didn't dare move. There was that gun in his back.

Judah Glayden hit him again, and Dick Snowden kept on smiling. He didn't even bother to wipe off the drop of blood that trickled down from the corner of his mouth.

"What have you found out?" Judah growled.

Kathleen couldn't bear the sight of Dick Snowden standing there, taking Glayden's punishment without flinching.

"Don't," she said, "don't hit him again. I'll tell you; I'll tell you."

Dick Snowden, his voice brittle, said: "Don't tell anything, Miss Croydon."

Judah's fist crashed into Dick's face almost before the words were out. Dick Snowden reeled a little, and with the next blow he went down. Judah drew back his foot, but Kathleen stopped him.

"Don't, Mr. Glayden, don't! I'll tell you."

Her words came piteously fast. "The first line means 'in'; the third line 'of.'" She hastened to explain how Dick Snowden had arrived at that solution.

Dick Snowden, glaring up with hate from the floor at Judah, said bitterly:

"What'd you tell the fat slob for? If he ever gets the whole thing out of you, there's no telling what he'll do to you."

Kathleen looked miserable. She watched Dick Snowden's cheek swelling, the drops of blood oozing slowly from his lips. Suddenly she dropped down beside him and took a flimsy little handkerchief from her purse. She dabbed at the blood-flecked lips.

"You're hurt," she said.

Dick Snowden gazed up at her, an odd look in his eyes, then he grinned crookedly.

"Hell," he said, "he couldn't hurt me in a thousand years." He struggled to his feet and helped Kathleen up. He gave Judah a glance, then shifted his gaze to Disk. The butler was standing there like a figure of stone, the gun in his hand, ready.

"We'll take him upstairs," Judah said, "where he'll be safe. In the meantime, Miss Croydon, you might concentrate on your work. There are still a couple of lines in that message, that need elucidation. Come on," he said to Dick Snowden roughly, "let's get going."

CHAPTER 5. "HE'S DEAD."

FOR a time, Kathleen remained in the library alone. She was terribly frightened, and oddly enough more for Dick Snowden than for herself. Where had Judah and Disk taken him? What were they going to do to him? She tried to get her mind off of that by concentrating on the meaning of the two unsolved lines of the message on which Dick Snowden had made such an auspicious start, without making any headway. Around one o'clock she went upstairs to her

room. For some inexplicable reason she felt safer there. Some ten minutes later, Matilda Glayden came in.

"How much," Matilda asked, "has Judah promised you if you find the money? Whatever it is," Matilda said, her voice indescribably harsh, "I'll give you twice as much. You can't trust him, but you can trust me."

In a vague voice Kathleen, scarcely realizing what she said, protested, "He's your husband!"

"Yes, he's my husband," the woman retorted, "and he hates me; hates me on account of Claude; hates me the way my father hated me on account of Claude— as if it were my fault. And Judah beats him; he beats Claude for no reason at all, as if it were Claude's fault any more than mine."

"Who is Claude?" Kathleen asked.

The woman looked about her furtively.

"I wouldn't tell you, only you heard last night. I know you heard. Don't lie to me! Claude is my son."

"Where is he? Why do you keep him locked up?"

Matilda looked momentarily distrait, then a cunning expression flared up in her eyes.

"He's not here," she said. "We don't keep him locked up; nobody keeps him locked up." She wandered about the room in aimless circles, wringing her thin hands. Then she recovered herself. "I'll give you twice as much as Judah," she said; "three times as much. I'll have Disk bring up your lunch. It will be pleasanter for you to eat up here by yourself. But look out for Disk. Disk's a beast." And then she wandered out without another word.

Disk appeared later with a tray, but apparently Matilda's warning had been needless. He put the tray down without speaking and went out,

Kathleen ate some of the food and drank two cups of tea. She felt better after that, had a notion she might be able to cope with whatever turned up next. She went to the window and looked out. Between her and the chauffeur's house, she saw an old well. It meant nothing to her for the moment. Her mind reverted to the puzzle of the second and fourth lines; particularly the second. She couldn't get it out of her mind.

The sailor's friend and one in every port.

She kept thinking of it, her eyes on the well, then suddenly her hand went to her lips smothering an exclamation. Of course that was it! She had the answer. It was right there before her eyes. Incredibly simple now. Her mind went back to the dead Abner Sneed. He had made the puzzle just hard enough, but not too hard. He had probably wanted somebody in this strange house to solve it; might

even have hoped that they would solve it more or less simultaneously and then fight for the money.

Suddenly Kathleen felt very tired. She had had only a few hours sleep on the previous night, and now she went from the window to the bed and lay down, trying to solve the problem that confronted her. Before she knew it she had fallen asleep.

She awoke many hours later. The room was pitch-dark. She rose and groped for the switch. Eventually, she found it. Her hair was in disarray and she tried to straighten it out. She looked at her wrist watch and found that it was almost ten o'clock. For a moment she stood listening, struck by the fact that the house was once more enveloped in that unearthly stillness of the night before. She tried to tell herself that meant nothing; that the people in this house retired early; that if she shot the bolts on the door she would be perfectly secure and safe.

Then it happened. A strange, muffled shuffling out in the hall. She could almost visualize what was going on. Somebody was staggering -along outside. Somebody was clutching at the wall for support. For seconds the sound was drowned out by the pounding of her own heart, and for more seconds she tried to think of what to do. Eventually, she made for the door. Her hands were on the bolts, and she started to push them forward to lock herself in, but she found she couldn't do it. There was something out there, something terrible that she had to know. She just couldn't stay there cooped up in her room, waiting—waiting. Slowly, she opened the door and peered out. She saw Matilda Glayden standing with her back against the wall, her hands spread out. Swiftly,- Kathleen stepped out.

"What's the matter, Mrs. Glayden?"

"He's dead," Matilda said, "he's dead."

Kathleen took her by the shoulders and shook her.

"Who's dead?" she demanded.

Matilda turned bleak eyes on her.

"Why, Judah," she said, as though Kathleen had asked a silly question. "Judah's dead."

Kathleen couldn't stand any more. She rushed down the hall to Doctor Lombardy's room. She pounded frantically at the door, and when Doctor Lombardy, in a purple dressing gown came out, Kathleen tried to explain in incoherent words what had happened. He listened to her, his eyes dark and brooding, then stepped across the hall, opened the Glaydens's door and looked in. The light was on.

Judah Glayden lay on his bed, a scalpel thrust deep into his heart.

Kathleen found herself standing there, her nails digging into the palms of her hands. She could think of only one thing. With Glayden dead, Silas Sneed, crippled though he was, could help her get out of this house of horror. She

stepped swiftly across the hall, knocked twice on Silas Sneed's door, opened it, and stepped inside.

CHAPTER 6. CLAUDE

SILAS was awake. He turned "| his wasted face toward her, j' a look of inquiry in his eyes.

She shut the door behind her, and said in breathless haste:

"Your brother-in-law, Mr. Glayden, is dead. He's been stabbed."

Silas said nothing. Not a muscle in his face moved.

"I want to go away from here," Kathleen said. "I tried to go this morning, but Judah wouldn't let me. I'm locked in." It required a terrific effort for her to keep hysteria out of her voice. "There's a man here who works for you— a man named Snowden, and Glayden and the butler have locked him up somewhere in this house. Where are they keeping him prisoner? He helped me solve the puzzle of your father's will."

Silas Sneed raised himself on his elbows. A fierce light came into his eyes.

"You— you solved it?"

"Yes," she said, "yes. I'll tell you the answer, but you must tell me where Mr. Snowden is. You've got to fix it so we can get out of here. I'm afraid of Disk. I'm afraid of everything in this house, except perhaps you."

"Of course you needn't be afraid of me," Silas Sneed said. His eyes grew veiled. "I wanted you to go away in the first place, but I'm glad now you didn't. I knew you had solved the first and third lines. Lombardy overheard Disk and Glayden talking. I thought perhaps that by now you might have guessed at the rest, that you might have told Glayden. Glayden was a man not to be trusted. What is the answer?"

"Tell me where Dick Snowden is," she insisted. "Promise you will arrange it so that we can leave."

"Of course you may leave," Silas Sneed said. "As for your friend, Mr. Snowden, I'm fairly certain that you will find him up on the next floor. You will see three doors up there, doors to just ordinary rooms. The hall is panelled. The third panel to the left of the first door is a door, too. Nobody would ever know it; nobody would ever suspect that behind that panel there is another very small room, not an ordinary room at all. My father had it built years ago when it became obvious that Claude would never be cured, that Claude would always be a menace."

"How do you get in?"

"In the lower right-hand corner of the panel there is a tiny hole. If you search under the carpet in front of the panel you will discover a nail. Insert that into the hole and press down. It operates a little electric switch that opens the door. You

needn't be afraid of Claude. He won't hurt you. There are some people he would hurt, but not you. If I'm not mistaken, you will find your friend there. It's the only place in the house where he could be safely hidden. And now tell me the secret of my father's will."

Kathleen started to speak, but he stopped her.

"Bend down and whisper in my ear. You can never tell in this house but some one is listening."

Kathleen humored him. She bent over the bed, and in a scarcely audible tone told him what she had discovered. She straightened up and found Silas Sneed looking past her strangely. Instinctively, she realized why. Some one was standing behind her. She swung around and discovered Doctor Lombardy there. She started to pass him, but he stopped her, closed the door, and stood with his back to her.

"Judah's dead," Lombardy said to Silas.

"Another suicide," said Silas in a flat, calm tone.

Doctor Lombardy shook his head morosely. "We'll have to notify the police."

"Yes, of course," Silas Sneed agreed.

"Let me out," Kathleen said, "I'm leaving."

Doctor Lombardy paid no attention to her,

"What about her?" he asked of Silas. "She knows too much. When that precious brother-in-law of yours and the butler discovered that she had partly solved the will they lost their heads. We can't let the police talk to her, and we can't let her go until she's finished her job. She can do it, too."

"I have done it," Kathleen burst out. "I just told Mr. Sneed the secret of it."

"So," Lombardy said slowly, "so she's told you! You didn't have in mind to double cross me, Sneed, did you?"

"No, Lombardy, of course not," Sneed said, scowling. "She only told me this minute."

"Perhaps," he said in a tone full of meaning, "it will be possible for me to convince the police that this is another suicide. We ought to be able to do something with that district attorney, Heinemann, especially now that we have some real money. What'll we do with this girl?"

"Nothing," Silas said gently. "We will, in due course, reward her for what she's accomplished. She's free to go, taking Mr. Snowden— who it seems has been locked up by Judah and Disk— with her. I've told her where she can find him." Silas lifted his eyes toward the ceiling.

"I see," said Doctor Lombardy, "I see." He stepped away from the door and turned to Kathleen, "You'd better hurry while Disk is still downstairs. We might have trouble with Disk."

He held the door for her, and Kathleen hurried out.

She went swiftly down the hall and mounted to the floor above. The three doors that Silas had mentioned were before her. She counted the panels, knelt down in front of the third one to the left of the first door, groped along the edge of a faded carpet and discovered the nail. She had little trouble in locating the tiny hole in the lower right corner of the panel. Her pulses throbbing, she listened intently but heard nothing. Then she inserted the nail and pressed down hard. The panel slipped to one side smoothly.

She rose and looked into a small, poorly-lighted room. There was a bed in the middle of it. Almost instantly, she made out the figure of Dick Snowden bound hand and foot lying there; then she made out something else; something that froze the blood in her veins, yet led her to spring quickly into the room. A tiny figure was sitting on the edge of the bed. It was a man, yet not a man, but a misshapen dwarf, with a short, broad torso, long arms and the spindliest of legs. In a vague way he suggested Matilda, and Silas Sneed, too, what with his long, matted hair and sharp features. He sat there looking down at Dick Snowden, a weird, gloating expression on his face. His right hand was upraised, holding a little knife— a surgeon's scalpel. He was giggling softly. Kathleen screamed. The dwarf turned his head. For seconds he stared at Kathleen. Then he got off the bed and waddled toward her, a puzzled look in his eyes.

"How do you do?" he said in an unbelievably squeaky voice.

Kathleen, her eyes riveted on that gleaming thin knife, turned instinctively to the door, just in time to see it slide shut.

CHAPTER 7. THE PANEL SLIDES BACK.

KATHLEEN, her back against the wall, was staring wide-eyed at Claude. He seemed to take her in with a sort of childlike curiosity.

"Who are you?" he asked. "You're not grandfather's wife. She died a long time ago. She was kinder to me than my mother. "You don't think I'm mad, do you?" he asked in an anxious tone. "Everybody thinks I'm mad except Uncle Silas. He understands me and he doesn't mind my being small and deformed. You see, I understand everything. I know that I'm a cripple, so I can't be mad, can I?"

"No, of course not," Kathleen said hastily. She wondered what she would do if he sprang at her with that knife; wondered if physically she would be a match for him, and had her doubts, despite her advantage in height.

"I'm very strong," he said, almost as if in answer to her thoughts, "and I know how to handle a knife. I never miss. Sometimes I get a chance to go about the house. I like that. This room is so small. I had a chance a few days ago, or maybe it was weeks. It's hard for me to tell the time in this room. You see, it has no windows. I can't tell night from day. But Judah caught me and beat me. I

suppose if I were really mad I wouldn't mind being beaten, and if I were bigger I wouldn't need a knife like this. I could beat people back with sticks or my fists."

Kathleen said, "I don't like people being beaten."

"Do you like knives?" Claude asked, tense interest in his voice. "I have quite a few knives like this. My uncle Silas gave them to me. These are very fine knives, very ` sharp; they go in so easily. Shall I show you where the others are hidden? My uncle Judah, the other night after he beat me, searched the room, but he couldn't find them."

Kathleen, her throat so constricted that she could scarcely speak, managed to say, "No."

She glanced at the bed where Dick Snowden lay. She could see that he was trying to free himself quietly from his bonds. With his eyes he was encouraging her to keep talking to this monstrous little madman. Her glance traveled about the tiny windowless room, and for the first time she noticed that it was padded along the entire walls right up to some small vents along the ceiling, which evidently furnished what air there was. She noticed that the floor was thickly carpeted. Everything had been done to make the room soundproof. There was a single light set flush with the ceiling.

"How do you manage to get out when you want to?" she asked, to make conversation.

"I can't get out when I want to," he said. "Somebody has to let me out. It's a secret. I had to promise not to tell. You see that man?" he said over his shoulder. "They pushed him in here— I think it was yesterday— and I helped him onto the bed. At first I thought of cutting the ropes, because I'm really very kind, but then I thought that perhaps he was an enemy of my uncle Silas, so I helped him onto the bed. You see, I'm not very tall, and the bed is just the right height." He made a downward, jabbing motion with his knife, and Kathleen had all she could do to keep from screaming.

"He's not an enemy of your uncle Silas's," she said desperately. "He's a friend; a very good friend of his."

"Oh," Claude said, "then I must set him free." He made for the bed, his spindly legs giving him a funny rolling motion.

Kathleen saw him put the blade of his knife to the ropes that held Dick Snowden's wrists, but before he'd severed a single strand, he changed his mind. He turned and regarded her suspiciously.

"Perhaps you're not telling me the truth," he said shrilly. "It may be only a trick. You think you can fool Claude, but Claude is not easily fooled."

"I am telling you the truth," said Kathleen steadily, "and I'm a friend of your uncle Silas's, too. Has he ever told you about the money hidden on this place by your grandfather? I've come to help him find it. He probably wants the money so that he can take you away to travel."

The dwarfed madman came away from the bed and confronted her, his sharp features alive with interest.

"Money on this place? Tell me about that!"

Kathleen told him at great length, spinning it out as long as she could, hoping against hope that either Dick Snowden would be able to free himself or that help in some form would arrive. When she had finished, and it was plain that Claude, his interest satisfied, had some notion of going back to the bed, Dick Snowden called:

"Tell him about the places his uncle is going to take him."

Kathleen began to talk about Italy. She had never been there, but she had read a great deal and drew, for the rest, on her imagination. Claude listened enthralled. And when she had finished with Italy, she went to France, to England, to Norway, and ultimately to the Orient. Hours and hours went by. It seemed to her that if she had to keep this up much longer she would go mad. She felt like Scheherazade in the "Arabian Nights," spinning one tale after another, trying to stave off an inevitable fate. She looked at her wrist watch. It was after five! Five in the morning! She could scarcely believe that she had been on her feet all these hours, talking to the dwarfed madman, yet she had.

Suddenly she heard a faint sound behind her, wheeled about and saw the panel sliding back a foot or so. She heard a low whistle. Claude made for the opening. She was there ahead of him and tried to squeeze through. A hand from without struck her savagely in the face, sending her reeling back. Again that low whistle and before she could regain her balance, Claude, like some fantastic little animal, had scuffled past her through the opening, and the panel slid shut.

CHAPTER 8. A CAN OF VARNISH.

SUMMONED by Doctor Lombardy, Captain Toll had arrived shortly after midnight, and District Attorney Heinemann had come with him.

Stalking up and down the library Captain Toll stormed: "This is a hell of a case and a hell of a house. It looks as though a wrecking crew had been through it."

"Probably something wrong with the plumbing," District Attorney Heinemann said.

"I suppose this is another suicide," "Beak" Toll growled.

"It looks very much like it to me," said Heinemann. "You see, these people here are a little queer. I'm perfectly willing to admit that. To me it looks as though Doctor Lombardy was right. Glayden had been brooding over something for months, and, when whatever it was that worried him got too much for him, he decided to do away with himself. He committed suicide the same way that

his brother-in-law, Minton Sneed, had done. Mental suggestion, you know. The sort of thing that happens every day."

Toll stopped his pacing and glared at the district attorney. The brazen effrontery of the man left him speechless.

"Glayden died in the same room that Minton did," he declared finally. "When Minton died that room was bolted top and bottom and that, I admit, made it look like suicide in away. Glayden's wife, Matilda, who slept in the bed next to Judah's, now says that when her husband died, the door was bolted, too, and I believe she's telling the truth. But she's lying when she says she, too, thinks her husband committed suicide. She knows better. I don't think she did it herself, but I think she knows who did it and knows how that person got in and out of the room, The funny thing is that I've got a notion there's somebody else in this house besides the people I've talked to, and yet I can't find them. Me and my men have been through every room."

"A ghost, maybe," Heinemann suggested sarcastically.

Beak Toll grunted.

"The butler, Lombardy, Matilda, and the crippled Silas Sneed; they're all there are in this house. None of 'em have anything to say, but every one of them is worried. I wonder why," he muttered. He paused and looked with disfavor at the district attorney. He knew perfectly well why Heinemann had

come along at this late hour. Heinemann was troubled about this second death, feared that something might be discovered that would show he had been wrong in the case of Minton Sneed.

"Why don't you go on home," Beak Toll growled, "and let me handle this in my own way?"

Heinemann's face took on a more pinched look, then he said, "All right," and strode out.

Beak Toll watched him go then he ambled about the house. He wandered into Silas Sneed's room. It was in darkness, and Silas Sneed appeared to be asleep, so Beak Toll tiptoed out. He found Doctor Lombardy across the hall, seated in an armchair beneath a reading lamp, smoking a long, thin cigarette.

"I've sent my men back to headquarters, and I'm planning to spend the rest of the night here."

Doctor Lombardy, blowing clouds of smoke to the ceiling, shrugged.

"Mrs, Glayden doesn't seem to be any too upset over her husband's death," Beak Toll ventured.

"Perhaps she didn't like him," said Doctor Lombardy coolly.

Beak Toll went out and found Matilda. She said he could have a room, and led the way to the same room that Kathleen had occupied two nights before. She asked him to wait in the hall while she went inside to see if the room was in order. She was back again in a few minutes and told him he could go in. Beak

Toll thanked her, and sank down in the creaking rocker. For a time he swayed to and fro, then he straightened up and sniffed. There was just the faintest trace of perfume in the air. He got up and walked to the dressing table. There were traces of powder below the mirror. Some woman had occupied the room recently, and it wasn't Matilda. Matilda wasn't given to perfume and powder. Beak Toll hastily pulled open the bureau drawers and found them empty. He opened the closet door. This, too, was empty except that far in the back he found a small traveling bag. He opened it. It was packed. The lacy things, the smart pajamas, couldn't have belonged to Matilda, either.

A bag packed for traveling! It required some explanation.

Beak Toll made his way down to the library. He found Disk there.

Disk was rummaging through the books. He had a notion that Kathleen had partially discovered the secret of Abner Sneed's will in one of the books. Beak Toll growled:

"What are you doing here?"

"Nothing, sir. Just straightening things up a little."

"Well, go on to bed," Captain Toll said.

"Yes, sir." Then he hesitated. "If you're staying the night, captain, you might— you might sort of keep an eye on Doctor Lombardy."

Toll eyed him for a long time.

"Why?" he demanded eventually. "What's the matter with you? You look scared to death."

"I am a little frightened. The knife with which Mr. Glayden was killed was a surgeon's knife. Mr. Minton Sneed was supposed to have committed suicide with the same kind of a knife. Those knives belonged to Doctor Lombardy."

"He admits it," said Beak Toll. "He says somebody stole them from him."

"Doctor Lombardy keeps his instrument case in his room, sir, and he keeps his room locked."

"Go on to bed," Beak Toll snapped.

Alone, Toll looked about the library. Disk had lied when he said that he was straightening things up; Toll was sure of that. What had he

been looking for? After fifteen minutes search, Toll hadn't come on anything. He did discover an open can of varnish which Dick Snowden had used to touch up his handiwork whenever he had replaced a bookcase. Toll sniffed at the can. He started out; then he had an inspiration and came back. He picked up the can of varnish and the brush. Looking furtively up and down the hall, and finding it deserted, he sneaked up to his room unobserved.

Scarcely had the door closed behind Beak Toll, when Doctor Lombardy crossed the hall into Silas Sneed's room. He switched on the lights. Silas Sneed seemed to be sleeping, but that didn't trouble Doctor Lombardy. He shook him roughly by the shoulder and Silas Sneed opened his eyes.

"What did the girl find out? What did she tell you about the will? Where's the stuff hidden?" Lombardy demanded.

"That doesn't concern you," Silas Sneed said. "I made an agreement with you and Ill keep it. You'll be paid."

"I happen to think that it does concern me," said Lombardy.

Sneed turned his head away so that Lombardy couldn't see the hatred in his face.

"That policeman, Captain Toll, is staying in the house to-night. Maybe I better go and have a chat with him. He might like to know what I know," Doctor Lombardy continued ominously.

"I'll tell you to-morrow, Lombardy. I'll have to think out a way to protect myself first," Silas said.

"Protect yourself from what?"

"From you," said the man in the bed. "You see, you might not be satisfied with the share we agreed upon in the beginning. You might take it into your head to blackmail me. You might even go so far as to want all of it, or at least most of it."

"Don't be a fool, Sneed," Lombardy said. "If you want to think it over until to-morrow, it's all right with me."

"Matilda was in here a few minutes ago," Silas said slowly. : "She doesn't like the idea of sleeping in the room where her husband was killed."

Lombardy's eyes narrowed.

"Why not? The police have taken Judah's body away."

"It is the only room available in the house," Silas Sneed went on, "now that Toll is staying here. The others are all torn up." His voice was amazingly steady. His eyes were vacant. "I was wondering if you would mind changing with her for the night?"

Doctor Lombardy jerked his body upright, his eyes narrowed. He looked thoughtfully into space.

"I think that would be all right," he agreed slowly. He reached into his hip pocket and brought out a short, flat automatic. He examined the safety catch with some ostentation. After that he slipped the gun back into his pocket. "I'm a very light sleeper," he announced, "and I haven't forgotten that not only did Judah die in that room, but Minton Sneed died there, too."

He went out and found Matilda standing in front of his door. Her face was leaden, her eyes inquiring.

"You can have my room," Lombardy said, eying her curiously.

CHAPTER 9. BEAK TOLL'S SCHEME.

BEAK TOLL waited three quarters of an hour. Then he peered out of his room. He judged that by now everyone had retired and was asleep. He picked up the can of varnish and the brush. Walking noiselessly, he stepped out into the hall. The first door he came to was Silas Sneed's. Beak Toll bent down, dipped the brush in the can and sloshed varnish in front of the door. He went on to the next. He painted the floor in front of all the doors, even though he knew that the rooms behind weren't occupied, their interiors were literally gutted. Up the stairs, he walked on tiptoe to where he knew Disk's room was. He painted the floor here, too, and the floor in front of the other two doors. His task completed, he made his way back silently to his room.

If anybody moved in that house this night, they'd leave a trail of varnish he couldn't miss. If there was some one hidden in that house who went into one of those rooms and out again, he, Beak Toll, would know it in the morning.

With the door to his room slightly ajar, he sat down in an armchair, listening intently, but before he knew it he had fallen asleep.

A short time later he awoke with a start. He could almost swear that he had heard the sound of running feet. Shaking his head to clear his brain, he stepped out and listened. Down the hall he thought he heard some one moaning. He moved forward quickly. The moaning sound came from the Glaydens's room. Beak came to an abrupt stop in front of the door, his mouth open, his long chin hanging down. The door was open, or rather the lower left-hand panel was open. So that's how people got in and out of that room, even though it was bolted! That panel constituted a miniature door, not detectable when closed. Yet when Beak Toll got onto his hands and knees and tried to crawl through, he found the opening not nearly large enough. It wouldn't even have been big enough for a smaller man. Captain Toll swore and looked nonplussed. He stuck his head through and looked around. The room was in darkness, and he couldn't make out anything.

"Mrs. Glayden," he called, "are you hurt? Can you open the door?"

Only that same soft moan answered him.

Toll reached in with his long arm. His hand came in contact with the lower bolt. He pulled it back. He rose quickly, then threw himself against the door. It took three assaults. before it gave, and he went spinning into the room. He groped about, found the switch, and flooded the room with light. But it wasn't Matilda he saw sitting in a chair. It was Doctor Lombardy. Lombardy's gun lay at his feet. He was holding one hand to his chest. Blood was trickling between his fingers. In his other hand he held a scalpel, the blade stained red.

"What happened?" Beak Toll said.

"I'm all right," Lombardy gasped.

Toll heard a gasping sound behind him and spun around, Matilda stood there clothed in a faded wrapper, taking in the scene with bleak eyes.

"Phone for a doctor,' Toll snapped. "Quick!"

Matilda, walking like one in a trance, wandered off, and Toll turned back to the wounded man.

"Who did it? Do you know?"

"Claude," said Doctor Lombardy.

"Who's Claude?"

"Never mind. There's not time. Besides it was really Silas."

"Let me help you onto the bed," Toll said.

Doctor Lombardy shook his head. "I'm all right," he said stubbornly. "There's something I want to do."

Beak Toll was in a quandary. If—

Lombardy wouldn't let him do any thing for him, he couldn't use force, might get away. He dashed out of and in the meantime the murderer the room. Of course it was nonsense for Lombardy to say that Silas had stabbed him; still he better make sure. He yanked open Silas Sneed's door. The man was there in bed, his eyes shut, breathing lightly. Beak Toll got down on all fours and sniffed the carpet in front of Silas's room. The odor of varnish on the carpet was unmistakable, and the trail led directly from Silas Sneed's room to the room in which Lombardy had been stabbed. Strangely enough, it didn't stop there, but went on. Beak Toll, a grotesque figure, crawling on his hands and knees, his long nose almost rubbing the carpet, followed it to the stairs. Here the trail divided. Beak could sniff it on the first few steps going up and the first few steps going down. He was utterly bewildered. Whoever had stepped in that varnish couldn't have gone both ways. Of course, he might first have gone up and then down, or vice versa. Beak decided to follow the scent down as the most logical course. His quarry unquestionably, in trying to escape, would go down. Beak was right about that. The smell of varnish persisted right to the front door. But the stone steps outside hadn't taken the varnish, or else by the time the killer had gotten there the stuff had rubbed off.

Beak Toll beat the hedges, looked up into trees, searched behind the well, and eventually reached the chauffeur's house. The door was open, and he went through every room and discovered nothing. Discouraged, he started back toward the house.

While Captain Toll was busy searching the grounds, Doctor Lombardy, with a superhuman effort set about to do the thing he wanted to do. He pressed his left hand hard over his wound, bent down and picked up his gun, with his right. There was a fixed look in his eyes as he staggered out across the hall, each step incredibly painful. With his bloody hand he took hold of the knob on Silas's door. Lombardy turned it gently and swung the door back. The room was in darkness, but he knew where the bed was. Within a foot or so, he raised his gun,

"Sneed," Doctor Lombardy said softly, "Sneed, it's me— Lombardy! I'm here standing over you. You're going to die with a body full of slugs. Even so, it won't be as bad as a knife in your lungs."

He got no further. Something landed hard on the back of his head; something that sent him reeling crazily until he crashed to the floor.

Silas Sneed, hidden behind the door stepped out and put down the heavy brass candlestick with a low chuckle. Stripping off the long, old-fashioned nightgown he was wearing and disclosed himself fully dressed underneath. He stepped out in the hall, listened, and heard Matilda telephoning downstairs. Matilda would certainly scream or perhaps faint if she saw him come walking toward her; Matilda, who for years had only thought of him as a bedridden paralytic. She might rouse Disk, and there was a policeman in the house, too. And yet he must hide somewhere; hide and bide his time.

Gingerly, Silas made his way downstairs, stopping every now and then to look over the banister for a sign of Matilda or Disk. And then somewhere in that house there was Claude. For months and months Silas had thought over this whole business, and it had never been part of his plan that Claude should be roaming about the house at a moment like this. Claude ought to be back in that little room, but Silas hadn't dared run the risk of putting him there, with that policeman in the house ready to pop out at any minute. So Claude had to be left to his own devices. Anyway he doubted whether he would have done more to Claude than just leave him in the little room. He probably wouldn't have done away with Claude the way he had planned. That really had been Lombardy's idea. A very ingenious man, Lombardy. Too bad that he wasn't the sort that could be trusted.

Silas got to the foot of the stairs. Without a sound, he opened the door to the cellar and went down into the darkness.

CHAPTER 10. SOLID STEEL!

THE instant that Claude slipped out of the little room and the panel slid shut, Kathleen went to Dick Snowden. She struggled with the knots that fettered Dick Snowden's hands, but finally managed to get them loose at the expense of a few broken finger nails. Dick Snowden's wrists were raw, bleeding, as a result of his own efforts to liberate himself.

"Your poor wrists," she said.

He gave her a quick glance and grinned. "It's nothing."

He was busy with the cords about his ankles. Eventually he was able to get up. He stretched himself, flexed his arms and knees, trying to take the stiffness out of them.

"This Claude is a nice little fellow. He loves knives. What brought you here?"

Kathleen explained.

"So you thought you wouldn't leave this fire trap without seeing that I got out of here, too? What made you do that?" Dick Snowden asked curiously.

Kathleen looked momentarily confused.

"It seemed the thing to do," she said. "I wonder who let Claude out. Was it Matilda, Disk, or perhaps Doctor Lombardy? And why did some one let him out?"

Dick Snowden looked solemn.

"The question is who is going to let us out?"

Kathleen started. "Suppose nobody ever does? Suppose they never come back? We'd— we'd starve, Dick."

He came over to her, took hold of her shoulders and looked soberly into her face.

"I've never worried much about dying before," he declared. "I was always sort of fatalistic about it, but now— now, just when I've found you— " He dropped his hands and turned away. Then his voice took on a lighter note. "I guess we'll get out of this somehow."

Even as he spoke, he was on his knees at the panel, tearing away the padding. He had cleared away a foot or so when he stopped, a look of bitter disappointment on his face. "Steel," he said, "it's solid steel."

"Never mind," Kathleen said, "they're bound to bring Claude back here. We'll be ready for them, and we won't let the panel slide shut this time."

"I'm not so sure," Dick Snowden said. "I've a feeling I ought to do something to get us out of here."

He stepped back from the panel six feet, then threw his weight against it. The panel didn't even quiver. Then he faced about suddenly and sniffed. A drawn look came into his face. "Do you smell something?" Kathleen paled.

"Yes," she said, "yes. I think— I think it's gas." They stared with frightened faces toward the ceiling where the little air vents were.

"Listen," said Dick.

Faintly, ever so faintly, they could make out a soft, hissing sound: the whisper of the gas coming into the room. He let go of her and stepped up onto the bar of the bed, but even from there he couldn't reach the ceiling. The head of the bed was made of rounded brass and he couldn't climb that. He stepped down and went to where Kathleen stood; his face was dead-white.

"I guess it won't be long now," he said.

Kathleen was already beginning to feel dizzy. In a vague, confused way she had a notion that there was something she wanted to do, something she wanted to do very much. She swayed a little toward him, and when he caught her in his arms, she remembered what it was, and pressed her lips against his. Dick Snowden picked her up and placed her gently on the mattress. They

couldn't die now; they couldn't. He wouldn't let it happen. He took out his handkerchief, tied it across his nose and mouth and feverishly went to work on a bolt that he had already loosened in a bar on the bed. He had it out before it was necessary to take a single breath. He yanked the bar loose and, using it like a battering-ram, banged savagely at the panel. He didn't remember how often he struck— perhaps a dozen times— before the bar slipped from his nerveless fingers. He tried desperately to pick it up, but reeled and sank to his knees.

CHAPTER 11. THE WELL.

BEAK TOLL went back to the house. He passed Matilda in the hall.

"They're sending an ambulance," she said dully.

Beak Toll said nothing, but went upstairs three at a time to the third floor, stopping near the top to sniff the stair carpet. No doubt about it. It smelled of varnish. He crawled along the floor feeling like an idiot, but grimly determined. The trail of varnish led past the first door and ended abruptly at a panel. Beak Toll looked baffled. Why in the world should anybody walk smack up to a panel— a blank wall, so to speak— and go no farther? He got up and brushed off his knees.

Just then he heard the door to Disk's room open. The butler stood there. He looked frightened, and there was a huge gun in his hand.

Toll walked up to him and took the gun away. He shoved the butler in front of him to the panel.

"What's behind that?" Beak Toll demanded.

Disk avoided his gaze.

"Nothing, sir."

Beak Toll clipped him on the chin with his fist sending Disk's head back against the wall.

"What's back of that panel?"

"Nothing " Disk began.

Faint sounds of banging came from behind the panel. Not even its soundproof qualities could entirely deaden the crashing blows of that iron bar that Dick Snowden was wielding within.

Captain Toll knocked Disk down to make sure of getting an answer to his next question.

"How does it open?" he roared.

Disk got on one knee, looked up in terror at the captain. He had helped lock Dick Snowden into that room. He wondered what would happen to him once that young man got out, although he had no idea that Kathleen was inside, too. And as for Claude— well, he might be in there, and then again he might not. Claude had been known to get out.

The pounding behind the panel suddenly ceased, and Disk thought for a moment of brazening it out, but the look on the captain's face caused Disk to change his mind. He fumbled hastily under the carpet, found the nail and inserted it in the tiny hole in the panel.

"You press down on this and it slides back," he said sullenly. "It stays open as long as you keep your finger on the nail."

"Push," said Beak Toll.

The butler pressed down on the head of the nail. The panel slid back.

Beak Toll stuck his head in, then ducked back as the overwhelming odor of gas struck him in the face. Still he had seen enough. He had seen two bodies lying on the floor. He didn't dare go in to get them for fear that Disk would lock him in. He jerked the butler to one side by the collar and stooped down himself to press the nail down.

"Get in there," he said. "There are two people on the floor. Drag them out and be quick about it. The room is full of gas."

Disk, holding his breath, went inside. He brought Kathleen out first, then Dick Snowden. Toll let go of the nail. The panel closed.

"What in hell is this," Beak bellowed, waving his fists

He bent down over the two inert figures and ascertained that there was still life in them. Just then the wail of the ambulance siren came to his ears. He ordered Disk to go down and bring the doctor up to the third floor; told him to tell the doctor to bring his pulmotor with him. Toll tried to open the window. It was stuck, and he kicked out the panes with the heel of his boot. The doctor appeared in a minute.

"See what you can do with them," ordered Toll. "When you're through, come down to the floor below. There's a guy that's been stabbed down there. I should have sent for a dozen ambulances."

He clumped hastily downstairs and went into the room where he had left Lombardy. The latter wasn't there. He looked in the room that Matilda had used. It was empty. He went to Silas Sneed's room, and there he found Lombardy lying face down in the far corner. There was an ugly gash at the back of Lombardy's head. Lombardy's right arm was stretched out and his hand was in a hole in the floor where a little trapdoor had been opened. Lombardy's hand was tightly clutched about the wheel of a valve concealed in the floor.

Beak Toll pried the hand loose and turned Lombardy over. The captain knelt down and placed his ear close to Lombardy's mouth.

"Never— never mind— Claude," Lombardy whispered. "I got him. You get Silas— Silas murdered— "

Lombardy was dead.

Toll turned to the bed. He had forgotten in the excitement all about Silas Sneed, and when he found the bed empty and Silas Sneed gone, Toll sank limply into a chair.

Beak Toll had the ominous premonition that he would stumble on Silas in some obscure corner and that he would be dead. A nice story for the papers; two murders in the house while Captain Toll was there: maybe four, if those two upstairs were not brought around. Wearily, Beak Toll got to his feet.

He spent the next ten minutes going through every room and every closet in the house. He even went through the cellar, but found no one there. He wound up on the third floor just as the doctor, with the aid of Disk, was about to help Kathleen and Dick Snowden downstairs.

"When can I talk to them?" Beak Toll asked.

"Haven't you any feeling?" the doctor said. He glanced at the girl whose limp body he was holding upright. Her face was still bluish.

Beak Toll said, "No. When can I talk to them?"

"In about an hour," the doctor snapped.

Beak Toll told the doctor to take his patients to the room with the broken-down door. There were two beds in there. He watched them going down with gloomy eyes. He went through Disk's room after that, and through the two other rooms that were empty. Then he went to the library, telephoned the police station, told the man at the desk to send up all the men he could round up at this ungodly hour.

He found Matilda crouched by the stove in the kitchen rocking to and fro. He asked her to make him some coffee, then he went back into the library. There was nothing to do but wait for his men to come. He couldn't, single-handed, surround the house.

He sat down for a minute, then sprang up as though a bee had stung him, and dashed upstairs. Some one had tried to kill those two people in that concealed room. The murderer might still be in the house. Perhaps there were other panels in this damn place behind which people could hide. Those two youngsters who had been gassed were still in danger, if that were so. What an idiot he was to leave them alone.

He heaved a sigh of relief when he found them unharmed in the Glaydens's room,

Kathleen was on the bed nearest the window. She looked with frightened eyes at Captain Toll.

"Its all right," he assured her with gruff kindness. "I'm Captain Toll of the police. I don't suppose you want to talk?" he added.

She shook her head.

"You couldn't even just tell me if you know of some place in this house where a man could hide! Where Silas Sneed might be?"

He saw her eyes widen, saw the struggle in them as she tried to comprehend. But she said nothing; her head settled more deeply on the pillow, her eyes closed.

Beak Toll turned his back on her and stared morosely out of the window at the first signs of breaking dawn, He heard a murmur from the girl on the bed behind him, and turned. Her eyes were still closed. She was talking in her sleep. Beak Toil bent down and listened. "In windlass of well," he thought she was saying. It didn't make sense and he turned back to the window, looked toward the distant road beyond the coachman's house for a sign of the squad car with his men, so that he could get to work.

The doctor came in. "There is nothing I can do for that stiff in the room across the hall."

"Yeah, I know," said Toll, still looking out of the window. Then his whole body stiffened.

Outside, he saw a man creeping along the, hedge, a shadowy form making his way slowly, carefully. Not fifty feet from where the man came to a stop, there was a well, A well! Was there some significance after all in what that girl had said in her sleep? "*In windlass of well*." Beak Toll dashed for the door. On his way out he shouted to the doctor:

"Stay here and watch these two."

It took him only seconds to negotiate the stairs and get the front door open. He stepped out cautiously, inched his way along the house to the corner. Beak Toll waited. He wanted to see what was going to happen, and when he saw he could scarcely believe what was taking place.

The man had gone straight up to the well, but in a curious, furtive way. He was too far away to make out his features, but there was no doubt in Toll's mind that it was Silas Sneed. He saw Silas climb up on the wooden enclosure that surrounded the well. For the first time Toll noticed that Silas was carrying some tools, a hammer, and what looked like a chisel. What in the world was the man planning to do?

Beak Toll, taking advantage of the shadow of the hedge, even as Silas had done, crept forward. He had made about half the distance when he was stopped short by a weird cry that rang out with an eerie sound in the gray dawn.

"Uncle Silas! Uncle Silas!"

CHAPTER 12. THE SECRET OF THE WILL.

FOR a moment Beak Toll thought that he was going mad. That cry seemed to come from the very depths of the well. He saw Silas on his precarious perch swaying, holding onto one of the uprights that supported the windlass. Then he saw him bend forward and look down.

Again that shrill cry, "Uncle Silas!"

Silas Sneed straightened up and began fumbling with the looped strap that held the windlass crank in place. Beak Toll thought he understood what Silas was trying to do. There was some one suspended in the bucket that hung in the well. Silas was going to pull him up by winding more rope onto the windlass. Beak started forward, but he hadn't taken more than two steps when he wheeled at a sound. Matilda, screaming, dashed past him.

"You beast, you beast!" she cried. "You're going to drown him!" Silas was still fumbling with the strap. He got the crank loose and, just as Matilda reached it, he let it go. The crank spun like mad as the rope unwound itself. A fearful shriek came from the well.

Toll had never covered ground so fast before. Even so, he didn't get there in time to stop Silas from kicking Matilda in the face. Matilda had been clawing his legs trying to pull him down. She had been trying to get her hands on the crank. Matilda went down, but she was up again, screaming and clawing at Silas when Toll got there. He pulled her roughly to one side. Silas looked down at him with wild eyes. He was drooling at the mouth.

Toll, frantic at the thought that some one else might die, and largely because of his own slowness, yelled, "Get down off of there."

Silas lashed out at him with the hammer. It was a nasty blow that momentarily stunned Toll, but only for seconds. Then he reached for Silas, got him about the knees and pulled. But Silas wound his arms about the windlass support and held on with a madman's strength. But at last Beak Toll got him loose, and Silas let go so suddenly that they went down together with Silas on top. Toll had his hands full. Silas still had his hammer and chisel. He let go of the hammer and jabbed at Toll with the chisel. The captain caught his wrist, held it, and shouted to Matilda to pull up the bucket, while Silas pounded him in the face with his other hand.

When Toll heard the creaking of the windlass and knew that Matilda was busy, he gave a sudden heave, reached over with his free hand and wrested the chisel away from Silas and tossed it aside. Then he cracked Silas on the jaw. Silas lay still.

Beak Toll jumped to his feet and took the handle away from Matilda. He wound furiously until a head appeared above the enclosure of the well. Another foot or so and the bucket was clear, Toll threw the loop about the handle holding it fixed. He thought at first it was a child standing in that bucket and then, because of the mature face, he thought it wasn't. Behind him in a dead voice, he heard Matilda say, "Claude! You didn't drown!"

"No, mother," Claude said in his squeaky voice, "I didn't drown, but the bucket went down so fast, I lost my knife— the kitchen knife you gave me. It was a wonderful knife."

Beak Toll brought the bucket over the side of the railing onto the ground and lifted Claude out. He looked moodily down at the dwarfed little man. So this was Claude, and Matilda was his mother. No doubt he was small enough to have gone through that opening in the door where Judah Glayden had been murdered and later Lombardy had been stabbed. Beak Toll glanced at Matilda and then at the well.

"What was he doing in there?"

"I hid him there," she said defiantly. "I found him running down the hall and I knew you would search the house."

"And what was he trying to do?" Toll asked grimly, pointing to Silas Sneed still on the ground.

"I don't know," said Matilda. "I was watching to see if any one went near the well. When I saw Silas go there I thought he had seen me hide Claude there. I thought he was going to drown him." She stopped in wonder. "I never knew Silas could walk."

Beak Toll heard the harsh clanging of the squad car bell. He stopped the car before it got to the house. Four of his men tumbled out.

Silas was now sitting up rubbing his jaw, a crafty look in his eyes.

"Take them to the station," Beak Toll said.

One of the detectives, Sergeant Fillmore, was eying the little dwarf curiously. Then he grinned at Beak Toll.

"I see you got your face marked plenty, cap. I suppose it was the little fellow what done it."

"Shut up," Beak Toll growled. "Just for that you stay on guard here. Go up to the house. On the second floor, you'll find two people lying on beds. They've been gassed. Stay with them, and tell the sawbones you'll find there, to take the stiff down to the morgue."

Silas Sneed looked for a moment with great dignity at Toll. "What is the meaning of this, sir?" he said.

"You're under arrest,' Beak Toll said.

"I realize that. I'm not referring to that fact," said Silas. "I'm referring to your remark of a few minutes ago that I was to be placed in a padded cell; that I was 'nuts,' by which I suppose you mean I'm insane. That's slander, captain, I warn you that I'll hold you responsible. I'm certainly not mad."

"O. K., Mr. Sneed," said Beak Toll warily. "I take it all back." Nevertheless he gave one of the plainclothes men a warning wink. He told them to drive up to the house to fetch Disk and take him along.

"Book him as a material witness. I don't think he's in on this, but I'll sleep better if he's out of here, too," Toll said.

IT WAS LATE in the afternoon when Toll got back to the Sneed house. He found Kathleen and Dick Snowden in the library.

"He won't let us leave," Kathleen said indignantly, indicating the watchful Sergeant Fillmore.

"We can fix that in no time. There are just a few questions I want to ask you to sort of round out my case," Captain Toll said as he waved Fillmore out of the room.

"That gas wasn't intended for you," Captain Toll explained to Kathleen. "It was intended for Claude, but maybe I better begin at the beginning. I've just come from a long talk with Silas. He can talk on for hours just like you and me. It is only when you get him on the subject of money or murder that you find out that he's absolutely goofy.

"The first thing he did when he heard his old man died was to come back here, posing as a cripple, paralyzed from the waist down. He had, from the beginning, figured out that he was going to do a little killing and this cripple business was to be his alibi. He had consulted Lombardy on the symptoms of paralysis and the doc got the whole thing out of Silas after a few interviews. Lombardy saw a chance to clean up for himself, so he offered to go along ready to testify that Silas was crippled, and also to do any little odd jobs around the house that might be necessary to locate the fortune that Abner Sneed had hidden.

"A couple of months ago, Minton Sneed died with a knife in his heart. It was supposed to be suicide. What happened was this. Minton had hit upon the secret of that will you were telling me about, that is, he had hit upon part of it— the first and third lines I think it was— and like a nitwit he told Silas about it, gloating over it, figuring, I think, that Silas couldn't get up and look for the money even if he knew the whole business.

"Silas got out of his bed in the middle of the night during the next week and swiped one of Lombardy's scalpels. With that he worked on the lower panel of Minton's door. Those scalpels are sharp as hell. But when he got done, he found that the hole wasn't big enough for him to go through. And then, by gosh, an accident happened.

"Claude somehow got loose out of that room where they kept him locked up the night after Silas had finished making that panel in the door of Minton's room. And Claude, wandering about the house, stumbled into Silas's room late at night. Silas hadn't seen the little dwarf for years, but of course he knew about him, knew where he was kept, because old Abner Sneed had had that room built when they brought Claude back from the sanitarium about ten years ago after it was established that Claude couldn't be cured.

"Well, Claude's size gave Silas an idea. Claude could get through that opening Silas had made. Silas worked on Claude for a few days, told him how he,

himself, was being held prisoner in that house, and that if they could get rid of Minton and maybe some of the others, he would take Claude away. Claude was crazier than Silas, and it was no trick to' get him worked up to the point where he stuck Lombardy's scalpel into Minton. Silas put the little door back in place with narrow strips of adhesive tape stuck on the edges so they wouldn't be noticed, and took Claude back to his little cell.

"I don't know whether the Glaydens or Disk suspected it was murder. Perhaps the bolted door fooled them into thinking it was suicide. Anyway, the family didn't want any scandal, so I imagine they had a little talk with Heinemann, the D. A., and the thing got hushed up.

"The only man who knew that Minton's death wasn't suicide, outside of Claude and Silas, was Lombardy. He was in on Silas's plans. Lombardy, thinking things over, figured that in the end Silas would be the one to get the money, definitely decided to tie up with him. He suggested the scheme of connecting a gas pipe with the air vents in Claude's room. The house is old and was originally lighted with gas. It was no trick at all for a man of Lombardy's skill to hook up the pipes and fix that valve in Silas's room. The idea was that when it came to making a getaway, they would finish up Claude and anybody else who was left by getting them into that little room. There would then be only Silas and Lombardy to divide, and no Claude to tell what had happened.

"After Minton's death, Silas got Glayden and Matilda to move to Minton's room on some pretext, and when he heard that Glayden was on the verge of discovering where the fortune was, he put little Claude to work once more. Then, later, he did in Lombardy because Lombardy was threatening blackmail. But Silas was scared to take Claude back to his room because I was in the house. Besides, with Lombardy dead, Silas, knowing where the securities were hidden, figured he'd make a get-away right off, and that even if I found Claude he'd be the one to be arrested for the murders. That's why Silas didn't even go back to close that little opening in the door of the room where Lombardy was killed. It was additional proof that little Claude had done it. The trouble was that Claude for once had missed and hadn't killed Lombardy outright.

"Lombardy, dying, had only one idea and that was to get even with Silas and Claude. I gave him his chance while I was searching the grounds. Lombardy sneaked into Silas's room. Silas had gotten up prepared to leave the house, and when he heard Lombardy coming in, he ducked behind the door and let him have it with a candlestick; then he sneaked out. But even then Lombardy wasn't entirely dead. Silas had gotten away from him, but there was still Claude, whom he assumed to be locked up in his room, and Lombardy made his dying effort, crawling on his stomach to where the valve was and turned on the gas." Beak Toll stopped for a minute and looked at Kathleen. "In a way, you tipped me off," he said, "to where I could find Silas, when you said in your sleep, 'In windlass of

well.' That's where the securities were hidden that Silas was after. The windlass was hollow and we found them inside; but how did you know?"

"The message which old Abner left in his will read," Kathleen said:

"I men without me
The sailor's friend and one in every port
O' flight without light
As you seek I wish you no ill.

"The first line means 'in.' The second line, 'The sailor's friend' is 'wind,' and 'one in every port' is a 'girl' or 'lass.' That gives you 'windlass.' 'O' flight without light' means 'of,' and the last line— if you don't wish somebody ill you wish them well. Thus, 'In windlass of well.'"

"I'll be damned," Beak Toll said. He stood up and looked at the other two. "You two can go whenever you want to, or you can stay here for a while, I guess. I won't be bothering you. In case you two should take it into your heads to get married or something, it seems to me that you, Miss Croydon, are entitled to that money that New York lawyer promised you, or at least part of it. I guess it's none of my business though." With that Beak Toll wandered out.

Dick Snowden looked at Kathleen and said: "How about it?"

"How about getting married, you mean?"

"Right," said Dick Snowden.

"Why you don't even know my first name," Kathleen said.

" 'Dearest' is good enough for me," said Dick Snowden.

———————

25: The Submarine Boat

Clifford Ashdown

(R. Austin Freeman 1862-1943, & John James Pitcairn, 1860-1936)

Cassell's Magazine, June 1903

One of the adventures of Romney Pringle, a somewhat dubious private detective

TRIC-TRAC! tric-trac! went the black and white discs as the players moved them over the backgammon board in expressive justification of the French term for the game. *Tric-trac!* They are indeed a nation of poets, reflected Mr Pringle. Was not *Teuf-teuf!* for the motor-car a veritable inspiration? And as he smoked, the not unmusical clatter of the enormous wooden discs filled the atmosphere.

In these days of cookery not entirely based upon air-tights— to use the expressive Americanism for tinned meats— it is no longer necessary for the man who wishes to dine, as distinguished from the mere feeding animal, to furtively seek some restaurant in remote Soho, jealously guarding its secret from his fellows. But Mr Pringle, in his favourite study of human nature, was an occasional visitor to the 'Poissonière' in Gerrard Street, and, the better to pursue his researches, had always denied familiarity with the foreign tongues he heard around him. The restaurant was distinctly close— indeed, some might have called it stuffy— and Pringle, though near a ventilator, thoughtfully provided by the management, was fast being lulled into drowsiness, when a man who had taken his seat with a companion at the next table leaned across the intervening gulf and addressed him.

'Nous ne vous dérangeons pas, monsieur?'

Pringle, with a smile of fatuous uncomprehending, bowed, but said never a word.

'Cochon d'Anglais, n'entendez-vous pas?'

'I'm afraid I do not understand,' returned Pringle, shaking his head hopelessly, but still smiling.

'Canaille! Faut-il que je vous tire le nez?' persisted the Frenchman, as, apparently still sceptical of Pringle's assurance, he added threats to abuse.

'I have known the English gentleman a long time, and without a doubt he does not understand French,' testified the waiter who had now come forward for orders. Satisfied by this corroboration of Pringle's innocence, the Frenchman bowed and smiled sweetly to him, and, ordering a bottle of Clos de Vougeot, commenced an earnest conversation with his neighbour.

By the time this little incident had closed, Pringle's drowsiness had given place to an intense feeling of curiosity. For what purpose could the Frenchman

have been so insistent in disbelieving his expressed ignorance of the language? Why, too, had he striven to make Pringle betray himself by resenting the insults showered upon him? In a Parisian restaurant, as he knew, far more trivial affronts had ended in meetings in the Bois de Boulogne. Besides, *cochon* was an actionable term of opprobrium in France. The Frenchman and his companion had seated themselves at the only vacant table, also it was in a corner; Pringle, at the next, was the single person within ear-shot, and the Frenchman's extraordinary behaviour could only be due to a consuming thirst for privacy. Settling himself in an easy position, Pringle closed his eyes, and while appearing to resume his slumber, strained every nerve to discern the lightest word that passed at the next table. Dressed in the choicest mode of Piccadilly, the Frenchman bore himself with all the intolerable self-consciousness of the *Boulevardier*; but there was no trace of good-natured levity in the dark aquiline features, and the evil glint of the eyes recalled visions of an operatic Mephistopheles. His guest was unmistakably an Englishman of the bank-clerk type, who contributed his share of the conversation in halting Anglo-French, punctuated by nervous laughter as, with agonising pains, he dredged his memory for elusive colloquialisms.

Freely translated, this was what Pringle heard:

'So your people have really decided to take up the submarine, after all?'

'Yes; I am working out the details of some drawings in small-scale.'

'But are they from headquarters?'

'Certainly! Duly initialled and passed by the chief constructor.'

'And you are making— '

'Full working drawings.'

'There will be no code or other secret about them?'

'What I am doing can be understood by any naval architect.'

'Ah, an English one!'

'The measurements of course, are English, but they are easily convertible.'

'You could do that?'

'Too dangerous! Suppose a copy in metric scale were found in my possession! Besides, any draughtsman could reduce them in an hour or two.'

'And when can you let me have it?'

'In about two weeks.'

'Impossible! I shall not be here.'

'Unless something happens to let me get on with it quickly, I don't see how I can do it even then. I am never sufficiently free from interruption to take tracings; there are far too many eyes upon me. The only chance I have is to spoil the thing as soon as I have the salient points worked out on it, and after I have pretended to destroy it, smuggle it home; then I shall have to take elaborate notes every day and work out the details from them in the evening. It is simply

impossible for me to attempt to take a finished drawing out of the yard, and, as it is, I don't quite see my way to getting the spoilt one out— they look so sharply after spoilt drawings.'

'Two weeks you say, then?'

'Yes; and I shall have to sit up most nights copying the day's work from my notes to do it.'

'Listen! In a week I must attend at the Ministry of Marine in Paris, but our military *attaché* is my friend. I can trust him; he shall come down to you.'

'What, at Chatham? Do you wish to ruin me?' A smile from the Frenchman. 'No; it must be in London, where no one knows me.'

'Admirable! My friend will be better able to meet you.'

'Very well, as soon as I am ready I will telegraph to you.'

'Might not the address of the embassy be remarked by the telegraph officials? Your English post-office is charmingly unsuspicious, but we must not risk anything.'

'Ah, perhaps so. Well, I will come up to London and telegraph to you from here. But your representative— will he be prepared for it?'

'I will warn him to expect it in fourteen days.' He made an entry in his pocket-book. 'How will you sign the message?'

'Gustave Zédé,' suggested the Englishman, sniggering for the first and only time.

'Too suggestive. Sign yourself "Pauline", and simply add the time.'

'"Pauline", then. Where shall the rendezvous be?'

'The most public place we can find.'

'Public?'

'Certainly. Some place where everyone will be too much occupied with his own affairs to notice you. What say you to your Nelson's Column? There you can wait in a way we shall agree upon.'

'It would be a difficult thing for me to wear a disguise.'

'All disguises are clumsy unless one is an expert. Listen! You shall be gazing at the statue with one hand in your breast— so.'

'Yes; and I might hold a *Baedeker* in my other hand.'

'Admirable, my friend! You have the true spirit of an artist,' sneered the Frenchman.

'Your representative will advance and say to me, "Pauline", and the exchange can be made without another word.'

'Exchange?'

'I presume your Government is prepared to pay me handsomely for the very heavy risks I am running in this matter,' said the Englishman stiffly.

'Pardon, my friend! How imbecile of me! I am authorised to offer you ten thousand francs.'

A pause, during which the Englishman made a calculation on the back of an envelope.

'That is four hundred pounds,' he remarked, tearing the envelope into carefully minute fragments. 'Far too little for such a risk.'

'Permit me to remind you, my friend, that you came in search of me, or rather of those I represent. You have something to sell? Good! But it is customary for the merchant to display his wares first.'

'I pledge myself to give you copies of the working drawings made for the use of the artificers themselves. I have already met you oftener than is prudent. As I say, you offer too little.'

'Should the drawings prove useless to us, we should, of course, return them to your Admiralty, explaining how they came into our possession.' There was an unpleasant smile beneath the Frenchman's waxed moustache as he spoke. 'What sum do you ask?'

'Five hundred pounds in small notes— say, five pounds each.'

'That is— what do you say? Ah, twelve thousand five hundred francs! Impossible! My limit is twelve thousand.'

To this the Englishman at length gave an ungracious consent, and after some adroit compliments beneath which the other sought to bury his implied threat, the pair rose from the table. Either by accident or design, the Frenchman stumbled over the feet of Pringle, who, with his long legs stretching out from under the table, his head bowed and his lips parted, appeared in a profound slumber. Opening his eyes slowly, he feigned a lifelike yawn, stretched his arms, and gazed lazily around, to the entire satisfaction of the Frenchman, who, in the act of parting with his companion, was watching him from the door.

Calling for some coffee, Pringle lighted a cigarette, and reflected with a glow of indignant patriotism upon the sordid transaction he had become privy to. It is seldom that public servants are in this country found ready to betray their trust— with all honour be it recorded of them! But there ever exists the possibility of some under-paid official succumbing to the temptation at the command of the less scrupulous representatives of foreign powers, whose actions in this respect are always ignored officially by their superiors. To Pringle's somewhat cynical imagination, the sordid huckstering of a dockyard draughtsman with a French naval *attaché* appealed as corroboration of Walpole's famous principle, and as he walked homewards to Furnival's Inn, he determined, if possible, to turn his discovery to the mutual advantage of his country and himself— especially the latter.

During the next few days Pringle elaborated a plan of taking up a residence at Chatham, only to reject it as he had done many previous ones. Indeed, so many difficulties presented themselves to every single course of action, that the tenth day after found him strolling down Bond Street in the morning without

having taken any further step in the matter. With his characteristic fastidious neatness in personal matters, he was bound for the Piccadilly establishment of the chief and, for West-Enders, the only firm of hatters in London.

'Breton Stret, do you noh?' said a voice suddenly. And Pringle, turning, found himself accosted by a swarthy foreigner.

'Bruton Street, *n'est-ce pas*?' Pringle suggested.

'Mais oui, Brrruten Stret, monsieur!' was the reply in faint echo of the English syllables.

'Le voila! À droite,' was Pringle's glib direction. Politely raising his hat in response to the other's salute, he was about to resume his walk when he noticed that the Frenchman had been joined by a companion, who appeared to have been making similar inquiries. The latter started and uttered a slight exclamation on meeting Pringle's eye. The recognition was mutual— it was the French *attaché*! As he hurried down Bond Street, Pringle realised with acutest annoyance that his deception at the restaurant had been unavailing, while he must now abandon all hope of a counter-plot for the honour of his country, to say nothing of his own profit. The port-wine mark on his right cheek was far too conspicuous for the *attaché* not to recognise him by it, and he regretted his neglect to remove it as soon as he had decided to follow up the affair. Forgetful of all beside, he walked on into Piccadilly, and it was not until he found himself more than half-way back to his chambers that he remembered the purpose for which he had set out; but matters of greater moment now claimed his attention, and he endeavoured by the brisk exercise to work off some of the chagrin with which he was consumed. Only as he reached the Inn and turned into the gateway did it occur to him that he had been culpably careless in thus going straight homeward. What if he had been followed? Never in his life had he shown such disregard of ordinary precautions. Glancing back, he just caught a glimpse of a figure which seemed to whip behind the corner of the gateway. He retraced his steps and looked out into Holborn. There, in the very act of retreat, and still but a few feet from the gate, was the *attaché* himself. Cursing the persistence of his own folly, Pringle dived through the arch again, and determined that the Frenchman should discover no more that day he turned nimbly to the left and ran up his own stairway before the pursuer could have time to re-enter the Inn.

The most galling reflection was his absolute impotence in the matter. Through lack of the most elementary foresight he had been fairly run to earth, and could see no way of ridding himself of this unwelcome attention. To transfer his domicile, to tear himself up by the roots as it were, was out of the question; and as he glanced around him, from the soft carpets and luxurious chairs to the warm, distempered walls with their old prints above the dado of dwarf bookcases, he felt that the pang of severance from the refined associations of

his chambers would be too acute. Besides, he would inevitably be tracked elsewhere. He would gain nothing by the transfer. One thing at least was absolutely certain— the trouble which the Frenchman was taking to watch him showed the importance he attached to Pringle's discovery. But this again only increased his disgust with the ill-luck which had met him at the very outset. After all, he had done nothing illegal, however contrary it might be to the code of ethics, so that if it pleased them the entire French legation might continue to watch him till the Day of Judgment, and, consoling himself with this reflection, he philosophically dismissed the matter from his mind.

It was nearing six when he again left the Inn for Pagani's, the Great Portland Street restaurant which he much affected; instead of proceeding due west, he crossed Holborn intending to bear round by way of the Strand and Regent Street, and so get up an appetite. In Staple Inn he paused a moment in the further archway. The little square, always reposeful amid the stress and turmoil of its environment, seemed doubly so this evening, its eighteenth-century calm so welcome after the raucous thoroughfare. An approaching footfall echoed noisily, and as Pringle moved from the shadow of the narrow wall the newcomer hesitated and stopped, and then made the circuit of the square, scanning the doorways as if in search of a name. The action was not unnatural, and twenty-four hours earlier Pringle would have thought nothing of it, but after the events of the morning he endowed it with a personal interest, and, walking on, he ascended the steps into Southampton Buildings and stopped by a hoarding. As he looked back he was rewarded by the sight of a man stealthily emerging from the archway and making his way up the steps, only to halt as he suddenly came abreast of Pringle. Although his face was unfamiliar, Pringle could only conclude that the man was following him, and all doubt was removed when, having walked along the street and turning about at the entrance to Chancery Lane, he saw the spy had resumed the chase and was now but a few yards back. Pringle, as a philosopher, felt more inclined to laughter than resentment at this ludicrous espionage. In a spirit of mischief, he pursued his way to the Strand at a tortoise-like crawl, halting as if doubtful of his way at every corner, and staring into every shop whose lights still invited customers. Once or twice he even doubled back, and passing quite close to the man, had several opportunities of examining him. He was quite unobtrusive, even respectable-looking; there was nothing of the foreigner about him, and Pringle shrewdly conjectured that the *attaché*, wearied of sentry-go had turned it over to some English servant on whom he could rely.

Thus shepherded, Pringle arrived at the restaurant, from which he only emerged after a stay maliciously prolonged over each item of the menu, followed by the smoking of no fewer than three cigars of a brand specially lauded by the proprietor. With a measure of humanity diluting his malice, he was about to offer the infallibly exhausted sentinel some refreshment when he

came out, but as the man was invisible, Pringle started for home, taking much the same route as before, and calmly debating whether or no the cigars he had just sampled would be a wise investment; nor until he had reached Southampton Buildings and the sight of the hoarding recalled the spy's discomfiture, did he think of looking back to see if he were still followed. All but the main thoroughfares were by this time deserted, and although he shot a keen glance up and down Chancery Lane, now clear of all but the most casual traffic, not a soul was anywhere near him. By a curious psychological process Pringle felt inclined to resent the man's absence. He had begun to regard him almost in the light of a body-guard, the private escort of some eminent politician. Besides, the whole incident was pregnant with possibilities appealing to his keenly intellectual sense of humour, and as he passed the hoarding, he peered into its shadow with the half-admitted hope that his attendant might be lurking in the depths. Later on he recalled how, as he glanced upwards, a man's figure passed like a shadow from a ladder to an upper platform of the scaffold. The vision, fleeting and unsubstantial, had gone almost before his retina had received it, but the momentary halt was to prove his salvation. Even as he turned to walk on, a cataract of planks, amid scaffold-poles and a chaos of loose bricks, crashed on the spot he was about to traverse; a stray beam, more erratic in its descent, caught his hat, and, telescoping it, glanced off his shoulder, bearing him to the ground, where he lay dazed by the sudden uproar and half-choked by the cloud of dust. Rapid and disconcerting as was the event, he remembered afterwards a dim and spectral shape approaching through the gloom. In a dreamy kind of way he connected it with that other shadow-figure he had seen high up on the scaffold, and as it bent over him he recognized the now familiar features of the spy. But other figures replaced the first, and, when helped to his feet, he made futile search for it amid the circle of faces gathered round him. He judged it an hallucination. By the time he had undergone a tentative dust-down, he was sufficiently collected to acknowledge the sympathetic congratulations of the crowd and to decline the homeward escort of a constable.

In the privacy of his chambers, his ideas began to clarify. Events arranged themselves in logical sequence, and the spectres assumed more tangible form. A single question dwarfed all others. He asked himself, 'Was the cataclysm such an accident as it appeared?' And as he surveyed the battered ruins of his hat, he began to realise how nearly had he been the victim of a murderous vendetta!

When he arose the next morning, he scarcely needed the dilapidated hat to remind him of the events of yesterday. Normally a sound and dreamless sleeper, his rest had been a series of short snatches of slumber interposed between longer spells of rumination. While he marvelled at the intensity of malice which he could no longer doubt pursued him— a vindictiveness more natural to a mediaeval Italian state than to this present-day metropolis— he bitterly

regretted the fatal curiosity which had brought him to such an extremity. By no means deficient in the grosser forms of physical courage, his sense that in the game which was being played his adversaries, as unscrupulous as they were crafty, held all the cards, and above all, that their espionage effectually prevented him filling the gaps in the plot which he had as yet only half-discovered, was especially galling to his active and somewhat neurotic temperament. Until yesterday he had almost decided to drop the affair of the *Restaurant Poissonière* but now, after what he firmly believed to be a deliberate attempt to assassinate him, he realized the desperate situation of a duellist with his back to a wall— having scarce room to parry, he felt the prick of his antagonist's rapier deliberately goading him to an incautious thrust. Was he regarded as the possessor of a dangerous secret? Then it behoved him to strike, and that without delay.

Now that he was about to attack, a disguise was essential; and reflecting how lamentably he had failed through the absence of one hitherto, he removed the port-wine mark from his right cheek with his customary spirit-lotion, and blackened his fair hair with a few smart applications of a preparation from his bureau. It was with a determination to shun any obscure streets or alleys, and especially all buildings in course of erection, that he started out after his usual light breakfast. At first he was doubtful whether he was being followed or not, but after a few experimental turns and doublings he was unable to single out any regular attendant of his walk; either his disguise had proved effectual, or his enemies imagined that the attempt of last night had been less innocent in its results.

Somewhat soothed by this discovery, Pringle had gravitated towards the Strand and was nearing Charing Cross, when he observed a man cross from the station to the opposite corner carrying a brown paper roll. With his thoughts running in the one direction, Pringle in a flash recognised the dockyard draughtsman. Could he be even now on his way to keep the appointment at Nelson's Column? Had he been warned of Pringle's discovery, and so expedited his treacherous task? And thus reflecting, Pringle determined at all hazards to follow him. The draughtsman made straight for the telegraph office. It was now the busiest time of the morning, most of the little desks were occupied by more or less glib message-writers, and the draughtsman had found a single vacancy at the far end when Pringle followed him in and reached over his shoulder to withdraw a form from the rack in front of him. Grabbing three or four, Pringle neatly spilled them upon the desk, and with an abject apology hastily gathered them up together with the form the draughtsman was employed upon. More apologies, and Pringle, seizing a suddenly vacant desk, affected to compose a telegram of his own. The draughtsman's message had been short, and (to Pringle) exceptionally sweet, consisting as it did of the three words— 'Four-

thirty, Pauline'. The address Pringle had not attempted to read— he knew that already. The moment the other left Pringle took up a sheaf of forms, and, as if they had been the sole reason of his visit, hurried out of the office and took a hansom back to Furnival's Inn. Here his first care was to fold some newspapers into a brown-paper parcel resembling the one carried by the draughtsman as nearly as he remembered it, and having cut a number of squares of stiff tissue paper, he stuffed an envelope with them and pondered over a cigarette the most difficult stage of his campaign. Twice had the draughtsman seen him. Once at the restaurant in his official guise as the sham literary agent, with smooth face, fair hair, and the fugitive port-wine mark staining his right cheek; again that morning, with blackened hair and unblemished face. True, he might have forgotten the stranger at the restaurant; on the other hand, he might not— and Pringle was then (as always) steadfastly averse to leaving anything to chance.

Besides, in view of this sudden journey to London, it was very likely that he had received warning of Pringle's discovery. Lastly, it was more than probable that the spy was still on duty, even though he had failed to recognise Pringle that morning. The matter was clinched by a single glance at the Venetian mirror above the mantel, which reflected a feature he had overlooked— his now blackened hair. Nothing remained for him but to assume a disguise which should impose on both the spy and the draughtsman, and after some thought he decided to make up as a Frenchman of the South, and to pose as a servant of the French embassy. Reminiscent of the immortal Tartarin, his ready bureau furnished him with a stiff black moustache and some specially stout horsehair to typify the stubbly beard of that hero. When, at almost a quarter to four, he descended into the Inn with the parcel in his hand, a *Baedeker* and the envelope of tissues in his pocket, a cab was just setting down, and impulsively he chartered it as far as Exeter Hall. Concealed in the cab, he imagined he would the more readily escape observation, and by the time he alighted, flattered himself that any pursuit had been baffled. As he discharged the cab, however, he noticed a hansom draw up a few paces in the rear, whilst a man got out and began to saunter westward behind him. His suspicions alert, although the man was certainly a stranger, Pringle at once put him to the test by entering Romano's and ordering a small whisky. After a decent delay, he emerged, and his pulse quickened when he saw a couple of doors off the same man staring into a shop window! Pringle walked a few yards back, and then crossed to the opposite side of the street, but although he dodged at infinite peril through a string of omnibuses, he was unable to shake off his satellite, who, with unswerving persistence, occupied the most limited horizon whenever he looked back.

For almost the first time in his life, Pringle began to despair. The complacent regard of his own precautions had proved but a fool's paradise. Despite his

elaborate disguise, he must, have been plainly recognisable to his enemies, and he began to ask himself whether it was not useless to struggle further. As he paced slowly on, an indefinable depression stole over him. He thought of the heavy price so nearly exacted for his interposition. Resentment surged over him at the memory, and his hand clenched on the parcel. The contact furnished the very stimulus he required. The instrument of settling such a score was in his hands, and rejecting his timorous doubts, he strode on, determined to make one bold and final stroke for vengeance. The shadows had lengthened appreciably, and the quarter chiming from near St Martin's warned him that there was no time to lose— the spy must be got rid of at any cost. Already could he see the estuary of the Strand, with the Square widening beyond; on his right loomed the tunnel of the Lowther Arcade, with its vista of juvenile delights. The sight was an inspiration. Darting in, he turned off sharp to the left into an artist's repository, with a double entrance to the Strand and the Arcade, and, softly closing the door, peeped through the palettes and frames which hung upon the glass. Hardly had they ceased swinging to his movement when he had the satisfaction of seeing the spy, the scent already cold, rush furiously up the Arcade, his course marked by falling toys and the cries of the outraged stall-keepers. Turning, Pringle made the purchase of a sketching-block, the first thing handy, and then passed through the door which gave on the Strand. At the post-office he stopped to survey the scene. A single policeman stood by the eastward base of the column, and the people scattered round seemed but ordinary wayfarers, but just across the maze of traffic was a spectacle of intense interest to him. At the quadrant of the Grand Hotel, patrolling aimlessly in front of the shops, at which he seemed too perturbed to stare for more than a few seconds at a time, the draughtsman kept palpitating vigil until the clock should strike the half-hour of his treason. True to the Frenchman's advice, he sought safety in a crowd, avoiding the desert of the square until the last moment.

It wanted two minutes to the half-hour when Pringle opened his *Baedeker*, and thrusting one hand into his breast, examined the statue and coil of rope erected to the glory of our greatest hero. *'Pauline!'* said a voice, with the musical inflection unattainable by any but a Frenchman. Beside him stood a slight, neatly dressed young man, with close-cropped hair, and a moustache and imperial, who cast a significant look at the parcel. Pringle immediately held it towards him, and the dark gentleman producing an envelope from his breast-pocket, the exchange was effected in silence. With bows and a raising of hats they parted, while Big Ben boomed on his eight bells.

The *attaché*'s representative had disappeared some minutes beyond the westernmost lion before the draughtsman appeared from the opposite direction, his uncertain steps intermitted by frequent halts and nervous backward glances. With his back to the National Gallery he produced a *Baedeker*

and commenced to stare up at the monument, withdrawing his eyes every now and then to cast a shamefaced look to right and left. In his agitation the draughtsman had omitted the hand-in-the-breast attitude, and even as Pringle advanced to his side and murmured *'Pauline'*, his legs (almost stronger than his will) seemed to be urging him to a flight from the field of dishonour. With tremulous eagerness he thrust a brown paper parcel into Pringle's hands, and, snatching the envelope of tissue slips, rushed across the road and disappeared in the bar of the Grand Hotel.

Pringle turned to go, but was confronted by a revolver, and as his eye traversed the barrel and met that of its owner, he recognised the Frenchman to whom he had just sold the bundle of newspapers. Dodging the weapon, he tried to spring into the open, but a restraining grip on each elbow held him in the angle of the plinth, and turning ever so little Pringle found himself in custody of the man whom he had last seen in full cry up the Lowther Arcade. No constable was anywhere near, and even casual passengers walked unheeding by the nook, so quiet was the progress of this little drama. Lowering his revolver, the dark gentleman picked up the parcel which had fallen from Pringle in the struggle. He opened it with delicacy, partially withdrew some sheets of tracing paper, which he intently examined, and then placed the whole in an inner pocket, and giving a sign to the spy to loose his grasp, he spoke for the first time.

'May I suggest, sir,' he said in excellent English with the slightest foreign accent, 'may I suggest that in future you do not meddle with what cannot possibly concern you? These documents have been bought and sold, and although you have been good enough to act as intermediary in the transaction, I can assure you we were under no necessity of calling on you for your help.' Here his tone hardened, and, speaking with less calmness, the accent became more noticeable. 'I discovered your impertinence in selling me a parcel of worthless papers very shortly after I left you. Had you succeeded in the attempt you appear to have planned so carefully, it is possible you might have lived long enough to regret it— *perhaps not!* I wish you good day, sir.' He bowed, as did his companion, and Pringle, walking on, turned up by the corner of the Union Club.

Dent's clock marked twenty minutes to five, and Pringle reflected how much had been compressed into the last quarter of an hour. True, he had not prevented the sale of his country's secrets; on the other hand— he pressed the packet which held the envelope of notes. Hailing a cab, he was about to step in, when, looking back, at the nook between the lions he saw a confused movement about the spot. The two men he had just left were struggling with a third, who, brandishing a handful of something white, was endeavouring, with varying success, to plant his fist on divers areas of their persons. He was the draughtsman. A small crowd, which momentarily increased, surrounded them,

and as Pringle climbed into the hansom two policemen were seen to penetrate the ring and impartially lay hands upon the three combatants.

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26: The Magic of Fear

Edgar Wallace

1875-1932

Everybody's, Dec 1925

One of the "Sanders of the River" stories

THERE WAS ONCE an Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs who had risen from the ranks of the lesser politicians by the force of his personality and the great charm and eloquence of his many public speeches.

This Nickerson Haben married a rich widow, who most providentially died at the crisis of his affairs, and when her friends were whispering of the divorce suit she was bringing. It was a very prosaic case of an appendicitis operation that did not go well. To the astonishment of the greatest of English surgeons, and at a period when she should have been out of danger, she suffered a collapse and died. Whereupon the sympathetic colleagues of Mr. Under-Secretary Haben found an excuse for sending him to the River Territories— that vast hinterland which was governed by Mr. Commissioner Sanders, one Captain of Houssas and a youthful lieutenant whose name was Tibbetts but who was invariably called "Bones."

The ministry felt that the change would be beneficial to the grief-stricken man, who seemed inconsolable even by the immense fortune which his wife had left to him— her new will, which left him nothing, being unsigned.

So he set forth for the Territories by the first available boat, and because this lank and pallid man had a "streak of commonness in him" (his dead wife had often said this to her most intimate friends), he did not warn the officials of the big river that he was honoring them with a visit. Mr. Haben was of the type who set traps for possibly dishonest servants, and suspected his chauffeur of being in league with the garage man to rob him. And he thought it likely that arriving unannounced, he might be in a position to discover certain irregularities which would be hidden away if his coming was widely advertised.

As it happened, his furtiveness introduced no scandal, though, had Sanders of the River the gift of forevision, he might well have taken Agasaka, the Chimbiri woman, and hidden her deep in her native forest.

Agasaka was very closely linked with the life and fate of Mr. Nickerson Haben, though this he did not dream. Mr. Haben was dressed by the best tailor in Saville Row— Agasaka wore no clothes at all except for the kilt of dried grass which hung from her beautiful waist.

A tall maiden, very slim of body and very grave of eyes, no lover for any man, having a great love for something more imponderable than man; terribly wise too, in the ways of ghosts and devils; straight-backed, small-breasted,

beloved of children, so strong in the arm and skilled in her strength that she could put a spear beyond the range of any young man's throw: this was Agasaka, the Chimbiri woman, daughter of N'kman'kimi, the dead village woodman.

She was elderly for a virgin, being seventeen; had been wooed by men in their every mood. Agasaka had kindness for all, but generosity for none.

She lived with her brother, M'suru, the hunting man, and his women hated her, for she never spoke a lie and was frank to her elderly brother on the matter of their numerous lovers. They would have beaten her, but that they knew the strength of her throwing arm. Where hands did not dare, tongues were more reckless, but none of their mud stuck. Few men were so poor in mind that they would admit others had succeeded where they had failed.

She had lived for many years with her father in the deep of the forest in the abiding place of M'shimba M'shamba, the fearfully boisterous devil who tears up trees with each hand, whilst his mouth drips molten fire; here, also, dwell other mighty ones. N'guro, the headless dog, and Chikalaka-m'bofunga, the eater of moons— indeed all except the Fire Lizard, whose eyes talk death. He is to be found in no one place. N'kema had taught her the mysteries of life and the beginning of life and the ground where life is sown. She knew men in their rawness and in their strength. N'ktema taught her the way in which she might be more wonderful than any other woman; the magic handed down from mouth to mouth— the magic which was old when they laid the first deep stones of the Pyramids.…

MEN WERE afraid of her; even Oboro, the witch-doctor, avoided her.

For this was her strangest magic: that she had the power to bring before the eyes of men and women that which they desired least to see.

Once, a small chief stalked her by the river path where the grass is chin high, having certain plans with her. And at the right and lonely moment he slipped from cover, dropping his spears in the grass, and caught her by the arms so that, strong as she was, she could not break his hold.

"Agasaka," he said, "I have a hut in this forest that has never heard a woman's voice—"

He got so far and then, over her silken shoulder, he saw three black leopards walking shoulder to shoulder down the narrow path towards him. Their heads hung low, their golden eyes shone hungrily.

In an instant he released her and fled to his spears. When he turned again, leopards and woman were gone.

Aliki, the huntsman of her village, neither feared nor cared, for he was familiar with magics of all kinds and often walked in the woods communing with devils. One night he saw a vision in the fire, a great red lizard that blinked its

heavy eyelids, Aliki looked round his family circle in a cold-blooded search for a victim. Calichi, the fire lizard, is the most benevolent of devils and will accept a deputy for the man or woman to whom, with its red and blinking eyes, it has given its terrible warning of death.

Aliki saw his three wives and his father and an uncle who had come many days' journey on a hunting trip, and none of these, save the youngest wife, was well enough favored for the purpose. Calichi is a fastidious devil; nothing short of the best and the most beautiful will please him. Beyond the group sitting about the red fire and eating from the big pot that stood in the embers, were other groups. The village street of Chimbiri-Isisi runs from the forest to the river, a broad avenue fringed with huts, and before each hut burnt a fire, and about each fire squatted the men and women of the house.

Dark had come; above the tall gum trees the sky was encrusted with bright stars that winked and blinked at Calichi, but more rapidly.

Aliki saw the stars and rubbed his palms in the dust for luck, and at that moment into his vision came the second wife of his neighbor, a tall woman of eighteen, a nymph carved in mahogany, straight and supple of back, naked to the waistline of her grass skirt. And Aliki knew that he had found a proper substitute and said her name under his breath as he caught the lizard's eyes. Thereupon the beast faded and died away, and Aliki knew that the fire-god approved his choice.

Later that night, when Loka, the wife of M'suru the huntsman, went down to the river to draw water for the first wife's needs, Aliki intercepted her.

"There is nobody so beautiful as you, Loka," he said, "for you have the legs of a lion and the throat of a young deer."

He enumerated other physical perfections and Loka laughed and listened. She had quarreled that day with the first wife of her husband, and her husband had beaten her. She was terribly receptive to flattery and ripe for adventure.

"Have you no wives, Aliki?" she asked, pleased. "Now, I will give you Agasaka, the sister of my husband, who is very beautiful and has never touched the shoulder of a man." This she said in spite, for she hated Agasaka, and it is a way of women to praise, to strangers, the qualities of the sisters they loathe.

"As to Agasaka… and wives…." He made a gesture of contempt. "There is no such wife as you, not even in the hut of the old king beyond the mountains, which are the end of the world," said Aliki, and Loka laughed again.

"Now I know that you are mad, as M'suru says. Also that you see strange sights which are not there to see," she said in her deep, gurgling voice. "And not M'suru alone, but all men, say that you have the sickness *mongo.*"

It was true that Aliki was sick and had shooting pains in his head. He saw other things than lizards.

"M'suru is an old man and a fool," he said. "I have a ju-ju who gives me eyes to see wonders. Come with me into the forest, Loka, and I will tell you magic and give you love such as as old man cannot give."

She put down her gourd, hiding it in a patch of elephant gnus near the river's edge, and walked behind him into the forest. There, eventually, he killed her. And he lit a fire and saw the lizard, who seemed satisfied. Aliki washed himself in the river and went back to his hut and to sleep.

When he awoke in the morning he was sorry he had killed Loka, for of all the women in the world she had been most beautiful in his eyes. The village was half empty, for Loka's gourd had been found and trackers had gone into the woods searching for her. Her they found; but nobody had seen her walking to death. Some people thought she had been taken by Ochori fishermen, others favored a devil notorious for his amorous tricks. They brought the body back along the village street, and all the married women made skirts of green leaves and stamped the Death Dance, singing, the while, very strangely.

Aliki, squatting before his fire, watched the procession with incurious eyes. He was sorry he had killed the Thing that was carried shoulder high, and, dropping his gaze to the dull fire, was even more sorry, for the hot lizard was leering up at him, his bulging eyelids winking at a great rate.

So he had taken the wrong sacrifice.

His eyes rose… rested on the slim figure of a woman, one hand gripping the doorpost of her brother's hut. And there came to Aliki a tremendous conviction.

The lizard had vanished from the heart of the fire when he looked down.

No time was to be lost: he rose and went toward the virgin of Chimbiri.

"I see you, Agasaka," he said. "Now this is a terrible shame to come to your brother's house, for men say that this woman Loka had a lover who killed her."

She turned her big eyes slowly towards him. They were brown and filled with marvelous luminosity that seemed to quiver as she looked at him.

"Loka died because she was a fool." she said, "but he who killed her was a bigger. Her pain is past; his to come. Soon Sandi *malaka* will come, the brown butcher bird, and he will pick the eyes of the man who did this thing."

Aliki hated her, but he was clever to nod his agreement.

"I am wise, Agasaka," he said. "I see wonders which no man sees. Now before Sandi comes with his soldiers, I will show you a magic that will bring this wicked man to the door of your brother's hut when the moon is so and the river is so."

HER GRAVE EYES were on his; the sound of the singing women was a drone of sound at the far end of the village. A dog barked wheeezily in the dark of the hut and all faces were turned toward the river where the body was being laid in

a canoe before before it was ferried to the little middle island where the dead lie in their shallow graves.

"Let us go," she said, and walked behind him through an uneven field of maize, gained the shelter of the wood behind the village, and by awkward paths reached the outline of the forest, where there was no noise, for this place was too sad for the weaver birds and too near to the habitation of man for the little monkeys which have white beards. Still he walked on until they made a patch of yellow flowers growing in a clearing. Here the trees were very high, and ten men might have stood on one another's heads against the smooth boles, and the top most alone could have touched the lowermost branch.

He stopped and turned. At that second came an uneasy stirring of the treetops, a cold wind and the rumbling of thunder.

"Let us sit down," he said. "First I will talk to you of the women who have loved me, and of how I would not walk before them because of my great thoughts for you. Then we will be lovers—"

"There is no magic in that, Aliki," she said, and he saw that she was against him and lifted his spear.

"You die; as Loka died, because of the word which the lizard of fire brought to me," he said, his voice very low, and his shoulder hunched back for the throw.

"I am Loka!" said the girl, and he looked and his jaw dropped. For she was truly Loka, the woman he had killed. Loka, with her sly eyes and long fingers. And she had Loka's way of putting a red flower behind her ear, and Loka's long, satiny legs.

"O ko!" he said in distress, and dropped his spear.

Agasaka bent in the middle and picked it up and in that moment became herself again. There was no flower and her fingers were shorter, and where the sly smile had been was the gravity of death.

"This is my magic," she said. "Now walk before me, Aliki, killer of Loka, for I am not made for love, but for strange power."

Without a word the bemused man walked back the way he had come and Agasaka followed, and, following, felt the edge of the spear's broad blade.... Though she touched lightly there was a line of blood on her thumb where blade and skin had met. The wood was growing dark, the wind was alternately a shriek and a whimper of sound.

Near the pool at the edge of the forest, she swung the spear backward over her left shoulder as a cavalry soldier would swing his sword, and he half-turned at the sound of the whistle it made....

The first wife of her brother was by the pool gathering manioc root from a place where it had been left to soak— the head of Aliki fell at her feet as the first flash of lightning lit the gloom of the world....

The sun was four hours old when a river gunboat, a white and glittering thing, came round the bluff which is called The Fish, because of its shape. The black waters of the river were piled up around its bows, a glassy hillock of water, tinged red at its edges, for the *Zaire* was driving against a six-knot current. Every river from the Isisi to the Mokalibi was in spate, and there were sand shoals, where deeps had been, and deeps in the places where the crocodiles had slept open-mouthed the last time Mr. Commissioner Sanders had come that way.

He stood by the steersman, a slim and dapper figure in spotless white, his pith helmet at a rakish angle, for an elephant fly had bitten him on the forehead the night before, and the lump it had induced was painful to the touch. Between his regular white teeth was a long black cheroot. He had breakfasted and an orderly was clearing away the silver coffee pot and the fruit plates. Overhead the sky was a burning blue, but the glass was falling with alarming rapidity and he desired the safe harborage of a deep bank and the shelter of high trees which a little bay south of Chimbiri would give to him.

"Lo'ba, ko'lo ka! A fathom of water by the mercy of God!"

The sleepy-eyed boy sitting in the bow of the boat drew up his wet sounding-rod.

Sanders's hand shot out to the handle of the telegraph and pulled,-and Yoka the engineer sent a clanging acknowledgement.

"Half a fathom."

Thump!

The boat slowed of itself, its wheel threshing astern, but the nose was in sand and a side swinging current drove the stem round until it was broadside to the sand-reef. Then, as the wheel reversed, the *Zaire* began to move to wards the right bank of the river, skirting the shoal until the nose found the deep water of the river again.

"Lord," said the steersman, virtuously annoyed, "this bank has come up from hell, for it has never been here since I was without clothing."

"Think only of the river, man," said Sanders, not inclined for gossip.

AND NOW above the tree tops ahead, Sanders saw the rolling smoke of clouds, yellow clouds that tumbled and tossed, and threw out tawny banners before the wind.

And the still surface of the river was ripped into little white shreds that leapt and scattered in spray. Sanders moved his cigar from one side of his mouth to the other, took it out, looked at it regretfully and threw it over the side. His servant was behind him with an oilskin invitingly held; he struggled into the coat, passed his helmet back and took in exchange the sou'wester which he fastened under his chin. The heat was intolerable. The storm was driving a

furnace blast of hot air to herald its fury. He was wet to the skin, his clothes sticking to him.

A ribbon of blinding light leapt across the sky, and split into a tracery of branches. The explosion of the thunder was deafening, it seemed as if heavy weight was pressing down on his head; again the flash, and again and again. Now it showed bluely on either bank, vivid blue streaks of light that ran jaggedly from sky to earth. The yellow clouds had become black; the darkness of night was upon the world, a darkness intensified by the ghastly sideways light that came from a distant horizon where the clouds were broken.

"Port," said Sanders curtly. "Now starboard again— now port!"

They had reached the shelter of the bank as the first rain fell. Sanders sent a dozen men overboard with the fore and aft hawser and made fast to the big gums that grew down to the riverside.

In a second the deck was running with water and the Commissioner's white shoes had turned first to dove-gray and then to slate. He sent for Yoka the engineer, who was also his headman.

"Put out another hawser and keep a full head of steam." He spoke in coast Arabic, which is a language allowing of many nice distinctions.

"Lord, shall I sound the *oopa-oopa?"* he asked. "For I see that these thieving Akasava people are afraid to come out into the rain to welcome your lordship."

Sanders shook his head.

"They will come in their time— the village is a mile away and they would not hear your *oopa-oopa!"* he said, and went to his cabin to recover his breath. A ninety-knot wind had been blowing into his teeth for ten minutes, and ten minutes is a long time when you are trying to breathe.

The cabin had two long windows, one at each side. That to the left above the settee on which he dropped, gave him a view of the forest path along which, sooner or later, a villager would come and inevitably carry a message to the chief.

The lightning was still incessant; the rain came down in such volume that he might well think he had anchored beneath a small waterfall; but the light had changed, and ahead the black of clouds had become a gray opacity.

Sanders pulled open the doors he had closed behind him; the wind was gusty but weaker. He reached out for a cheroot and lit it, patient to wait. The river was running eight knots; he would need hand-towing to the beach of the village. He hoped they had stacked wood for him. The Chimbiri folk were lazy, and the last time he had tied they showed him a wood stack— green logs and few of them.

His eyes sought the river-side path— and at the critical moment. For he saw eight men walking two and two and they carried on their shoulders a trussed figure.

An electric chrysanthemum burst into blinding bloom as he leapt to the bank— its dazzling petals, twisting every way through the dark clouds, made light enough to see the burden very clearly, long before he reached the path to stand squarely in the way of eight sullen men and the riff-raff which had defied the storm to follow at a distance.

"O men," said Sanders softly— he showed his teeth when he talked that way— "who are you that you put the ghost mark on this woman's face?"

For the face of their passenger was daubed white with clay. None spoke: he saw their toes wriggling, all save those of one man, and him he addressed.

"M'suru, son of N'kema, what woman is this?"

M'suru cleared his throat.

"Lord, this woman is the daughter of my own mother; she killed Aliki, also she killed first my wife Loka."

"Who saw this?"

"Master, my first wife, who is a true woman to me since her lover was drowned, she saw the head of Aliki fall. Also she heard Agasaka say, 'Go, man, where I sent Loka, as you know best, who saw me slay her.'"

Sanders was not impressed.

"Let loose this woman that she may stand in my eyes," he said, and they untied the girl and by his order wiped the joke of death from her face.

"Tell me," said Sanders.

She spoke very simply and her story was good. Yet…

"Bring me the woman who heard her say these evil things."

The wife was found in the tail of the procession and came forward important… frightened… for the cold eyes of Sanders were unnerving. But she was voluble when she had discovered her voice.

THE MAN in the streaming oilskins listened, his head bent. Agasaka, the slim woman, stood grave, unconscious of shame— the grass girdle had gone and she was as her mother had first seen her. Presently the first wife came to the end of her story.

"Sandi, this is the truth, and if I speak a lie may the long-ones take me to the bottom of the river and feed me to the snakes."

Sanders, watching her, saw the brown skin go dull and gray; saw the mouth open in shocking fear.

What he did not see was the "long one," the yellow crocodile that was creeping through the grass toward the perjurer, his little eyes gleaming, his wet mouth open to show the cruel white spikes of teeth.

Only the first wife of M'suru saw this, and fell screaming and writhing at her husband's feet, clasping his knees.

Sanders said nothing, but heard much that was in contradiction of the earlier story she had told.

"Come with me, Agasaka, to my fine ship," he said, for he knew that trouble might follow if the girl stayed with her people. Wars have started for less cause.

He took her to the *Zaire;* she followed meekly at his heels, though meekness was certainly not in her.

That night came a tired pigeon from headquarters, and Sanders, reading the message, was neither pleased nor sorry.

High officials, especially the armchair men, worried him a little, but those he had met were such charming and understanding gentlemen that he had lost some of his fear of them. What worried him more were the reports which reached him from reliable sources of Agasaka's strange powers. He had seen many queer things on the river; the wonder of the *lokali* that hollowed the tree trunk by which messages might be relayed across a continent was still something of a wonder to him. Magic inexplicable, sometimes revolting, was an every day phenomenon. Some of it was crude hypnotism, but there were higher things beyond his understanding. Many of these had come down through the ages from Egypt and beyond; Abraham had brought practices from the desert lands about Babylon which were religious rites amongst people who had no written language.

The *Zaire* was steaming for home the next day when he sent for Abiboo, his orderly.

"Bring me this woman of Chimbiri," he said, and they brought her from the little store-cabin where she was both guest and prisoner.

"They tell me this and that about you, Agasaka," he said, giving chapter and verse of his authority.

"Lord, it is true," said Agasaka when he had finished. "These things my father taught me, as his father taught him. For, Lord, he was the son of M'kufusu, the son of Bonfongu-m'lini, the son of N'sambi…"

She recited thirty generations before he stopped her— roughly four hundred years.

Even Sanders was staggered, though he had once met an old man of the N'gombi who had lived in the days of Saladin.

"Show me your magic, woman," he said, and to his surprise she shook her head.

"Lord, this one magic only comes when I am afraid."

Sanders dropped his hand to his Browning and half drew it from its leather holster.

He was sitting under an awning spread over the bridge. The steersman was at the wheel, in the bow of the *kano* boy with his long sounding-rod. Purposely he did not look at the woman, fixing his eyes on the steersman's back.

His hand had scarcely closed on the brown grip when, almost at his feet, he saw the one thing in the world that he loathed— an English puff adder, mottled and swollen, its head thrown back to strike.

Twice his pistol banged… the steersman skipped to cover with a yell and left the *Zaire* yawning in the strong current.

There was nothing… nothing but two little holes in the deck, so close together that they overlapped. Sanders sprang to the wheel and straightened the boat, and then, when the steersman had been called back and the sounding boy retrieved from the cover of the wood pile where he crouched and trembled Sanders returned to his chair, waving away Abiboo, who had arrived, rifle in hand, to the rescue of his master.

"Woman," said Sanders quietly, "you may go back to your little house."

And Agasaka went without the evidence of triumph a lesser woman might have felt. He had not looked at her… there was no mesmerism here.

He stooped down and examined the bullet holes, too troubled to feel foolish.

That afternoon he sent for her again and gave her chocolate to eat, talking of her father. She was sitting on the deck at his feet, and once, when he thought he had gained her confidence, he dropped his hand lightly on her head as he had dropped his hand on so many other young heads before.

The puff adder was there— within striking distance, his spade head thrown back, his coils rigid.

Sanders stared at the thing and did not move his hand, and then, through the shining body, he saw the deck planks, and the soft bitumen where plank joined plank, and then the viper vanished.

"You do not fear?" he asked gently.

"Lord… a little; but now I do not fear, for I know that you would not hurt women."

The *Zaire*, with its strange passenger, came alongside the residency wharf two hours before sundown on the third day. Captain Hamilton was waiting, a fuming, angry man, for he had been the unwilling host of one who lacked something in manners.

A FIGURE dressed in white stretched languidly in a deep chair, turned his head but did not trouble to rise. Still less was he inclined to exchange the cool of the broad veranda for the furnace of space open to a red-hot sun.

Sanders saw a white face that looked oddly dirty in contrast with the spotless purity of a duck jacket. Two deep, suspicious eyes, a long, untidy whip of hair lying lankly on a high forehead— a pink, almost bloodless mouth.

"You're Sanders?"

Mr. Haben looked up at the trim figure.

"I am the Commissioner, sir," said Sanders.

"Why weren't you here to meet me— you knew that I was due?"

Sanders was more shocked than nettled by the tone. A coarse word in the mouth of a woman would have produced the same effect. Secretaries and under-secretaries of state were Godlike people who employed a macrology of their own, wrapping their reproofs in the silver tissue of stilted diction which dulled the sting of their rebukes.

"Do you hear me, sir?" he asked, impatiently.

Hamilton, standing by, was near to kicking him off the step.

"I heard you. I was on a visit to the Chimbiri country. No notice of your arrival or your pending arrival was received."

Sanders spoke very carefully; he was staring down at the scowling Nickerson.

Mr. Haben had it on the tip of his tongue to give him the lie. There was, as the late Mrs. Haben had said, a streak of commonness in him; but there was a broader streak of discretion. The gun still hung at the Commissioner's hip; the grip was shiny with use.

"H'm!" said Mr. Under-Secretary Haben, and allowed himself to relax in his chair.

He was clever enough, Sanders found; knew the inside story of the territories; was keen for information. He thought the country was not well run. The system was wrong, the taxes fell short of the highest possible index. In all ways his attitude was antagonistic. Commissioners were lazy people, intent on having a good time and "their shooting." Sanders, who had never shot a wild beast in his life, save for the pot or to rid himself of a pressing danger, said nothing.

"A thoroughly nasty fellow," said Hamilton.

But it was at dinner that he touched the zenith of his boorishness. The dinner was bad; he hated palm nut chop; sweet potatoes made him ill; the chicken was tough; the coffee vile. Happily he had brought his own cigars.

Lieutenant Tibbetts, second-in-command of the Houssas, spent that trying hour wondering what would happen to him if he leaned across the table and batted an Under-secretary with a cut-glass salt cellar.

Only Sanders showed no sign of annoyance. Not a muscle of his face moved when Mr. Nickerson Haben made the most unforgivable of all suggestions. He did this out of sheer ignorance and because of that streak of commonness which was his very own.

"A native woman is… a native woman," said Sanders quietly. "Happily, I have only had gentlemen under my control, and that complication has never arisen."

Mr. Haben smiled skeptically; he was sourest when he smiled.

"Very noble," he said dryly, "and yet one has heard of such things happening."

Hamilton was white with rage. Bones stared open-mouthed, like a boy who only dimly understood. The pale man asked a question and, to the amazement of the others, Sanders nodded.

"Yes, I brought a girl down from Chimbiri," he said. "She is at present in the Houssa lines with the wife of Sergeant Abiboo. I hardly know what to do with her."

"I suppose not," more dryly yet. "A prisoner, I suppose?"

"N-no," Sanders hesitated; seemed confused in Haben's eyes. "She has a peculiar brand of magic which rather confounds me—"

Here Mr. Nickerson Haben laughed.

"That stuff!" he said contemptuously. "Let me see your magician."

BONES was sent to fetch her— he swore loudly all the way across the dark square.

"That is what we complain about," said Mr. Haben in the time of waiting. "You fellows are in the country so long that you get niggerized." (Sanders winced. "Nigger" is a word you do not use in Africa.) "You absorb their philosophies and superstitions. Magic… good God!"

He waggled his long head hopelessly.

"My poor wife believed in the same rubbish— she came from one of the Southern States— had a black mammy who did wonderful things with chicken bones!…"

Sanders had not credited him with a wife. When he learned that the poor lady had died, he felt that much worse— things could happen to a woman.

"Appendicitis— an operation… fool of a doctor…." Mr. Haben unbent so far as to scatter these personal items. "As I said before, you people— hum…."

Agasaka stood in the doorway, "missionary dressed," as they say. Her figure was concealed in a blue cotton "cloth" wrapped and pinned about her to the height of her breast.

"This is the lady, eh? Come here!" he beckoned her and she came to him. "Let us see her magic… speak to her!"

Sanders nodded.

"This man wishes to see your magic, Agasaka; he is a great chief amongst my people."

She did not answer.

"Not bad looking," said Nickerson, and did a thing which amazed these men, for he rose and, putting his hand under her chin, raised her face to his. And there was something in his queer, hard eyes that she read, as we may read the printed word. The streak of commonness was abominably broad and raw-edged.

"You're not so bad for a nig…."

He dropped his hands suddenly; they saw his face pucker hideously. He was looking at a woman, a handsome woman with deep shadows under her eyes. It was the face he often saw and always tried to forget. A dead white face. She wore a silk nightdress, rather high to the throat.

And she spoke.

"Won't you wait until the nurse comes back, Nick? I don't think I ought to drink ice-water… the doctor says…"

"Damn the doctor!" said Nickerson Haben between his teeth, and the three men heard him, saw his hand go up holding an imaginary glass, saw his eyes fall to the level of an imaginary pillow.

"I'm sick of you… sick of you! Make a new will, eh? Like hell!"

He stared and stared, and then slowly turned his drawn face to Sanders.

"My wife…" he pointed to space and mumbled the words. "I… I killed her,"

And then he realized that he was Nickerson Haben, Under-Secretary of State, and these were three very unimportant officials— and a black woman who was regarding him gravely. But this discovery of his was just the flash of a second too late.

"Go to your room, sir," said Sanders, and spent the greater part of the night composing a letter to the Foreign Secretary.

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